Petaws and Perés

A study concerning youth and jewelry in West Africa
Acknowledgement

I want to thank the art and craft teacher at Tujereng Upper Basic School in The Gambia, Abdoulie Bobb. He took the time to discuss West African education and the conditions of schools in the Gambia with me. He has proved that it is possible to see opportunities where other people only see obstacles.

I also want to thank all the students in Abdoulie Bobb’s art and craft class for giving me their points of view concerning traditional West African jewelry and its importance. I am grateful for their respectful endeavor and for sharing their positive spirit.

I want to thank Bai Sering Secke, the smith and jewelry maker in The Gambia, who took me into his home, showed me his products, and gave me the possibility to photograph traditional jewelry pieces. The fact that he shared his knowledge concerning traditional jewelry production has been of great importance to me.

Furthermore, I want to thank Fanta Bayo, chef at Le Bendoula Hotel in Senegal, for letting me interview her about West African culture and its hidden rules.

Moreover, I want to express my thanks to the staff at Le Bendoula Hotel. It has been a great benefit to me and my study to get to know these loving and helpful people.
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1 Introduction

When I was eighteen years old, I went to Chicago as an exchange student for one year. To get to and from school every day my host family told me to take the train all the way to Evanston, the secure suburb where they lived. I was not allowed—under any circumstances—to take the bus to Howard Street and walk from there. They told me that Howard Street was nothing but a haunt of poverty, gangsters, guns, violence, and prostitution. As they were religious conservative Jews, they called it “The Street God had forgotten.” The longer they discussed the sins of Howard Street, the more determined I became to explore the mysterious place.

A couple of weeks later, I went there with shaking knees and a rapidly beating heart. What I met there was a very rich crowd of different ethnic backgrounds and subcultures. It was like traveling around the world, only I didn’t have to leave that one street. What caught my attention were the African jewelry shops. Their earrings were huge and colorful, and they looked gorgeous on the African sales women. That day on Howard Street, my interest in traditional African jewelry awoke within me. I bought several pairs of earrings, and I returned to those stores almost every week during that year. Every time my host family asked me where I got all my new jewelry, I had to lie and say that I had been shopping downtown in one of the malls.

Five years later, during my university study to become an art teacher, I got a scholarship opportunity to travel to a third world country of my choice and write a report. I knew instantly that I wanted to go to someplace in Africa, south of the Sahara. I decided that I would go to The Gambia and Senegal and that I would write about jewelry. A student from the university, who had done the same trip one year before me, wrote in the end of her report that West African jewelry is very interesting and could become a study of its own. I decided to continue where she finished.
2 The purpose of my study

The purpose of my study was to learn more about the spiritual meaning behind West African jewelry. I wanted to find out if jewelry production trade began with young generations in school—like our handicraft tradition in Sweden—or if it was passed on in another way. The purpose was also to learn if the West African youth of today appreciates this tradition, and how they communicate with their jewelry.

2.1 Questions at issue

More specifically, I have tried to answer the following questions:

- What kind of hidden messages does West African jewelry communicate?
- Who decides what kind of jewelry is worn? Who decides its placement on the body?
- Does the youth of today value the traditional jewelry? If so, how?
- In what way is the youth of today planning to pass on the value of traditional jewelry to future generations?
- How is knowledge about traditional West African jewelry production taught to young people in The Gambia and Casamance in southern Senegal?
- In what way do students work with jewelry production in school?
- What can a teacher gain by bringing jewelry making into the classroom?

2.2 Delimitations

I am aware of the fact that West Africa involves many countries; however, I have only been visiting The Gambia and Casamance in southern Senegal. I am also conscious of the limitations of my study as a white, Western woman. It’s very likely that I would have received differing answers to my questions if I had been an African man who knew the local languages. Cultural differences have also, in some situations, made it harder for me to understand certain aspects of this study.
3 Research survey

3.1 African handcraft and jewelry

In 2001, Mai Palmberg, with Maria Eriksson Baaz, wrote in their book, Same and Other: Negotiating African Identity in Cultural Production, that many people regard Africa as a continent without a rich culture.

One can ask whether Africa is treated any differently from other parts of the “Third World”, for example, South East Asia or Latin America. I think the answer is yes. Africa is given a special place on the mental map in the Western world, and also in Sweden. It is undeniably seen as the most primitive, the most underdeveloped and exploited, the most miserable and incapable, and the continent with the least culture. (Palmberg, M, 2001, p. 198).

The reality is that Africa does, in fact, have a very rich culture. Because Africa is such a large continent, it’s natural to assume that cultural identity differs depending on which part of Africa a person visits. African values and aesthetic preferences also change over time; they are not static. (Eriksson Baaz, M, 2001).

In Africa, patterns and colors are very important in individuals’ lives. Y. Ayo writes about this in his book, Eyewitness guides Africa. Fabrics, clothes, ceramic pots, baskets and materials are often covered in color and prints. The African designs usually include geometric shapes, animals, humans and flowers. People make some materials themselves for their own use, while handicraft specialists produce other materials, like fabrics. Africans are very good at using the materials nature provides. For example, they use wood for furniture, figure carving, and they use vegetable dyes for decoration. Many handcraft objects have a religious purpose. (Ayo,Y, 1995).

