

Fall 2010

Education as a Detour on the path to Inevitable Motherhood: the acquired values and collective ambitions of the students at La Maison D'Education Mariama Ba

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Education as a Detour on the path to Inevitable Motherhood: the acquired values and collective ambitions of the students at La Maison D'Education Mariama Ba

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Senegal Arts and Culture,
SIT Study Abroad Fall 2010

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my community at home for supporting all that I love and everywhere I adventure, and I would like to thank the new communities I have found in Senegal that have challenged what I know and taught me the true meaning of hospitality.

Abstract

The values young Senegalese women acquire at home revolve around motherhood, domesticity and, above all, solidarity. The students lucky enough to attend La Maison D'Education Mariama Ba, the most elite girl's high school in all of Senegal carry these community-centered values. Here, young Senegalese women have a chance to take a detour from the prescribed path that their gender has dictated by spending seven years living and studying with their peers in a highly intellectual setting. An understanding of the narratives of their lives before school, time spent at MEMB, and vision of their futures provides a lens through which one can grasp a better picture of the options Senegalese women are given and what values drive the choices they can and cannot make. An amalgamation of these stories demonstrates what doors an excellent education can open and what values stay the same regardless of what a formalized education can provide.

Introduction

Fatima Kaba realized she could be a journalist at age seven when she watched television for the first time. Fatima is a resident of a village called Sao, tucked into the heart of central Senegal by the Gambia River where there is no electricity or medical resources. . When Fatima moved ninety two kilometers away to the city of Tambacounda for three years to recover from an illness she glimpsed what professions existed outside of her village for the very first time. Fatima, says, “There are two people that have ever left my village. My brother, who went to middle school, and one other who is a policeman in Dakar. There are no professions outside of the village” (Dans notre village, il y a deux personnes qui avait partir. Mon frère, qui allait au collège, et un qui est un policier a Dakar. N’est pas les professions dehors le village) After her time spent in Tambacounda, Fatima pushed herself in school so she could reach her goals of being a journalist. Her score on a national exam given after primary school placed her in the top 25 girls in Senegal, and now Fatima, at age thirteen, is in her first year at La Maison D’Education Mariama Ba, (MEMB) the most prestigious girls high school in all of Senegal.

Every morning Aminata Diange rises at the same time as the Senegalese sun - about six thirty am. She spends two hours of her morning in ankle deep red clay in very same river that Fatima has grown up next to, where she will fish, bathe, and wash laundry and the previous days dishes in the shallow water before returning home to make her daily trips to the pump for water. Next comes lunch preparation. After lunch she heads back to the pump and then takes another walk to the river. Aminata, at age twenty-two, repeats this same pattern every day. She lives in Samécouta, a village in southeastern

Senegal. Like Fatima, Aminata also grew up without electricity far from the nearest city, Kedougou. Unlike Fatima, however, Aminata was never able to attend middle school or high school, a ten-kilometer bike ride from her home that would take her away from her daily chores. Surrounded daily by her enormous family and a host of friends, Aminata never says she is discontent because she does not have access an education, yet she also never had the choice.

Fatima finds herself extraordinarily lucky to be studying at MEMB, yet the implications of leaving a small community like Sao to attend school far from home must be further explored. Both Fatima and Aminata grew up in insular communities largely removed from Western and modern influence and without access to secondary educations. Now that Fatima has been offered an opportunity outside of this structure, it is necessary to ask whether or not she has been given access to a different future than Aminata. An attempt to answer this question begins with exploring the values she has learned in her home community and if these stay with her as she studies at MEMB, or if her schooling may force these values to shift and change. Fatima is one of only 200 girls nation wide that have already been designated as extraordinary enough to study on Gorée Island. She has already established herself as an individual apart from her home community.

I. Am nga jekker?¹ : Gender roles in Senegalese Society

The first two questions young women in Senegal are asked during daily introductions are what is your name, and do you have a husband. As an American student

¹ Wolof for, do you have a husband?

who is not even considering a husband, when I first arrived in Senegal I was taken aback by how immediately strangers asked me this question. Never was I first asked if I was a student, what I was studying or where I was working. My marital status was always the most important, and when I told my new friends I needed to finish my studies before thinking about marriage they were rarely satisfied. My personal experience with gender roles in Senegal was further enforced by my visits to both Mouit, a village outside of Saint Louis near the border of Mauritania, and Aminata's village Samécouta, ten kilometers from Kedougou.

In Mouit, I was fortunate enough to have four younger sisters, the oldest of whom, at nineteen years old, was named Hadi. Hadi had finished Koranic primary school in Mouit but had not continued her schooling any further. When I asked what she planned to do now that she is done with school, she was at first confused by my use of the word "do". I elaborated and asked if she wanted to work or attend secondary school or university. Still confused, Hadi said that the next thing she would "do" is finding a husband. My understanding of a woman's role in Senegal was further enforced by the time I spent in Samécouta. There, I followed my twenty-two year old sister Aminata through her daily routines. Aminata's familial role revolved around these domestic chores. Like Hadi, she finished her primary schooling but not continued her studies any further. After observing Aminata at work for a few days the reason for her truncated education seemed clear— she simply does not have enough time. These two girls offered me a window into the structure of gender roles in rural Senegal, where as my own experiences in Dakar let me see the prevalence of these roles first hand.

From these experiences and conversations in rural villages I determined that

Senegal is a society within which a woman's marital status and role in her family are integrally important to the respect she is given. Where as I was offended when men and women alike cared more about my husband than my work or studies, both Hadi and Aminata saw their work at home as necessary and important— commitment to one's family is a given in Senegal, not an option. It is important to contextualize this study by framing Senegal as a place where marriages may be made for the economic and social benefit of both extended families involved.

Literature Review

I. Still Behind: Women's Education in Senegal

Women's education is a thoroughly explored topic, in large part because women continue to fall behind men in areas such as access and completion. In Senegal in the statistics are particularly grim, The New York Times reports the adult female literacy rate in French, the legal and official language in Senegal, as twenty nine percent. (New York Times 2010). Only twenty eight percent of the population of Senegal has graduated from high school at all, and (Fall, lecture) sixteen percent of Senegalese girls have a chance of going at all. Sixty percent of the entire population is living on less than one dollar per day and this must pay for school expenses. These statistics are an important lens to look through when understanding what the girls at MEMB have already overcome. They are on their way to joining a high school educated and literate minority of women, and they are living in a country where over half the population is defined as below the poverty line.

