

## **Yahaar Jallow and Female Teachers in The Gambia: A Comparative Study of the Ways in which Working Women are Balancing Their Responsibilities at Home with Those at Work**

Pam Wye

Going to the Gambia was one of the best decisions I have made for myself in college thus far, or actually in my whole life. It truly has been a life-changing experience. In fact, I cannot believe I even hesitated over whether I should go or not.

I have to be honest though, I was not one of those college students who had everything all worked out. I wasn't using this trip to help my major or to fuel my St. Mary's Project. I was simply going on this trip because I thought it sounded like an amazing experience. In fact, I haven't even declared my major yet. In the fall of my freshman year I was in the SOAN 101 class of Professor Roberts, the leader of the Gambian Summer field study. He casually mentioned a trip to the Gambia in the coming summer, but he didn't go in depth about it. It was only later, on my own, that I inquired more about the trip.

Africa is a place I hear about frequently in my family. All of my cousins and my aunt have been to Africa, and some have even served as Peace Corps volunteers. The stories I often heard were always interesting, but in a very removed sense. It was always hard for me to picture what this far away continent was really like. I was excited to think I would be able to contribute to the conversations about Africa my cousins often had, and the more I heard about it, the more I felt I had to go. Having the full support of family and friends made the decision easier. However, I have to admit I was nervous at first, because it sounded like such a serious research trip that was going to be filled with highly directed students who have all their college plans all figured out. I guess I still had some apprehensions that all the other students on the trip would be conducting highly organized and directed research. In the end, it is fair to say that we did, in fact, carry out valuable, worthwhile research using anthropological methods I had never known before. I quickly found that that was not the case. I attended one of the meetings and met some of the students going on the trip, and I realized that this trip could only help me. After my participation in the trip was finalized, I started thinking about what my research project was going to focus on. I called Professor Roberts to set up a meeting. I wanted to sit down and talk with him about finding a direction for myself. I didn't even know where to start thinking about possible research topics.

As unsure as I was about what to research while I was in the Gambia, there was one thing that I kept in the back of my mind about my goals for the trip. I often thought to myself that if I could just establish a strong relationship with one Gambian person, then I would be happy. So when Professor Roberts began discussing with me a life history project about a woman named Yaharr Jallow as a way to learn about working women in the Gambia, I became very interested. After only about 10 minutes of talking in his office, he picked up the phone and started dialing. I thought nothing of it until he started speaking

Mandinka, one of the common languages spoken in Gambia, and addressed the receiver by an African name. He handed me the phone and suddenly I was talking with the woman that I would be working closely with, and that I now consider my mother in Africa, Yaharr Jallow.

Now I am sure you are wondering, why her? Well, you will soon find out. Why is she so special that I should want to do a life history project about her? This paper attempts to give you a glimpse into the life of an extraordinarily successful woman who is not only unique in her own culture but in any culture. Through her life you will see how working women, female teachers more specifically, have to balance the heavy responsibilities of having a career and a family, and the way in which society responds to that.

In a Gambian context this topic is important because many young women are beginning to realize the importance of education. As education becomes more easily available to them, they are now faced with the responsibility of caring for their children, husbands, homes, and careers, all at the same time. Many women are the sole breadwinners of their families, and they bear the full responsibility for taking care of their children. It's an interesting topic because the life a typical working woman/mother/wife has to endure is incredible. As a young woman myself, I often think about the life that is ahead of me and what I am going to have to deal with in terms of balancing its many aspects. I have watched my mother work as an a multi-tasker in everything she does and it amazes me, but nothing compares to the work I have seen the women of the Gambia do, and the ways in which they got where they are today. Never before have I seen a pregnant woman walk into a hospital, give birth, and within a couple of hours be on her way to continue with her daily activities. In my experience the women in the Gambia are amazingly strong women. In the heat of the midday sun they are carrying their youngest child on their back while working in the rice fields.

### **The Patience that is Methodology: Starting the Research**

In my opinion, there were basically three very different parts of the trip.

The first two weeks were spent adjusting to the hot climate, to very outgoing and often invasive people, to musical sounds, distinct smells, and basically the idea that we were in Africa...I mean Africa. It really took some time for it to really sink in. For a day, everything felt a bit surreal. The first four days I had a lot of trouble sleeping. My mind was constantly running a mile a minute about everything, it seemed. I wondered, had I made a mistake? I thought about the length of the trip and thought, is six weeks going to feel like an eternity? I even had trouble concentrating on my own thoughts, but soon things calmed down and I was able to make sense of it all. We spent our mornings in language and culture classes where we met in small groups for language for the first half of the morning and then with the whole group for the culture part of class. Our afternoons were spent taking days trips to nearby sites like the Peace Corps Office, Gambia College, and a crocodile pool. Those first two weeks seemed to fly by.