L Meyer, has written about African art and handicraft in Black Africa, Masks Sculpture Jewelry. He asserts that African art and handcraft do have, and always have had, an underlying meaning, a story to tell, or a hidden message:

In fact, it should be clear that the European concept of “art” is alien to traditional African thought. “Art for art’s sake” was extremely rare in Africa, as it was in medieval art. This did not prevent the flowering of beauty in Africa in many domains, even if not under the heading of “art”, and for purposes different from those of western art. (Meyer 1992:10).

Professional craftsmen make traditional African jewelry from various natural materials, such as wood, leather, and beads. The jewelry can vary in design, but it is almost always colorful. Usually, the traditional jewelry conveys a message. For example, white is associated with
purity and truth, red symbolizes anger and pain, and blue refers to being faithful. (Ayo, Y, 1995).


### 3.2 Practical knowledge

My research also concerns the teaching of jewelry manufacturing and how that knowledge transfers to young people in southern Senegal and Gambia. Bernt Gustavsson has written about different kinds of knowledge in *Kunskapsfilosofi: Tre kunskapsformer i historisk belysning* from 2001. He mentions three different kinds of knowledge: tacit knowledge, proficiency knowledge, and familiarity knowledge. Tacit knowledge is something one can verbalize and equates with scientific or theoretical knowledge. Proficiency knowledge is synonymous to “knowing how,” which means knowing how to manufacture and produce jewelry. Familiarity knowledge represents the knowledge that an individual learns over a long period of time within a profession or through accustomed tasks. “To master a praxis does not only mean that one have learned to practice a certain operation. It also means being conversant with the silent conditions and collected experiences that controls the action on the field.” (Gustavsson, 2001).

#### Formal, non formal and informal learning

In their book, *Human Resource Development – att utveckla medarbetare och organisationer* (2011), Nilsson, Wallo, Rönnqvist, and Davidson state three forms of educational activities. The first of those forms is formal educational activities under planned and structured supervision. An example of this would be an instructed lesson in a classroom.

The second form is non-formal educational activities in which the lesson is still planned but under less formal conditions. When attending non-formal educational activities, a student does not have to apply, nor will he receive a grade for is work. An example of non-formal training would be small, study circles and staff conferences.

The third form of educational activity is informal learning. This could be described as learning during the daily work for an individual or for a staff. Informal learning
could involve better possibilities for people to meet and learn from each other. (Nilsson, Wallo, Rönqvist, Davidson, 2011).

**Situated learning**

Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory inspired situated learning. According to this perspective, learning always transpires within a context. Learning occurs when a person is involved in an activity or in an interaction with other people. Situated learning occurs when an individual leaves the position as a peripheral participant and becomes an adequate member of a learning community. (Nilsson et al, 2011).

**Collective learning**

Senge focuses on the “work group” as the spine in collective learning. He affirms that learning occurs by interacting with others. For example, he believes that in situated learning the individual leaves the periphery, enters the center of a working community, and then furthers his learning through collective elements. In collective learning, the individual’s experiences are communicated and reflected openly in the group. The result of this could be a mutual look on the reality, a shared cognitive map and approach. (Nilsson et al, 2011).

**Transferring knowledge**

Jacobsen and Thorsvik have written about how to transfer knowledge in their book *Hur moderna organisationer fungerar*, from 2008. The diagram below categorizes different ways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silent</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>Socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Externalization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Socialization – from silent to silent knowledge.** Knowledge spreads subconsciously by observing and learning from each other. This form of learning is limited since it requires physical proximity, and it requires the teacher and learner to see each other. It is also limited because of the fact that it is silent and cannot be discussed or reviewed.
**Externalization – from silent to explicit knowledge.** This entails a process in which the individual’s silent knowledge becomes articulated, verbally or in writing, and thereby becomes available to others.

**Internalization.**

Internalization occurs when people add new, explicit knowledge to their own silent knowledge.

**Combination – from explicit to explicit knowledge.**

Combination involves the putting together of open sources of information. For example, someone learns when another person explains something to him or her.
4 Theoretical basis

I will use the following theoretical terms to enhance understanding:

- **Knowing how**: Something one performs physically; something that is difficult to verbalize.
  
  An important conception for practical knowledge is “knowing how” which is connected to working with the body. This kind of knowledge is usually very difficult to put into words. “Knowing how” is the ability to make something but also to understand what it is one is constructing. To be proficient in something, one must be able to reason about it. (Gustavsson 2002:85-86).

- **Knowing that**: Something theoretical that one knows; something that is easily verbalized.
  
  Words are very important for “knowing that.” When reasoning, one needs logical conclusions. Having theoretical knowledge means “knowing that.” This describes what a person theoretically knows, something one can easily verbalize. (Gustavsson 2002:84-85).

- **Knowledge based on experience**: This means that a person has experience from a particular situation, and that situation has given her new knowledge that can be used in the future. “Knowledge based on experience” implies that a person is open-minded enough to learn from her surroundings and from various situations. The way a person reacts to something has very much to do with his or her prior experiences with similar situations.