Gene Sperling covered a 2001 conference that took place Senegal's capital Dakar

where world leaders met to discuss a goal of free universal education. His commentary shows that even though girls are globally behind in education, changing that statistic is a frequent topic of conversation. In “Towards a Universal Education: Making a Promise, Keeping it”, Sperling says, “there is a growing body of research showing that investment in education—particularly for girls—in the world’s poorest countries produces impressive health benefits and high economic returns” (2). This idea directly relates to what I have found comparing education to an investment for Senegalese families. Sperling, like many others, states that educated women in particular help advance struggling nations. My study looks at this advancement in a smaller, community and familial lens. That is, how is women’s education seen now in Senegal and are families seeing the same economic and social returns that Sperling discusses.

The importance of women’s education in Senegal is further explored by Michelle Kuenzi in “Nonformal Education, Political Participation and Democracy: Findings from Senegal. She speaks of education as one of the founders of democracy, arguing that those with more exposure to modern media, literacy and urbanization are more world conscious and open to political ideas. My study seeks to uncover the affects of education are for Senegalese women as well, whether they that is a foundation for new windows of economic or social opportunity, political participation, and or world awareness.

The second important subject that Kuenzi hits upon is the relationship between cultural values and values learned in school. She also addresses an important conflict that arose in my study. She says, “formal education creates a schism between the schooled and unschooled and particularly between children and their unschooled parents” (Kuenzi 3) She defines this difference as perhaps intergenerational where as in my study the

contrast is more importantly about changing systems of values that come with education regardless of the age bracket.

This is a subject that arose consistently in both my class observation and interviews with professors, particularly when discussing the difference between education at home and at school. Kuenzi says “nonformal education is often considered a more culturally relevant form of education than formal education in Africa since it is usually conducted in African languages and informed by the culture and exigencies of the learners” (Kuenzi 4). While Kuenzi focuses more on the implications of the language used to educate I hope to expand on the differences between home and formal educations and the values implied in both. I learned heavily on my experiences living in rural villages in Senegal and a home stay in Dakar to observe this kind of home education based on cultural values. Kuenzi’s work is substantial background information for studying the transition between home and MEMB for its students.

II. Value Acquisition in the School Setting

My study deals in large part with value acquisition, both in a school setting and in a family setting. It is essential to consider previous work on value systems and the implications of these systems. Peter Silcock’s “Value Acquisition and Value Education” provides a good background for the theory behind acquiring values in any setting. Silcock says “values are intrinsic to all actions and decisions” (Silcock 243). I based my study on this idea, assuming that the decisions the girls at MEMB make during their time at school and after they graduate are based on accumulated and changing values. Additionally, “students may be unaware of the values behind much that they learn” (Silcock 245). To address this issue I made sure to interview professors of MEMB to ask what they

believed they were teaching their students in class, which I was able to compare and contrast with what students said they were learning. I also will make my own assessment of what values are being taught at MEMB as observed in my time spent in the classroom.

There are two books concerning economic class and education that consider Silcock's work more specifically. First, Jay MacLeod's "Aint No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a low-income neighborhood". This study follows two racially and economically diverse groups of high school boys through their high school years and after graduation. Macleod's model is helpful to my study because he researched boy's values entering high school and their value acquisition (or refusal of these values) through schooling. In this study the boy's backgrounds deeply influence their attitude towards education, to the point where their high school education did not necessarily have an impact on their life course at all. At MEMB, students already deviated from the course they are expected to follow by attending. My study will address whether or not their schooling has had an affect on their values and future plans. My experience applying Macleod's study to high school seniors in Maine has helped me study a similar kind of value acquisition in a now foreign and entirely female high school setting. Studying students in their last year at the MEMB is a more different lens to look at a topic MacLeod has already explored.

The second book influencing my interest in this topic and informing my previous study is called "The Best of the Best: Becoming Elite at an American Boarding School" by Ruben Gaztambide. Gaztambide studied how a senior class at a private school in New England attained the values and culture of being "elite." This study was helpful when I started to think about what it meant to the families of the MEMB students when their

daughters were admitted to the best girls school in the country, and how these girls may already be set a class apart from their peers. While at MEMB I searched for signs of a culture of “elitism”, and how the girls defined themselves and their values post-acceptance. Gaztambide provides a solid background towards studying entitlement and how that influences future goals.

III. Community and Individual Values

Future is determined by a compilation of values acquired both at home and at school, and these paths show a crossing and at times conflict of community and individually oriented systems of values. Particularly relevant for Senegalese girls who are defined so strongly by their gender and ability to produce a family, is the relationship of their education to their future marriage. Anju Malhotra explores the relationship between marriage timing and education in “Gender and the Timing of Marriage: Rural Urban differences in Java” where she looks at factors that weigh into marriage timing in both rural and urban locations in Indonesia. Malhotra says that “arguments centered around modernization theory propose that early, arranged marriages in traditional societies serve to fulfill larger family interests such as the preservation or enhancement of social status, alliances, or reproductive and economic control of the younger generations.” (Malhotra 436). Although Malhotra’s study takes place in Indonesia, her work also operates in a location where a woman’s role is perhaps defined in relation to her community and future family rather than her individual desires. This is demonstrated by the fact that she sees arranged marriages as serving “family interest” as opposed to personal preference.

Her work provides a base for my study of the relationship between marriage and

education for the students at MEMB and also introduces the difference between urban and rural locations that I will also explore. She argues that in urban setting modernization offers more options for women, where “younger generations have fewer reasons to be obligated or dependent on parents,” (Malhotra 437). My study follows up on this idea by speaking with students at MEMB who come from Dakar and smaller villages about the values they bring from home and how they now view their education. These options Malhotra speaks of may exist for urban girls prior to their education because of this independence she mentions. Most importantly however, Malhotra identifies the three ways in which education delays marriage: the time spent at school, the ideational change, and the increased employability of those with higher education. My study will also look very specifically and these three subjects as well, although I will broaden the lens beyond just marriage timing to career and family planning. These topics summarize how the girls at MEMB are set apart from their peers and outline what I will explore when I discuss their futures.

Methods

I. Location

La Maison D’Education Mariama Ba is a government funded all-girls high school and middle school. Constructed in 1978 by Senegal’s first president Leopold Senghor², the school is home to 200 girls who come from all every corner of the country. Each class at MEMB consists of the girls who have scored in the top 25 on a national exam given after primary school. These girls are then invited to live and study on Gorée Island for seven years, where they will receive the best public education in the country. MEMB is a

² (Diop, 2010)

self-described school of excellence situated on the seaside campus on the tranquil Gorée island, an island known for both its horrendous colonial slave trade history and booming tourist business. With the support and encouragement of twenty-eight of the best-qualified and motivated teachers in the country, girls at MEMB learn six foreign languages, literature, chemistry, physics, philosophy and algebra before heading off [to](#) universities all over the world. The girls come from locations as distant as Fatima’s Sao and as close as the capital city Dakar, just a twenty-minute ferry ride away. Girls like Fatima and her classmates have no hesitation admitting how fortunate they are—although they may not know exactly what kind of odds they would face otherwise.