  There are differences between a specialist, an expert, and someone who has experience. A specialist has had a theoretical education, but this person is not an expert or someone who has any experience. An expert possesses a theoretical education as well as experience and might have knowledge within a special matter. Experience is something a person gets when he or she has survived many different situations and learned from them, usually over a long period of time. Experience of a particular situation gives a person new knowledge that can be used in future situations. (Östlinder m. fl. 2006:15-17).

We know that increasing experience and knowledge in a specific field (chess, for instance) has the effect that things (properties, etc) which, at earlier stages, as to be abstracted, or even inferred are apt to be immediately perceived at later stages. To a rather large extent, abstraction is replaced by perception, but we do not know much about how this
works, nor where the borderline lies, as an effect of this replacement, a so-called “given” problem situation is not really given since it is seen differently by an expert that is perceived by an inexperienced person. (Östlinder m. fl. 2006:15).

- **Silent knowledge:** Describes practical knowledge; something that is difficult to verbalize. (Gustavsson 2002:83).
  
  Practical knowledge, knowing how, also has another name, silent knowledge. This means that a person has knowledge that she has never verbally reflected over. Silent knowledge is very common in crafts and sports. Of course there is also the argument that there are many more languages than the verbal one. Making something by hand could also be referred to as a language. (Gustavsson 2001:108-109).

- **Explicit knowledge:** Experiences and conditions that one can put into words. Explicit knowledge develops from conversations and discussions around assignments, problems, and possibilities. Explicit knowledge often takes place in writing, routines, and procedures. (Jacobsen och Thorsvik 2008:386).

- **Techne:** Practical productive knowledge – *techne* – did not evolve until after the Second World War. Not until then did philosophers put into words practical knowledge and think about its meaning in relation to theoretical knowledge. Techne emerges from a pragmatic knowledge tradition and claims that knowledge is based on practical activities. (Gustavsson 2001:101).
5 Method

5.1 Interviews, observations, photographing and question sheet

I have conducted qualitative interviews in both The Gambia and in Senegal, but I have also conducted quantitative research at a school in The Gambia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative research</th>
<th>Qualitative research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher’s understanding</td>
<td>The participants’ understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Vicinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination of theory</td>
<td>Examination of generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Aimed at the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Understanding in the context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hard,” reliable data</td>
<td>Rich and rounded data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro concentration</td>
<td>Micro concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected environments</td>
<td>Natural environments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 10: Quantitative versus qualitative research. (Bryman 2002:272).

According to Bryman, qualitative research is more focused on words than on numbers. It is also based on participation, observations, and the researcher’s involvement in the environment of the study. It is important to understand the context of the matter. In addition to interviews and observations, a qualitative study also includes collecting documents from the place of study.

Quantitative research, on the other hand, is focused on “hard,” reliable data, numbers, and statistics. This kind of research is more structured and demands a larger amount of participants. (Bryman, 2002). I have applied both qualitative as well as quantitative research.

In The Gambia, I interviewed the smith and jewelry maker, Bai Sering Secke. Later, in a small, countryside village called Tujereng, at an Upper Basic School, I interviewed the art and craft teacher, Abdoulie Bobb. I chose to interview Bobb because I wanted to know more about the craft behind traditional jewelry and how jewelry production is taught in schools.
When people *meet* for an interview, they build trust and confidence which makes the respondent both more relaxed and dedicated. The respondent’s answers become deeper and more meaningful than from, for example, a phone interview. Body language and the facial expressions can further add to the interview. (Eriksson, LT, Wiedersheim-Paul, F, 2001). I held my interviews as casual conversations with a desire for an open, relaxed, and pleasant atmosphere so the respondent would be more willing to talk. According to Bryman, these kinds of unstructured interviews can give rich and rounded data and a greater understanding in the context. (Fig.10).

I also handed out a question sheet to twenty of Abdoulie Bobb’s students at the Tujareng Upper Basic School to get quantitative data. I collected a copy of the Middle School Art and Craft Syllabus from the Ministry of Education, Banjul, The Gambia. I wanted to know more about young peoples’ opinions of traditional jewelry, and I felt that a question sheet would be a proper way to collect that information. One of the greatest benefits of handing out questionnaires is that the respondents’ identities stay anonymous and allows them to answer honestly. (Eriksson, LT, Wiedersheim-Paul, F, 2001). Bryman writes that this kind of quantitative research creates a distance between the questioner and the answerer, but that the answers, on the other hand, can produce valuable numbers and reliable data for the researcher’s understanding. (Fig. 10.)

In Casamance, in the south of Senegal, I interviewed a twenty-three year old woman. I wanted to interview a normal, unassuming resident, and the woman I interviewed did not stand out in any way. She seemed to be a regular Casamance-girl. I also held this interview as a casual dialogue, almost like “girl-talk,” but with my research questions in mind. I wanted her to feel relaxed and talk to me openly about the jewelry she wore and what it meant to her.

I also conducted observations. During my entire excursion, I kept my eyes open for jewelry and its further implications. I took many photographs of jewelry in order to remember what they looked like and to reproduce the images in my research.

### 5.2 Ethical considerations

I have tried to conduct myself most ethically. All my informants have given approval for me to quote them in this study. I asked them if they wanted to remain anonymous, but my informants allowed me to use their names. When I use the respondents’
names in this report, I mean to show them a great respect. Researchers should not make critical judgments of interviewee’s answers, and I would have liked to ask the informants to read what I have written to confirm my accuracy in this report. (Alvesson, M, 2011). Unfortunately this has not been possible in my case.

Everyone in my photographs has granted me permission to use their pictures in this report.
6 Cultural and Spiritual Background

6.1 The Gambia and Senegal

Africa is most likely the world’s oldest continent; former, scientific studies prove the human race originated in Africa. Africa is exceptionally large; it reaches from 35 degrees north of the equator to 35 degrees south of the equator. It also has produced many natural resources. In the 19th century, Great Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Belgium and Spain colonized large portions of Africa. At this time, Western Europe was convinced that their African colonies were more valuable than the native, African societies. Colonists believed they were more suited to be in power than Africans themselves. (Davidson 2001).

In 1868, James Africanus Horton, an African nationalist writer, reported that: “A nation can never civilize itself; the civilisation has to come from outside.” (Davidson 1979, 137). Most Europeans agreed with Horton’s assertion, and the struggle to colonize Africa also became a competition between the European countries. (Fage 1966, 192).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gambia</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population, total (millions)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface area (sq. km)</td>
<td>11295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth, females and males, years</td>
<td>58/55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3: Statistics on The Gambia (Landguiden 2011). [www.landguiden.se](http://www.landguiden.se)

The Gambia is a small country. Comparing their surface areas, Sweden is forty times larger than The Gambia. Regardless, The Gambia is densely populated with its 1.7 million inhabitants, compared to Sweden’s 9.4 million inhabitants. Due to poverty and a lack of available health care, life expectancy in The Gambia is more than twenty years lower than it is in Sweden. More than half of the population in The Gambia survives on less than 2 US dollars a day. Almost one third of the inhabitants suffer from malnutrition. The child mortality is decreasing, but one out of ten children can expect to die before the age of five. (www.landguiden.se)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population, total (millions)</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface area (sq. km)</td>
<td>196722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth, females and males, years</td>
<td>57/54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4: Statistics on Senegal (Landguiden 2011). [www.landguiden.se](http://www.landguiden.se)

Senegal is a little bit smaller than half the surface area of Sweden. One could say that Senegal is densely populated compared to Sweden but not compared to The Gambia. Senegal has 12.5 million inhabitants. Life expectancy in Senegal is the same as in The Gambia, also due to poverty and a lack of available health care. Poverty is scattered in Senegal. Almost two thirds of the population survives on less than 2 US dollars a day. Healthcare is somewhat better than in the surrounding countries, but it is still far from
adequate. One out of ten Senegalese children can anticipate dying before the age of five, due, in large measure, to malaria. (www.landguiden.se).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gambia</th>
<th>Year 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malinke</td>
<td>42 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolof</td>
<td>16 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diola (Jola)</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soninke</td>
<td>9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3. Statistics on ethnic groups in The Gambia (Worldstatesmen 2000). www.worldstatesmen.org

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senegal</th>
<th>Year 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolof</td>
<td>34,6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulani and Tukolor</td>
<td>27,1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serer</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandinka</td>
<td>9,7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16,6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 6. Statistics on ethnic groups in Senegal (Worldstatesmen 2000). www.worldstatesmen.org

The populations of both The Gambia and in Senegal consist of many different ethnic groups who speak various languages. Many people are bilingual or even trilingual. Illiteracy in West Africa are the highest in the world; according to Caroline Pearce of Oxfams study from 2009, *From closed books to open doors – West Africa's literacy challenge*, sixty-five million West African adults—40 percent of the adult population—cannot read or write

### 6.2 Religion

In The Gambia and Senegal, religious beliefs are very similar. Both of the countries have relatively conservative populations. The inhabitants highly value African traditions when it comes to both family and religion. Many West African societies believe in a strong hierarchy in which everyone has his or her own position. The countries have strong leaders, governors, and a mayor in each village; they are all looked upon with great respect not only for their leadership but also for their spiritual statuses. The belief in *thiossane*—
history and tradition—is strong. In all of Africa, religion is very important, but the rites and rules differ from north to south and west to east. (Palmberg 2001).

Most of the people in Senegal and The Gambia are muslims. In Senegal the first to convert to Islam were the Tukulor-people in the eleventh century. They chose to do so under the influence by North African traders and missionaries. In 1776 a group of Tukulor marabouts led a successful revolution and after that they began to send missionaries throughout Senegal and other parts of West Africa to make people convert to Islam. (Gellar 1995).

The rest of the population in Senegal and the Gambia is Christian, or they practice traditional nature religions. Although the social mores differ between religious groups, people in both countries are very tolerant toward each other. (landguiden.se). Most of the people believe in a mixture of traditional African rites and Islam. In the countryside, people tend to keep the traditional beliefs more than in the cities. (landguiden.se).

The general spiritual belief of the West African people is that the world was created by one supreme power, God. They also believe in three important spiritual forces: nature, the deceased, and the living people. According to the Gambian and Senegalese people, the world was created in peace and harmony. The purpose of life is to maintain this harmony. In order to maintain harmony, West Africans believe in submission; they believe they must surrender the head of the family: the father, the mayor, the governors, the king, and God. They believe in a close relationship between religion and society and they look upon the Quran as a book of laws with instructions on how to live. (Abdoulie Bobb).