I chose MEMB because of the unique place it holds in the Senegalese education system and the extraordinary opportunity it offers young girls who may not have had access to a secondary education otherwise. The diversity of the student population, isolation of the campus, and quality of the teaching are also factors that attracted me. I wanted to be able to focus on one contained location, and MEMB offered a small student population. However my choice to study at MEMB was primarily because a result of the strength of academics at the school— something I hypothesized was unique in the Senegalese education system and a particularly exceptional opportunity for young women.

II. Methodology

After finding a home stay on Goree Island, I settled into a routine of showing up at school in the morning and planning my days from there. Because of the length of my research project I wanted to spend much time as possible at MEMB, so both students and

staff would get used to seeing me at the school. I used three primary methods to complete my research: interviews, participant observation and one focus group. These three methods complimented each other by allowing me to confirm data I received in different ways.

I spent many hours observing (and at times participating in) classes taught by a wide range of professors and covering a variety of subjects.³ I observed classroom behaviors, professor and student relationships, style of dress, classroom management and peer relations. I kept track of what was being taught and how it was being taught— if professors interacted with their students, encouraged questions, instigated debate or lectured. Specifically, I observed what students learned about history, philosophy, politics and religion— who was quoted, what theories were presented, what was left out. This observation was done to back up what I learned in my professor and student interviews. I wanted to see if I could observe what values professors were teaching their students and if I found these as different from what values they said they wanted to teach in my interviews. While not in class I worked in the teacher's room speaking casually with professors. This method was mostly used to gain rapport with my colleagues, and to gain access to a wider range of professors and classes. By entering casual conversation (often in Wolof) I improved my rapport at the school and ended up being invited to new classes as well as multiple homes for Tabaski.⁴

³ All classes at MEMB are taught in French, and this impacted my comprehension of class material.

⁴ Tabaski (Eid Al-adha) is an Arabic holiday in November that celebrates the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ishmael to God.

I interviewed four professors (in French) to build on information I received from watching their classes- to find out the why behind their teaching. From these professors I also learned more generally about the education system in Senegal and what role they believe MEMB plays in that system. I chose to speak with professors because I believe they have the strongest influence over what values are taught at MEMB and in what way they are taught. My advisor, the assistante sociale Madame Diop (a role comparable to a guidance counselor) and I met every few days to discuss how my work was going and work through logistics. She was crucial in helping me understand how the school runs and especially to get a grasp on the admissions process. I was able to interview her twice and confirm data I had already received from my other methodology.

I also interviewed Doudou Dia, assistant director of the Gorée institute (GI) twice during my study. The Gorée institute is dedicated to the promotion of peaceful, self-reliant, and countries in Africa by strengthening of networks, institutions and of people. My interviews with Dia were crucial to my research for a couple reasons, the first being that there was no language barrier to cross. I was able to fully express myself and talk through my research with Dia in a setting where I was not limited by vocabulary or incomprehension. In return Dia had a wealth of knowledge about the Senegalese education system as a whole, and has been working on the island of Gorée for over two decades. His interviews were invaluable to my research because he was able to draw my focused study of MEMB out to a wider lens of Senegalese history and culture. He was also a source outside of MEMB which offered me a removed opinion with no vested interest in promoting the school.

The most important individual interviews were conducted with ten students in both the *sixieme* (sixth grade) and *terminale* (senior year) classes at MEMB. During these interviews I was able to establish more personal relationships with a small selection of students and also learn about their individual paths to MEMB. I asked all of them the same questions regarding their backgrounds and future plans and received unique stories that directed me on different tangents than I planned which eventually led my research into deeper directions. These interviews served as the basis for most of my analysis, as it was during the time with the students themselves that I learned the most about values in a Senegalese home and their experience with these values after they moved to MEMB.

During my final week at the school I continued observing classes and was also able to conduct a focus group with girls in the *sixieme* class. To prep for this group I had the students draw a timeline of their education thus far and future plans. After twenty students or so completed this activity, six of them stayed to discuss their timelines and what values influenced these lines. The activity method was used to draw data from a larger base of students, and also to alleviate language questions because the girls wrote their answers that I could translate later. The focus group following was useful as the girls built off each other's energy and enthusiasm and also asked me questions in return. This exchange made me think about my role as a researcher and also aided my relationships with the girls. My time spent dancing to Rihanna and letting the girls braid my hair helped build rapport and get them talking comfortably.

III. Role as Researcher: "He knew nothing about the men around him except for how they moved and laugh—on this side of language" (Ondaatje).

Senegal is a Wolof speaking country where all formal education and legal documents are in French. All semester has been a struggle with language, about finding different ways to navigate through Senegal with and without words. At times, I have been frustrated and discouraged by my incompetence. I have not been able to access relationships and information that I've needed due to what at times seems an insurmountable barrier. Language is one of many factors here that has rendered me an outsider from the start. It has been challenging, rewarding and always humbling to struggle with communication on a daily basis. Yet it was entirely humbling to live in a country where though everyone wishes to learn English, it cannot get me what I need. I have found beautiful commonalities that exist cross cultures, yet I found that there are some things that simply are not translatable between cultures.

At times this semester I have been able to cross to the other side, where friendships are made and secrets are shared. There have been more times where I have steadfastly stayed on my own side of language where there is broken Wolof and grammatically horrendous French. When I stepped on to the MEMB campus, I held both power and a disadvantage as an American student. My ability to speak English made both professors and students wary about speaking the language it with me even though most if not all of my interviewees spoke English. My inability to speak French fluently at times stood in the way of me asking for what I needed or understanding what was asked of me. Yet in the end the effort I put into speaking French aided my relationships with my subjects more than I was hindered by this system of communication.

IV. Limitations

Aside from language, my study is inherently limited by its length, as I only had 30 days to complete and compile my research. Because the grand fete de Tabaski fell in the middle of my ISP period I was only allotted two weeks time at the school to become assimilated and comfortable while completing my research. While I believe that I received more than enough information to answer my questions, the data is not as deep or as consistent as it could be with more time involved. This time limitation also left some large gaps in my study because I was not able to reach a few groups that would have supplemented my research. In particular I was not able to speak with alumni of MEMB. When I discuss the futures of the students, I am limited to their own projections and plans and do not have access to concrete data.

Another flaw it is important to note is how crucial my advisor Madame Diop's role is, as she is the only adult female I was able to speak to at MEMB. The quiet and reserve of the relatively few female professors at MEMB made them difficult to access yet also spoke to wider themes and gender roles in Senegal. I was not able to speak with one of them personally and I recognize that this is a gap in my study.