West Africans use the Quran as a practical guidebook on how to live in righteousness. It is still fairly common in The Gambia and Senegal for men to marry up to four wives. Senegal has the highest rates of polygamous marriages in West Africa; “close to half of the women are married to polygamous husbands. Even for the youngest generations (fifteen to nineteen years old), polygamy rates are about 25 percent, suggesting that about one in four women first marries into a polygamous union.” (jrank.org, 1995).

Many people follow the Muslim tradition of praying five times a day, but they also have longstanding non-Muslim superstitions. For example, they belief black cats are evil and are possessed by the devil. This Muslim/non-Muslim dichotomy is interesting since it is strongly forbidden in Islam to worship anything other than Allah:

One cannot judge merely by what is professed. The man who bows down to an idol to gain an hundred thousand dirhems, even though he utters the confession of faith, prays, fasts, accomplishes the
pilgrimage and does good works, yet by one act of heathenism destroys a thousand acts of faith.

In North and West Africa there exists a group of men who work as Marabouts. The word comes from the Arabic word Marbût (.Marbût) which means “one who is attached (to God).” Sometimes they are also called “priests.” They survive from the founding Islamic leaders, teachers, and experts of the Quran, but in West Africa it is not unusual for the Marabouts to give other kinds of spiritual guidance according to pre-Islamic beliefs. Their profession also involves predicting futures, healing people, speaking to the deceased, and creating costume jewelry to bring health and good fortune. Since they have such an important role in society as advisors, medical doctors, and spiritual leaders, they attain a great respect.
(Abdoulie Bobb).

“The priest is a religious specialist whose job is to maintain, celebrate, and restore, if necessary, the right relationship between the community and the Gods. He is an important person who is concerned with both the physical and spiritual well-being of his community. People often seek his medical advice as well as consulting him about social and moral problems.”

To summarize, West Africans highly value spirituality, and they have created their own, unique partnership between Allah and the ancient Gods and powers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religions in The Gambia</th>
<th>Year 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>90 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional beliefs and other</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religions in Senegal</th>
<th>Year 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>94 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional beliefs and other</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 9: A Fulani Marabout. Photo from www.accessgambia.com, with permission from Saihu S Janneh.
7 West African jewelry

**Petaw:** White shell worn by West Africans for protection from evil eyes. (Bai Sering Secke).

**Peré:** Protective small leather pouch containing a prayer or a message from the Quran. (Abdoulai Bobb).

**Bin-bin:** Ribbon worn by women around their waist to attract men. (Fanta Bayo).

Jewelers have, for hundreds of years, had a prominent social status in the West African society. (Gellert 1999). The Gambian and Senegalese people put much effort into looking their best and making their homes and compounds look nice. Given that these are deprived countries, their inhabitants are very innovative and skilled when it comes to handicrafts. A lot of what they wear and own is homemade.

Although most people know how to make clothes and different objects, West Africa experts are trained to produce certain products. (Garner, L, 2004). Usually they learn their profession from a parent or a relative. Some jobs, like jewelry-making, are almost solely performed by men.

Since many West African people are illiterate, they communicate through their art, clothes and jewelry, perhaps more than the people of the Western part of the world. Colors, patterns, and symbols have great importance in their silent way of communicating. West African artists find their inspiration from all over:

Traditional African Art is profoundly influenced by many factors: religion and magic; the belief in omnipresent occult forces; ancestor worship involving sacrifices; funeral rites; initiation ceremonies; masked dances for all important life events; the power of secret societies; the chief’s desire for prestige; the love of jewelry and the pursuit of beauty in the most lowly of objects.
(Meyer, 1992:1).

Men also wear jewelry and happily receive pieces of jewelry as gifts from friends, wives, or girlfriends. Many men wear an ornament on their upper arm. “They wear them as jewelry, but at the same time they expect them to offer magic protection against evil spirits…” (Gardi, R, 1969: 177). These ornaments are composed of a black ribbon and a leather pouch that contains a small piece of paper with a message. Men get the pouches from Marabouts, and it is the Marabout who decides and writes down the message, usually from the
Quran. The Marabout then sews the message it into the leather bag. It is a well-known belief in Islam that God’s words should be kept wrapped in goat leather. This is why Western African men put their prayers in leather pouches. (Abdouli Bobb). This kind of leather bag is called “peré” in Wolof and “safe” in Mandinka.

Another common piece of jewelry worn by men is the silver bracelet. This is also believed to hold protecting powers. As time passes and the bracelet turns darker and darker, it is believed to have drained the body of evil. (Bai Sering Secke). “The most common types of bracelets are hammered or cast silver cuffs. Simple in their conception, they take on the form of open cylinders.” (Cutsem, 2002).

Fig. 11: Man in The Gambia wearing a peré and a silver bracelet. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Bracelets and anklets are women’s favorite jewelry in Africa. Their bracelets have very important symbolic value. They put on a new bracelet for each big moment in life: their naming, the commencement of puberty, when they get married, and when they have a baby. (Cutsem, 2002).

Overall, West African women love to dress up for big events in nice clothes and jewelry. They have different style codes than Swedish women. The belief that “less is more” does not exist, and it is considered very beautiful to wear a lot of jewelry at the same time and to mix gold and silver with strong colors (Bai Sering Secke).
“The beloved was nude, for, knowing my desire,
She had discarded all but her jingling jewelry,
Sumptuous chains and bangles that gave her a triumphant air
Like that of Moorish slaves at moments of high revelry.
Whenever her dancing set off such bright, mocking sound,
That scintillating world of metal and stones
Left me ravished and enthralled, for to love madly I am bound
All things in which light mingles with beguiling tones.”
(Originally from “Jewels” by Charles Baudelaire, translated by and quoted from Butor 1994:15).

Fig. 12: This Senegalese woman gave birth to a baby girl one week earlier and is now ready for the celebration festivities. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Many infants in West Africa die because of inaccessible healthcare. Therefore, mothers typically bring newborns to Marabouts to get a blessing. The Marabout will pick a prayer or a part of the bible or the Quran and then make the baby a protective necklace, a peré or a safe. In most cases, the baby will wear it in a leather ribbon like a necklace, but if the baby has a sick stomach, the Marabout can prescribe the leather bag to be worn around the stomach instead. Common messages in babies’ perés or safes are, “Let God protect you from Satan” and “There is only one God” (Abdoulie Bobb).
In West Africa, many people wear white shells to protect themselves from evil eyes. These shells are supposed to be as white as possible and be worn with the narrow opening up, in order to function properly. They are worn in many different ways, as necklaces, bracelets, rings, sewed into braids, on bags, and on sandals, and worn as waist jewelry. The most protective shells are supposed to be found on the small islands outside of the West African coast. These shells are called “petaws” (Bai Sering Secke).
Bin-bins, a special kind of jewelry in West Africa, is only worn by women. They consist of a ribbon that women wear around their waists. They can be decorated with petaws, pearls, plastic beads, silver, or gold.

Wearing bin-bins is a very old tradition, but also a part of the contemporary West African fashion. They are looked upon as the most sensual piece of jewelry and are worn to “spice up” a marriage or to get attention from men. Some liberal women wear bin-bins outside of their clothes when they go out dancing and at their wedding, while the more conservative women only let their husbands see them.

Traditional bin-bins are made of leather ribbons with perés and are given from Marabouts (Fanta Bayo).

Fig. 15: Bin-bin with petaw. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Fanta Bayo discussed with me the Arabic influences on the style and jewelry in West Africa. She said that since it is impossible for African women to make themselves look “white,” they try to look North African by wearing light colored powder, Arabic looking clothes, hairstyles, and jewelry. This style gives them a higher status and popularity among the young men. (Fanta Bayo).
This study mainly concentrates on traditional West African jewelry, but it also needs to be said that a lot of the youth in West Africa also wear Western necklaces, earrings, and so on. When one visits the jewelry market, there exists a colorful mixture of ancient ornaments and modern jewelry.

Fig. 16: Photo of a young Senegalese hairdresser ready for a party. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Fig. 17: Gold jewelry, real or fake, is a part of the Arabic look. Photograph Frida Elmbro.
Fig. 18: The jewelry market in Kafountine, Senegal. Photograph Frida Elmbro.
8 Tujereng Upper Basic School in The Gambia

8.1 Learning jewelry making at school?

The school involved in this study is located in the southern countryside of The Gambia. The school has about two hundred students, half of them are boys and half are girls. As are many other schools in The Gambia, Tujereng Upper Basic School is unprivileged. There is no electricity and almost no supplies.

The Middle School Art and Craft syllabus of the Development and Research center of the Gambia instructs teachers to let their students try many different practical techniques, like painting, ceramic work, fabric coloring, weaving and photography. Unfortunately, none of this is possible at Tujereng Upper Basic School due to its lack of resources. Instead, Art and Crafts has become downgraded to a theory class. Though the syllabus clearly states that practical knowledge is highly valued in The Gambia, Art and Crafts is supposed to be filled with practical exercises, Tujereng Upper Basic School cannot fulfill the syllabus requirements.

The Art and Craft teacher, Abdoulie Bobb, says that he tries in every way to find free material in order to make the subject more practically oriented. His most important and valuable resource is nature. The students have, for example, picked natural “beads” that grow on bushes to make necklaces and bracelets. After picking the “beads,” the students use a needle, heated up over an open fire, to make a hole in each “bead.” They slip the bead onto a thin thread to make their ornament. Fanta Bayo confirmed that she, too, made pieces of jewelry from natural beads when she went to school.

Abdoulie Bobb said that since jewelry plays such an important role in the West African culture, it is a natural part of Art and Craft class in school.

Fig. 19: Beads used for jewelry making at Tujareng Upper Basic school. Photograph Frida Elmbro.
8.2 *The students’ opinions about jewelry*

The students wear school uniforms and are not allowed to wear any visible jewelry during school. Still, many of the students bring jewelry in their pockets or backpacks.