V. Objectives

This study was designed to explore the values that girls at MEMB learn at home and which of these values they bring to school with them. I further explored this question by asking each student where she came from, how big her family is, what her parents do for a living, what schools she attended before MEMB, and what other siblings in her family have done or plan on doing. Most importantly I wanted to get an idea of what

values their parents/family have instilled in them before their arrival and which of these values affect their schooling.

Another objective of this study was to understand what values students learn while at MEMB. I wanted to find out how are these values taught and by whom, and whether or not these values conflict with those learned at home. That is, how does value acquisition evolve from the home setting to a highly academic and removed setting like MEMB?

Finally, I wanted to know what values students at MEMB take from both settings when they graduate and how these values influence their futures. This section of my analysis was broken down into questions about higher education, career paths and future families. Who and what has influenced these students to make the decisions they are making, and do they, in turn, have access to a wider range of options because of their education?

Results

- I. . *“Ligeey yu ndeye anyup doom”*⁵: the work of the mother is equal to the meals of the children

A combination of personal experience, observation and conversation has shaped my findings about gender expectations in Senegal. Over the course of my research, I came to the understanding that motherhood is a value inextricably linked to women in Senegalese society. The weight put on being a wife and mother was evident during my first few weeks in Dakar when I quickly learned that creating a fictional boyfriend was far easier than explaining why I was an unmarried young woman. This conclusion was

⁵ Wolof proverb (Diallo, 2010).

supplemented by the stories of the girls at MEMB and their professor's opinions. Traditional gender roles in Senegal are a fundamental part of understanding what values girls at MEMB bring with them from home.

When asked what values their mothers and fathers think are the most important, students in the terminale class at MEMB repeated the following words over and over: religion, family, solidarity, respect for elders, domestic responsibility and *kersa*⁶. My conversations with students unpacked how these values translated into concrete lessons and actions. While speaking with a focus group about women's roles in their homes, a sixth grade student from the city of Louga summarized her assumed gender role by saying "a girls place is next to her mother" (la place d'une jeune fille est à côté de sa mère) (Mbaye, focus group). Traditionally, this "place" involves domestic work and raising children, tasks done even by young children. Conversations with professors at MEMB affirmed the value of domesticity as central, and added that marriage, as opposed to work or studies, is a traditional feminine role. Mustafa Sene, Professor of History said, "the girls, when they come to school, they marry much later, and this is a little bit of a contradiction with their values, because their parents would like the girls to be married early" (les filles, quand ils viennent à l'école, ils se marient beaucoup plus tard, et c'est un peu une contradiction avec leurs valeurs, parce que leurs parents aimeraient les filles à se marier tôt) (Sene, 2010). Omar Diallo, Professor of French echoed this sentiment explaining, "Men take a second wife if their first wife works too much" (les hommes prennent une deuxième épouse si leur première femme travaille trop) (Diallo, 2010). These two men confirm that, in Senegal, it is not normal for a woman to pursue an

⁶ a Wolof term meaning to be modest and have a respect for customs

education or a career before or instead of marriage. After speaking with students at MEMB, “instead” didn’t even seem to be an option— although it is delayed by their education, marriage is inevitable.

In order to further explore this idea I asked nine *terminale* students what they thought about marriage when they were little and if their thoughts had changed over the course of their education. These students consistently said that they were going to get married and have children and that they were not questioning this future. A *terminale* student named Penda from Dakar said, “maintenant, je veux un mari, enfants. Tout de ca, être une bonne femme, » (Now, I want a husband, children. All of that, and I want to be a good wife) (Sow, interview). Penda’s choice of the word “good wife” implies that she has learned (and arguably internalized) the difference between the definition of a good wife and a bad one. *Sixieme* student Fatima says that it was important to her mother that she « apprendre le cuisiner, travail a le champs, apprendre le travail domestique » (learn to cook, work in the field, learn domestic work) (Kaba 2010). The importance of domestic work may be the definition of being a good wife, and it may be related to another value both students and professors mentioned was learned at home: *kersa*, a Wolof term meaning “la pudeur respectueuse des convenances et avoir de la retenue”(modesty and respect for customs and having restraint). (class lecture 11/6). Students labeled the value of respecting elders and family hierarchies as an imperative lesson learned at home. A student from Dakar added her own definition, saying that obedience and being proper are also important values in her household. It could be projected that the collection of all of these lessons contributes to be a “good wife.”

Although not discussed in detail, it is incomplete to leave out the value of religion learned at home. Out of the fifteen students I spoke with, six *sixième* students in a focus group and ten *terminale* students in interviews, fourteen identified themselves as Muslim. All of them identified religion as an important, if not the most important, value learned at home. One *terminale* student from the inland city of Diourbel said, “Mon père, il a voulu que j’allais à l’école Koranic, Je suis allée à l’école Koranic pour primaire, mais il a compris que je dois aller ici pour lycée, » (My dad, he wanted me to go to Koranic school. I went to Koranic school for primary school, but he understood that I must go here for high school).

Rural and urban students both listed religion, family, and respect as values. Yet I asked professors what diversity they see amongst their students when they arrive at MEMB. When Professor Sene was asked if he saw a difference between the rural and urban primary education of his students, he pointed out, “you must distinguish between education and instruction. Because the mothers educate their daughters, transmit values, but that is not a westernized form of instruction,” (il faut distinguer entre l’éducation et l’instruction. Parce que les mères éduquent leurs filles, transmettent des valeurs, mais ce n’est pas une forme occidentalisée de l’enseignement) (Sene, 2010). GI director Dia adds his distinction between the two saying, “ Instruction is a way to get competencies. Education is a way to know how to see yourself in society,” (Dia 2010). By this definition instruction is localized, and education contextualizes the local in a wider world. Informal education is a lens through which to see how values are acquired in the home setting. Another informal educator I learned about is the *bajaan*, the father’s sister. Professors and students alike mentioned that this family member’s role as being

fundamental to a girl's home instruction and installation of values. Diallo said that the *bajaan* might be the family member who decides whether or not a girl attends school or works at home. My advisor Diop adds that the term "education" is "much bigger than just a school education" (*beaucoup plus grande que juste l'éducation a l'école*) (Diop 2010) because of the both informal and formal educators who play roles.

Finally, students at MEMB repeatedly and adamantly stated that solidarity was a value learned at home. Dia confirmed this value saying, "[in Senegal] there is a strong value, a family value, you cannot do something without taking into account the neighbors," (Dia, 2010). Dia's exchange of the words *family* and *neighbor* are important to note because his definition renders the two inseparable in a Senegalese context. He made sure to make clear that this value of community is personal as well, "maybe at age 80 you will forgot about things from school, but you will still have a sense of nostalgia for family," (Dia, 2010). I found this value to be the most consistent throughout all of my interviews and the focus group. "You must share everything," a *sixieme* student told me. "At home you have love, kindness and solidarity, always" (focus group 2010). I found that this solidarity is not lost when these young women leave home to spend seven years at MEMB.