To find out whether or not students value traditional ornaments, if they want to pass on the tradition to the future generations, and whether they received their jewelry from a parent or a Marabout, I gave the teenagers of Abdouli Bobb’s class a questionnaire to answer my queries (Appendix 1).

There were 20 students in the class, 11 girls and 9 boys. I received the following answers to my questions:

1. **Do you have any piece of jewelry that you use for protection?**

   All of the students, but one boy, declared that they had pieces of jewelry for protection.

2. **Do you have more than one?**

   Eight out of eleven girls stated that they had more than one piece of jewelry. Six out of the nine boys stated that they had more than one piece of jewelry.

3. **Who gave it to you; for example a parent or a Marabout?**

   Six of the girls answered that they got the piece of jewelry from a Marabout, and five answered they got the piece of jewelry from a parent. Six of the boys got their jewelry from a Marabout and five from a parent. No other answers were given.

4. **When do you use it?**

   Ten of the girls answered “every day” or “all the time.” One girl declared that she uses it at night. Eight of the boys answered “every day” or “all the time,” and one stated that he uses it at ceremonies.

5. **Describe where on your body you wear it:**

   Six of the girls and five of the boys answered that the placement of their jewelry was decided by a Marabout. One boy wrote “around the arm,” two boys and two girls wrote, “around the neck,” and one girl wrote “as bin-bin.”
6. Do you believe that it protects you?

All the girls and all the boys, except one boy, answered “yes.”

7. Do you (inshallah) want your children to have jewelry for protection?

Everyone answered “yes.”
9 Analysis

What has emerged by this study is that children and youth of The Gambia and Casamance in Senegal are very much dependent on family and relatives when it comes to learning craft professions such as jewelry making. This is a natural consequence of the fact that most of the schools lack essential resources. In school, children only get to try jewelry making to a small extent with few materials. According to Abdoulie Bobb, teachers of West Africa do what they can to bring jewelry making into the classrooms, but since the schools are very poor, they can only use whatever material they can find in the nature, such as natural beads and shells. Abdoulie Bobb says that despite his lacking resources, there are two important benefits to gain by continuing jewelry making into school: it passes on the jewelry making tradition, and because it is possible to find some natural materials in nature, it allows for a low-cost activity for students.

People in The Gambia and Senegal live in a collective culture. It is natural to help family members and relatives find jobs. Therefore, Bai Sering Secke believes, it is very common to inherit your parents’ or older relatives’ craft professions. Bai Sering Secke’s family has been jewelry smiths for many generations. For Secke’s family, jewelry production was taught by the family and not in school.

Knowledge of how to make these pieces of craft is silent; it exists in the hands of the West African people and survives from former generations. Their knowledge derives from experience and is often passed on without a single written word. One could call the jewelry making knowledge “knowing how:” something one performs physically, hard to verbalize, or “technē:” practical, productive knowledge. When people learn this profession from relatives, it is a non-formal educational activity. The education is planned but under less formal conditions. Knowledge is spread subconsciously, through “socialization,” by observing and learning from each other; it is taught through silent to silent knowledge.

As Gustavsson says, there are more languages than verbal or written ones. In West Africa, it is very clear that it is also possible to present feelings and opinions with pictures, crafts, patterns, and jewelry. West African jewelry communicates many different messages. Often, the messages have a long tradition and are very spiritual. They are worn mainly to protect the carrier, to heal, and to bring good fortune.
Abdoulie Bobb believed that West African people are incredibly proud of their traditional jewelry. West African youth seem to truly value traditional jewelry. They wear them almost all the time and definitely plan to pass on the tradition to their future children.

The Marabouts have a lot to say when it comes to what kind of jewelry to wear and where on the body to place it. One could almost say that the Marabout is like a traditional doctor who hands out different kinds of jewelry as prescriptions.
10 Conclusions and discussion

The Gambian and Senegalese people are clearly very proud of their craft culture and their traditional jewelry. Crafts are not only purposeful or decoration; they act as a form of communication. Many of the Gambian and Senegalese inhabitants are illiterate, which could be why their crafts speak volumes. There are many codes and meanings behind their patterns, craft works, and ornament.

One reason for why the West African people are so skilled in handicrafts could be that they have the tradition of learning from their parents and not from school. Many of society’s elders are experts in different crafts while only a few of them are able to help their children in reading or writing. In the area where Tujereng Upper Basic School is located, people still live very simple lives. Being able to sew, carve woodwork, or make jewelry, for example, gives people a chance to earn a living and support their families. There are very few work opportunities that involve reading and writing. If this study had been conducted in Banjul, the capital of The Gambia, the result would most likely have been different.

The Gambia and Senegal are countries with very spiritual people, including the youth. The capitals are developed and life in those areas is consistent with life in any European city. Influence from the modern world, however, is still very modest in the small towns that I have visited. Most of the teenagers don’t have access to the Internet or television. This is probably why secularization has not yet arrived. Young people tend to think that it is important to keep the ancient traditions alive and to pass them on to the future generations.

It is clear from the questionnaire in the school class that the students really believe that their traditional jewelry protects them. Many of the students brought jewelry in their pockets or backpacks even though they are not allowed to show them off during school. They told me they choose to bring jewelry to school to feel safe on the walk to and from home, and to feel safe during the school day. The girl who answered that she wears her ornaments at night later said that she does so to feel protected from men when she is walking after dark. Believing that their jewelry protects them seems to make the West African youth feel empowered and secure. The students have confidence in their protecting ornaments.