II. La Maison D'Education (The House of Education)

Both staff and students agree that MEMB is a community away from home. The solidarity students claimed was so important in their families does not lose its significance at school. When Astou, a *sixieme* student was asked whether or not education is an individual pursuit she responded by saying, "of course not. We all learn

and succeed together here” (Ndeye, focus group). Astou answered the question in a way that suggests that she considers herself as part of a collective, before she considers herself an individual student. The student body aims for success together; the students do not intend to achieve as singular entities. Additionally, Professor Diallo emphasized that MEMB is a “house” of education, where the professors try to act as the parents of their students who are living away from their real homes. His feelings were mirrored by those of Mamahdou Kane, Arabic Professor, said that he tries to encourage familial relationships amongst his students, “If two students are in class together, you see the seeds planted between them. They learn a life of accepting others, a life of creating a big family here outside of their small one at home,” (Kane, 2010). The consistency of solidarity as a value at home and at school cements its significance for MEMB students.

The list of values I perceive to be taught at MEMB were compiled by a combination of professor and student interviews, and validated by classroom observation. The word *discipline* was one mentioned by each professor and student interviewed. This term was not used with a negative connotation by those who labeled it as one of the most important values learned at MEMB. Rather, hard work is equivocated with success. Every professor interviewed was asked why MEMB stands apart from other public schools in Senegal. Without fail every professor answered, “this is a school of excellence,” as if this was a scripted response. This standard of excellence results in both staff and students knowing that they must both work diligently and succeed at doing so in order to live up to this goal. Overall, the students labeled the biggest difference between MEMB and schools in their home communities as the “rigor” of the schoolwork. When describing public schools at home one terminale student said “the professors are not

rigorous at the other schools, they are not rigorous like us” (les professeurs n’ont pas le régur, les étudiants ne sont pas le régur comme nous) (Diaw, interview) A *terminale* student named Marie from Zinguinchor, in the Casamance region of Senegal said that “for me, the difference is that you do not find the level of education [at home]. At my house I was always waiting to go to school” (Pour moi, le différence ne se trouve pas au niveau de l’éducation, mais au niveau de milieu. A la maison je ne m’attends pas par fois avec mes sœurs alors qu’a l’école) (Kamara 2010). Marie refers to the same degree excellence as her classmate from Dakar, but also expresses that by going to MEMB she does not have to deal with transportation issues like she did when she lived at home. The academic standard on Gorée is matched by the easy access of living at a boarding school, yet another reason students at MEMB know they are part of a fortunate minority and feel a responsibility to maintain this level of academia.

During my time spent observing classes, this dedication and focus was readily apparent. Girls took copious color-coded notes and consistently sat through two-hour class periods without breaking their focus. In class they were attentive, engaged, and quiet, qualities I observed in both the *sixieme* and *terminale* classrooms. Students stood up when their professor entered the room to greet him or her, and when the bell rang to end the period they did not move until he or she finished speaking. This kind of behavior clearly shows a respect for elders and positions of authority, and also demonstrates that the girls take their studies very seriously. Professor Sene presented what he tries to teach his students saying,

“I ask, why are you the best? Why are you elite? I want to motivate them to work well and hard. We have to give them inspiration, show them the way to work hard. I want to show them that you must distinguish yourself

to be competitive in a competitive world” (Je demande, pourquoi es-tu le mieux? Pourquoi êtes-vous d’élite? Je tiens à les motiver à travailler bien et dur. Nous devons leur donner l’inspiration, leur montrer le chemin à travailler dur. Je veux leur montrer que vous devez se distinguer pour être compétitif dans un monde compétitive) (Sene 2010).

Sene’s use of words like “distinguish” and “elite” are significant because they suggest that he sees his students as individuals that have the potential to become competitive as singular entities, even if students like Astou see themselves as part of a collective.

The professors stated respect for their students as individuals was in turn supported in practice by what I observed as professors encouragement of debate and curiosity. In the classroom, the girls were quick to answer questions and did not hesitate to challenge their professor’s point of view. Their willingness to speak up in class was particularly evident watching Professor Babacar Diba’s history class with *terminale* students. Diba asked his students if it was possible to create an exact African history, and then proceeded to challenge every answer his students gave him, always pressing the girls to explain why. For example, when one student responded that yes, an exact history could be recreated, he asked his class to argue with her. The other students countered by saying, “the documents written are subjective and can be modified”(les documents écrits sont subjectives et peuvent être modifiés), "" and “the colonizers wrote to justify colonization” (les colonisateurs a écrit pour justifier la colonisation) “there is ethnocentrism” (Il est l’ethnocentrisme) piped in a third. (notes 27 November). Open discussions demonstrated that Diba encourages his students to be vocal and speak up in class. Professor Diallo had mentioned that this kind of active participation is perhaps not natural to his students when they arrive at MEMB. Diallo says, “they come with values of the village, timidity. They don’t talk a lot. This is a value contrary to studies. Studies are about curiosity,” (Elles

viennent avec les valeurs du village, de la timidité. Elles ne parlent pas beaucoup. Il s'agit d'une valeur contrairement aux études. Des études sont de la curiosité) (Diallo, interview)

Since respect for authority figures and hierarchies is essential in the homes of the students MEMB, Diallo's comment makes sense. Girls that arrive from communities within which this value of *kersa* was stressed, would be less likely to question an authority figure or speak out against a peer. My observation demonstrates that a willingness to challenge other's idea is a value learned at school and contrary to home.

In my classes, I observed how curiosity is encouraged and how students are consistently pushed to challenge existing ideas and theories. In Professor Cheikh Diouf's philosophy and religion *terminale* class this style of teaching was unmistakable. The way religion was taught in Diouf's class revealed that, at MEMB, disputing pre-constructed theories and cultural norms are not only acceptable academic practices but also ones that are highly promoted. While talking about the existence of objectivity, Diouf said, "truth in mathematics is verifiable, unlike truth in religion," (la vérité en mathématiques est vérifiable, contrairement à la vérité dans la religion) (notes 13 November). In a class the following week Diouf further challenged the absoluteness of religion, teaching his students about agnostics and Marx and quoting Sartre saying "I am absolutely free and responsible" (je suis absolument libre et responsable) (notes 24 November). Diouf's class, covering mysticism, philosophy, fable and religion all together, showed me that MEMB teaches its students to think outside of the cultural boundaries that they may have grown up with. While the students are not taught to question the religion that is so important to them and their families, but are offered other options in class. Other curriculum choices expanded students' visions, predominantly their global awareness. I

observed classes covering triangular slave trade, Ottoman empire expansion, the United States' three branches of democracy, and Cold War era McCarthyism. Sene confirmed that the students were interested in world happenings outside of the classroom as well, "they didn't sleep at all the night before Obama was elected. They talk about what is happening in Senegal now," (elles n'ont pas à dormir toute la nuit avant d'Obama a été élu. Elles parlent de ce qui se passe aujourd'hui au Sénégal) (Sene, 2010). Their education encourages them to think globally and be politically conscious citizens, a mindset that was not cultivated at home.

A final observation to present is the differences observed between rural and urban students at MEMB. As previously stated, there is a difference between education and instruction, and informal instruction is perhaps more common in the home setting in rural locations. However, both students and professors expressed that the landscape of Dakar is rapidly changing to become both more modernized and individualistic. The difference between these two settings was most obvious when I asked students to what the biggest between schools found in their hometowns and MEMB is. A *terminale* student said that the difference between MEMB students and her peers in Dakar's public schools is the influence of modern media: "for the most part, it is very different. They wear makeup, they wear new clothes, they see boys" (Pour le plus part, c'est très différent. Elles portent le maquillage, elles portent les vêtements nouveaux, elles voient les garçons) Her classmate, also from Dakar added, "they simply follow the movement of the time" (Elles se contente de suivre le mouvement de son époque) (Gaye 2010). These statements label the modern influence in Dakar as the biggest difference between MEMB students and their peers at home. Students from rural areas were more likely to refer to class sizes,

transportation problems, and earlier marriage. Diouf believes that these rural and urban differences contribute to the students work produce at school “You see the most successful girls here are from villages. They have always had to work hard. The girls from the city take too much for granted” (Vous voyez les filles le plus de succès ici sont des villages. Ils ont toujours eu à travailler dur. Les filles de la ville prennent trop pour acquis) (Diouf 2010). I do not have statistical evidence to back up Diouf’s generalization, but it was apparent that girls from villages at MEMB have always had to work for their education, as noted by Marie’s comments about transportation at home and Fatima and Aminata’s inability to access electricity, let alone an education beyond primary school. GI director Dia says, “the people there [in the villages] are poor and if they have access to education they are more conscious of it. Being at MEMB is a way to meet the challenge of poverty,” (Dia 2010). Contrary to what he had said about neighbors and family earlier, Dia calls Dakar “an individual place,” where you “don’t even need to know your neighbors” (Dia 2010). Dakar students may or may not also face an obstacle of poverty, but it is clear that those living in the capital do not face the same problems of access to education as those in rural locations. In Dakar, it would not be necessary to “know your neighbors” because it is not as necessary to share resources.

III. Plans D’Avenir: the results of an education of excellence and a value of solidarity

When girls graduate from MEMB they bring the values of religion, respect, family and solidarity from home. At school, in order to maintain the level of excellence their school demands, they have learned the importance of discipline and hard work. They are encouraged to both speak up in class and create a new family of students and staff at

school. The amalgamation of these values and their experience at MEMB will shape their futures

Professors and students both claim that the first step after graduation from MEMB is an extension of this education at a university. All students plan on attending university after graduation and some students wish to travel abroad to do so. Professors told me that if students study abroad they usually go to France, however, in the past, students have also attended top American universities such as Yale and Harvard. Despite the fact that many students wish to travel abroad, the majority of MEMB's students will continue their education in Senegal where public universities are free, with the exception of a small registration fee. When *sixieme* students completed their timelines, the step following university was usually some sort of specialized education that would lead them to a pre-chosen career. For example, they wrote "medical school" as a step before becoming a nurse, or "business school" before going into finance. It is important to note that even at age thirteen the girls have specific career plans and these plans require many more years of schooling.

Each of the *terminale* girls I interviewed claimed that their education has changed their views towards marriage, in that it has pushed marriage into farther into their futures. One student from Dakar said, "I don't want a husband right now, I want experiences before marriage" (Je ne veux pas un mari maintenant. Je veux les expériences avant que mariage) Her classmate from the landlocked city of Diourbel added, "Before marrying you must be mature and have independence" (Avant que marier, tu dois avoir maturités, indépendance) (Diaw, 2010). Both girls said they needed to finish their educations before getting married, yet both also saw marriage as an absolute in their future. Although

Fatima agreed that in the best case scenario girls would be independent and mature before marriage, she offered a view of what happens when education is not accessible, like in her hometown of Sao. When asked about how her education has changed her views on marriage, Fatima said,

“If you are not a student, you must do domestic work, be married. When you go to school, you are excluded, protected. They [the other girls in the village] have fear, they do not want to be married early” (Si tu n’es pas une étudiante, tu fais le travail domestique, tu te marier, quand tu vas à l’école, tu es exclure, protégé. Elles ont peur, elles ne veulent pas être marier tôt) (Kaba, 2010).

As mentioned in the literature review, Malhotra mirrors Fatima’s words by stating that in the rural community of Java, “in the absence of alternative opportunities such as schooling or employment, marriage may be the only socially legitimate option for an adult woman” (Malhotra 437). Fatima was offered an opportunity to escape from this tradition, and her story alludes to the fact that her peers from home were not. Her older *terminale* classmates noted the importance of education before marriage, but did not mention what age they would marry if they were not going to university. Guidance counselor Diop has seen many generations of students enter and exit MEMB, and she says, “in certain villages people would like to marry girls very early, so the girls here, they are very motivated. After university, if you are a girl, you must marry soon,” (Diop 2010). Diop even recalled one student from Tambacounda who left in her *quatrieme*⁷ year to be married and returned later to start her *troisieme*⁸. All of these women make reference to education as a way to avoid traditional early marriage. “Protection” against

⁷ freshman year

⁸ sophomore year

marriage and “motivated” to stay in school implies that girls do not wish to comply with the traditional roles designated for them at a young age.

When asked to create lines of their futures, all students wrote that they would attend university after college, and then find a job. Students at MEMB are driven to succeed in a variety of professions, including medicine, law, engineering, journalism and finance. Some added traveling to foreign countries, or attending specialized schools for their career in their timelines. Fifteen out of fifteen students I talked to said that supporting a family followed all of their plans for education and employment. I asked the students in my focus group if the two could exist together. It turned out that “could” and “would” were very different words. Both students and professors adamantly agreed that it is possible to have a career and a family at the same time in Senegal. Professor Diouf said “Women and men can both work in a household. It’s happening more and more. You just need a maid⁹. My wife works just like I do. You need to have two incomes, and people are understanding that more and more,” (Les femmes et les hommes peuvent à la fois de travail dans un ménage. Il se passe de plus en plus. Vous avez juste besoin d'une bonne. Ma femme travaille comme je le fais. Vous avez besoin d'avoir deux revenus, et les gens comprennent que de plus en plus) (Diouf, 2010). Part of Diouf’s reasoning was that economic stability is produced from two incomes. The focus group of *sixieme* students did not bring up this point, but they did unanimously say that you can be a working mother. When pressed on the question, however, they did not like the idea of being one themselves. “You don’t know your mom if she works too much,” (Tu ne connait pas ta mère si elle travaille trop). one student responded, noting that her own mother has a job

⁹ Having a maid in Senegal is common for a middle class family

as a nurse. “It is hard,”(c’est difficile) said another, “if the kids spend too much time with the maid it is not good” (si les enfants passent trop de temps avec la bonne, il n’est pas bon) (focus group 11/23). It is important that to these girls that they become good mothers, a value learned from home by the example of their own mothers and aunts. This step on their timelines is perhaps identical to their peers who are not attending MEMB, but pushed forward by the girls’ desires to advance their education and careers.