Human beings have created different kinds of craftwork since the beginning of time; I find it strange, then, that philosophers have not included that under the word “knowledge” until the last five decades. It is apparent to me that the knowledge with the
highest regard is abstract, theoretical knowledge. When it comes to knowledge, The Gambian and Senegalese people should inspire us. They learn from each other, value their traditions, and show alternative forms of communication.

In Sweden, with each new generation, craftwork seems to be a dying profession. This could be due to the fact that we do not value handmade things as past generation, or because current industry allows for simpler, faster, and cheaper ways to manufacture goods. Swedish people can purchase everything from retail stores, already made by someone (or something) else. We buy our houses, furniture, clothes, jewelry, and even portion-sized food. I hope for a renaissance of the handicraft industry in our country. I also hope that practical knowledge will gain a greater respect and status.
References


**Electronic resources:**


**Interviews with the following respondants:**


Fanta Bayo, Casamance, Senegal, Dec 2008.
Figure register


Figure number 2: [http://www.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/Senegal/Map](http://www.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/Senegal/Map)

Figure number 3: Statistics on The Gambia (Landguiden 2011). [www.landguiden.se](http://www.landguiden.se)

Figure number 4: Statistics on Senegal (Landguiden 2011). [www.landguiden.se](http://www.landguiden.se)

Figure number 5: Statistics on ethnic groups in The Gambia (Worldstatesmen 2000). [www.worldstatesmen.org](http://www.worldstatesmen.org)

Figure number 6: Statistics on ethnic groups in Senegal (Worldstatesmen 2000). [www.worldstatesmen.org](http://www.worldstatesmen.org)

Figure number 7: Statistics on religions in The Gambia (Worldstatesmen 2000). [www.worldstatesmen.org](http://www.worldstatesmen.org)

Figure number 8: Statistics on religions in Senegal (Worldstatesmen 2000). [www.worldstatesmen.org](http://www.worldstatesmen.org)

Figure number 9: A Fulani Marabout. Photo from [www.accessgambia.com](http://www.accessgambia.com), with permission from Saihu S Janneh.

Figure number 10: Quantitative versus qualitative research. (Bryman 2002:272).

Figure number 11: Man in The Gambia wearing a peré and a silver bracelet. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Figure number 12: This Senegalese woman gave birth to a baby girl one week earlier and is now ready for the celebration festivities. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Figure number 13: Two baby boys in The Gambia wearing protecting peré. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Figure number 14: These necklaces with petaws are very common. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Figure number 15: Bin-bin with petaw. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Figure number 16: Photo of a young Senegalese hairdresser ready for a part. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Figure number 17: Gold jewelry, real or fake, is a part of the Arabic look. Photograph Frida Elmbro.
Figure number 18: The jewelry market in Kafountine, Senegal. Photograph Frida Elmbro.

Figure number 19: Beads used for jewellery making in Tujareng Upper Basic school. Photograph Frida Elmbro.
Appendix 1

Question sheet to pupils in Tujareng Upper Basic School

20 pupils
Boys: 9
Girls: 11

- Do you have any piece of jewelry that you use for protection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Do you have more than one?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Who gave it to you; for example a parent or a marabout?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Marabout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(No other answers were given.)
• When do you use it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Every day, all the time</th>
<th>At ceremonies</th>
<th>Night time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(No other answers were given.)

• Describe where on your body you wear it:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Where the Marabut tells you</th>
<th>Around the arm</th>
<th>Around the neck</th>
<th>As bin-bin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(No other answers were given.)

• Do you believe that it protects you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Do you (inshallah) want your children to have jewelry for protection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Frida Elmbro

Petaws and Perés

A study concerning how jewelry production trades to children and youth of West Africa.

Antal sidor: 39

The purpose of this study is to find out the spiritual meanings behind traditional West African jewelry, more specifically from The Gambia and Casamance in south of Senegal, and how children and youth learn about jewelry production. I want to find out if teaching about jewelry production lies in school’s responsibility—as it does in Sweden where we have our hand-craft education—or if it is learned in another way. I also want to know whether the youth of West Africa value their jewelry traditions, and if it is something they want to pass on to future generations.

This study has a pedagogical perspective with an emphasis on “practical” and “silent” knowledge. Furthermore, this study discusses forms of communication other than verbal, such as visual languages. I have chosen to make a few qualitative interviews with a young woman, a jewelry smith, and a teacher, and to hand out a small questionnaire in a school class. I have chosen these methods of research to discover more about West African traditional jewelry and its meanings. I also seek to know about young people’s views on their ornament traditions.

The result of my study is that traditional West African jewelry often has spiritual meanings and aims to provide divine protection from sickness and other ailments. The jewelry traditions in West Africa are still very popular, even among teenagers.

Western African youth is very proud of this tradition and plans to pass it on to future generations, including their own children. I also found out that there is a severe lack of resources in schools, and the handicraft profession, therefore, must be learned from older family members and relatives rather than from school.