Analysis

I. Education as an Investment

Although primary school through university education is advertised as free in Senegal, it holds many hidden expenses such as registration fees, notebooks, pens and uniforms. In a country where 60 percent of the population lives on less than one dollar a day, sending a child to school can often be a decision, not a guaranteed right. Parents living on the poverty line must decide whether or not to invest in education and with what children they will make that investment. This choice will be made for the good of the collective family, and gender plays a crucial role in this decision-making. As previously stated, young women in Senegal are seen as the founders of future families. They are the ones who will recreate what they have grown up with and produce the next generation of children. Influenced by these traditional gender roles, parents must choose if they will make the sacrifice of having their daughters take time away from home and monetary investment of sending all of their children to school. In rural locations issues such as transportation and physical labor in the fields or household arise. Take Aminata, from the village of Samécouta who did not continue her education after primary school because the forty-minute bike ride would take her from her work at home for the whole day.

Historically the role of going to school has been designated to sons, nephews and fathers. A pattern that was also evident in Samécouta, as her twenty and sixteen year old brothers regularly made the ride into Kedougou to attend secondary school. Young men are almost more dispensable— they do not need to stay at home to raise children, so they can be used in other ways.

Although at times education is hard to access, Senegalese understand what an education can bring to a community. Professor Diouf noted that even parents from more rural villages are sending their daughters to school more frequently as they see other educated girls who are going to school and leading by example. “When a young an educated young women starts to send money back to her village, others will see that her family is eating better, they are building a bigger house, and that these improvements are the result of the educated daughter working in Dakar,” (Quand une jeune femme commence à envoyer de l'argent dans son village, d'autres verront que sa famille mange mieux, ils construisent une maison plus grande, et que ces améliorations sont le résultat de la fille éduquée de travail à Dakar) (Diouf, 2010). MEMB immediately changes what education means to a family because it is handed to them— there is no choice necessary and everything from tuition to room and board to notebooks to uniforms is covered by the government when a girl is accepted. I was curious to see if families were still concerned about girls leaving their domestic responsibilities at home, yet when I had asked the girls how their families reacted post acceptance I heard only positive responses. All of the parents were first excited and second demanded that their daughters work as hard as possible once at MEMB.

II. Collective Ambition: defined as part of a Diaspora

In Senegal, a seemingly individual pursuit such as an elite education can be used for the common good. Values of family and personal educational advancement can be seen as joint ventures and the girls at MEMB have access to this union while their peers do not. They are afforded the privilege choosing careers with high salaries because of the level of their secondary education. This in turn allows them to move up in social class to the benefit of their families and communities. Not that is, necessarily to the benefit of their personal careers. The parents of students at MEMB realize this, and it is why an acceptance letter revolutionizes the importance of education in a household. A Senegalese woman can pursue a career and educational path instead of conforming to typical gender roles if she has access to the quality of education and therefore college offers and job opportunities required for this alternative. Professor Diouf's statement above implies that education is seen as a positive force in a young women's life when the results reflect positively on her family. Although a girl at MEMB may be respected as being highly intelligent, with her new education she is more importantly a provider for her family.

If success is seen as communal, failure is also then a disappointment for the community. Dia commented on the importance of this idea by saying, "for someone coming from very modest conditions, education is a way of success. They have a strong mindset, because they don't have the option to fail. If you fail you will go back to work in the fields, do domestic work. Their focus is how to bring social change to their community," (Dia , interview). Diop agrees with this statement and adds a personal story:

“Everyone knows if a girl is here. It is another reason to work hard, because if she must return after one year, everyone will know. She represents the village. If she is expelled, she cannot return. She will continue her education in Dakar” (Tout le monde, se connaissent que le fille est ici. C’est une autre raison pour travail bien, parce que si elle doit retourner après une année, tout le monde va connaitre. Elle représente tout le village. Quand elles sont exclure ici, elle ne peuvent pas retourner au village. Elles continuent leur éducation a Dakar) (Diop 2010).

One education at MEMB is then shared amongst many— whether or not a girl excels in school, her success or failure is communal.

Not only do parents see education as shared, the girls at MEMB express the same feelings. I consistently noted that the students I talked with did not mention promotions or advances within their chosen professions. There was no talk of entry-level jobs or interning, no discussion about moving up in salary or prestige. I was most struck by this discussing the *sixieme* students timelines with them—although all mentioned higher education and career, fifteen out of fifteen placed family at the end of their lines. Regardless of their other future goals, it is clear that family is a value ingrained in the students at MEMB, one that they grew up with and would like to recreate in their future. These students are part of a village Diaspora even when they leave home to study.

III. Self reflection from a Western Education

As an American student I believe that I have the privilege of being able to make individual oriented choices and indefinite plans. I am also far more likely to be asked about my future career choices than my husband. Although the high cost of a private education in the United States will later influence my career choices, I will not let it determine them. When I speak of economic decisions it is also solely related to my own bank account. My time abroad is an example of my ability to balance my personal

economic needs and desires. What sets the girls at MEMB apart from many western students pursuing a higher education and career path is their motivation. To work in the medical or financial fields to which they aspire to they will have to spend many years away from their families working towards these goals. In the United States, when students spend long years in higher education it is usually equated with personal advancement. Students go to prestigious universities so that they are able to get into even more prestigious graduate programs, make connections in high places and find financially stable jobs post graduation. The decisions I made to go to college, and then to study in Senegal were made for personal reasons that reflect my passions and academic interests. After spending a month with the students at MEMB I found their ambitions are motivated by the people around them instead of personal goals. It is very significant that Astou said the girls at MEMB learn and succeed together. This is drastically different from the both elite school setting Gatzambide describes at a prestigious New England boarding school, and the current private liberal arts school I study at, where academic competitiveness is fierce and prominent amongst the students. From my brief month of observations competition of this kind seemed absent from MEMB, and no student was trying to outdo another.

The absence of academic competitiveness leads to perhaps the most important point to draw from my study— what seems to fill this gap of competition is an unwavering solidarity amongst the students at MEMB and with their families at home. I come from a community that I love for accepting of diversity and change— and this community has taught me I can shape my own values. Young Senegalese women do not come from such a setting, they do not learn to form their personal interests or “be who

they are” or “grow into themselves” as I have been taught from a young age. . It was expected that I go to college as part of my individual future path, just as it is expected Senegalese girls will found families as part of their communally driven paths.

The Wolof proverb Professor Diallo shared with me can be used to bring what I have learned during my month at MEMB together: *Ligeey yu ndeye anyup doom*. The first translation of the proverb gives a mother credit for the success of her children. The girls at MEMB believe this, and I learned how essential starting a family and taking care of that family financially and emotionally is for them. The second translation he attributes a child’s failures to a mother’s poor behavior. Even at the age of thirteen girls know that they will be responsible for their future families and it is perhaps not surprising that girls careers are just a sidetrack along the way to their families. Regardless of if the connotation of the proverb, the mother—never the father—is accountable for her children’s futures.

Conclusion

Fatima may return to Sao and get married, have a beautiful happy family and a house overflowing with children. She might become a journalist and live in Dakar, or a foreign correspondent and be the first person from her village to travel abroad. Regardless of what she chooses, Fatima has options. Aminata’s future, on the other hand, is easier to foresee. She will follow the path of her mother and her sisters before her, and recreate her childhood with her own husband and children. Both girls have traditional ideas and come from similar backgrounds. Yet Fatima has been given both the opportunity to make choices in her future, and the obligation to succeed at the future she

chooses. Her education will give her not only a wider range of career options which in turn will give her and her family more financial stability, but she will also gain wider world vision in which to make these choices. This wider vision began back in Fatima's childhood when she first was saw that journalist on television.

When uncovering what options to MEMB girls have after they graduate it is most significant that MEMB girls have the opportunity to deviate from the gender-defined structure laid out for them. Through their hard work and dedication to their education they have earned the right to take a detour from the path their gender has prescribed them.

Secondly, the hegemony of the girls' narratives regarding motherhood leads me to believe that all will strive to become wonderful mothers and wives in the futures. Although they will be able to deviate from this straight-line future for a period of time, and their education will afford the option of continuing along a different path if they choose. However, what I have learned about the importance of solidarity and family in both the home and school settings leaves me to believe that most, if not all girls will choose family over a career if they cannot have both. Aminata is trapped by both her economic class and geographic background, and knows she will be become the woman her mother is. However, the students I talked to who are not limited by these two circumstances still strive to follow in their mother's footsteps.

It is important to remember that the students desire to found families does not mean they lack for ambition. On the contrary, they are focused and motivated to succeed in school in a way I have not seen working in middle and high schools at in the United

States. These girls have goals that are beyond motherhood: they unquestionably want to attend university, and they want to enter professions that may not be common for their gender. A more accurate way to describe their aspirations is collective ambition. I never heard a girl say she wanted to be president, or end world wars, or fight poverty, these kind of goals would require the girls to define themselves outside of their families. Their self-concept is shaped by an environment, which values solidarity and communal accomplishments over personal achievements. The students strive to fulfill the roles that their communities have pre-designated for them, whatever this requires, even if this is becoming just one successful individual as a part of a greater collective.

Recommendations for Further Study

Studying at MEMB led opened a world of interesting tangents and future research opportunities that I did not have the time to explore. As mentioned in my results, there was a fascinating contrast between the rural and urban girls at MEMB. I found their backgrounds to be quite strikingly different at times and professors noted a distinction in work ethic and rate of success between the two groups. I did not have the time to analyze or follow up on this information and factor in how this diversity plays a role at school and after graduation. Additionally, my study would have been greatly more comprehensive if I had had the chance to talk to alumni. I am curious to see what careers girls from MEMB have actually chosen and how many of them are able to be working mothers. A longer time frame and a wider range of student voices also would have aided my study.

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Appendices I

Student Interview Questions:

- Where do you come from ? (Tu viens d'où?)
- How many brothers and sisters do you have ? (Combien des sœurs et des frères as tu?)
- What religion do you practice ? Is your family very religious ? (Quelle religion est-ce que tu pratiques? Est-ce que ta famille très religieux?)
- When did your family say when you were accepted at MEMB ? (Qu'est-ce que ta famille a dit quand tu as accepté à la Maison d'éducation Mariama Bâ ?)
- Where do your other sisters and brothers go to school ? (Où vont vos autres sœurs et frères vont à l'école ?)
- What do you think is the difference between the two educations ? (Qu'est-ce que tu penses de la différence entre les deux éducations ?)
- How does this difference affect your futures ? (Comment est-ce que cette différence affectera vos futurs ?)
- When you were little, what did your family say about your future ? (Quand tu étais petite, qu'est-ce que ta famille a dit sur ton futur ?)
- Did these conversations change after you were accepted into MEMB ? (Est-ce que ces conversations ont changé après avoir été acceptés à Mariama Bâ ?)
- What did you think about marriage when you were little ? Now ? (Qu'est-ce que tu pensais du mariage quand tu étais petite ? Maintenant ?)
- Have your education changed your thoughts about marriage ? (Est-ce que ton éducation a changé tes pensées sur mariage ?)
- In the place where you come from, what does a Young girl your age do ? Does she go to High school ? (Dans l'endroit d'où vous venez, qu'est-ce que la jeune fille de votre âge faire? Est-ce qu'elle va à le lycée ?)
- What values do you think your mother thinks are the most important ? Your father ? (Quelle sont les valeurs est-ce que tu pense que ta mère pense sont les plus importants ? Ton père ?)
- What values do you think MEMB thinks are the most important ? (Quelles sont les valeurs est-ce que tu pense que l'école de Mariama Bâ pense sont les plus importants ?)

Focus Group Questions:

- Why is family important in Senegal ? (Pourquoi est-ce que vous pensez la famille est le plus important au Sénégal ?)
- How does this value manifest itself at your house ? (Comme est-ce que cette valeur manifeste lui-même a chez-toi ?)
- Do you think éducation is an individual pursuit ? (Pensez-vous que éducation est une poursuite individuelle ?)
- Is the reason for éducation considered different for girls than for boys ? (Est-ce que la raison pour l'éducation considère différente pour les filles et pour les garçons ?)
- What is your father's job ? Your mother ? (Quel est le métier de ton père ? Ta mère ?)
- When your mother had children did she continue working ? (Quand ta mère avait les enfants, est-ce que elle a travaillé ?)
- Do you want a family ? (Voulez-vous une famille ?)
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- Will you find a job first ? (Trouvera vous un métier premier ?)
- Can you be a mother and have a job at the same time ? (Pensez-vous que on peut être une mère et avoir un métier a le même temps ?)
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- What is the différence between éducation and instruction ? (Qu'est que c'est les différences entre éducation et instruction ?)