The second part of the trip was "upcountry," where we spent 10 days traveling to the more rural, and might I add hotter, villages of Gambia and even to the bustling capital of Senegal, Dakar. My personal highlights of that portion of the trip include being in Senegal the day Senegal played Turkey in the World

Cup, stopping at a rural school and exchanging nursery rhythms with the young children, as well as eating bread with bugs in it!! It was during the end of this upcountry trip, while we were in Dakar, that I got sick. I had been feeling a bit off for a couple of days, but it all hit me on what was supposed to be one of the most beautiful spots of our trip, Goree Island. I spent only one night on Goree before I was taken to see the American Embassy doctor. After one day I was well again and then enjoyed myself in Dakar a couple of extra days while the rest of the group returned, as planned, to The Gambia.

The third part of the trip, probably the part we were all the most unsure about, was the research part. How am I going to start this, many people were thinking, but I thought I had it all figured out. I was going to make lots of calls, set up times, and get as much done in one day as possible. Since my project involved learning about a woman's life history, I thought I could just schedule a bunch of interviews. But this was not the way to approach such a project. I soon realized that it was important for me to understand the difference in the Gambians' notion of time. What I needed to do was relax a bit. Calling Yaharr Jallow and asking if I could come over for a couple of hours and ask her some questions, and hope to get a lot done in that amount of time, was not the way things were going to get done. I quickly learned something many toubabs, the African name for foreigners, call Gambian time. The Gambian concept of time refers to a very relaxed and often very tardy way of life. Gambian time means that if you tell someone you want to see them at 4:00 for a couple of hours, then expect to see them at 5:30 for about four hours. I had to adjust to this concept, one that I learned to love and hate. After failing to get her on my own schedule, I made myself completely available and worked on her schedule. I would call her in the morning and simply ask if I could come over and see her for a bit. I would mention only a few words relating to my project and hopes to talk about her life. My goal was to indirectly steer our relationship and conversation into the direction I needed for my project. We usually met at 10:30 at her home, which was only a 10 minute walk from our hotel. In my backpack I carried a tape recorder, microphone, cassette tapes, and batteries. Yahaar lives in a very nice white compound behind a main street. I would walk into her compound where clothes would be hanging on lines to dry. I could hear school children singing from the nursery school she had started in her compound. When I arrived, I had usually already eaten breakfast, but when she offered I ate again. I learned that being able to provide for your guests was something that many Gambians took pride in and insisted upon. I would sit on the floor of the living room eating as we talked and visited with her family. Often I sat in on classes in her nursery school, and just hung out around the compound. In a sense I was establishing myself as a friend to Yahaar and her family. I was gaining some credibility for myself as well as establishing some rapport. When I felt the time was right, I started asking a few questions about her life, family, career, education, etc. It took nothing to get Yaharr talking because she is naturally such a vocal and outgoing person. It is also fascinating to watch her talk. She is expressive with her eyes, lips, and hands. As soon as Yahaar started talking about her life, I took out my recorder, and I pressed "record". In addition to that I observed and took in the ways in which Yaharr interacted with people, spoke, went about her day, etc. I did this for about five days, spending about eight hours each day with her. I guess you could call these very informal interviews in which I did not prepare questions, but rather I let her go with what she wanted to talk about. By participating in her life and observing her and her environment I was using a very common method of conducting ethnographic

work, participant observation. I was able to eventually lead things in the direction I wanted them to go, but by letting her talk about what she wanted I was able to see what she found important in her life. After all of that I was left with 120 minutes that I had to transcribe on the computer. It turned out to be about 20 pages of single-spaced information all about Yaharr. My next job was to read, read, and reread all of it until I found themes in her life which were most important to her. That is how I organized the information.

During one of my days with Yaharr we visited Bakau Newtown Primary School where she was the former headmistress. It was during one of those visits that I got to know a few of the teachers and the school comfortably. I became very interested in this school, known for its academic excellence and environmental efforts. Through a series of very informal conversations I decided that I wanted to learn more about female teachers. During our very casual conversations they would mention that they were tired and still had to go home and do a lot of work. I asked them typical questions such as, how many children do you have, how old are you, etc. Many of the teachers, so I found, had four or five children and were in their very early twenties. What they told me about their days and their lives was exhausting just to listen to. So, I decided to design a survey, which would help me learn about the status of female teachers in the Gambia and the ways in which they balance their careers and responsibilities at home. I made several drafts of the survey before finalizing it. I sat down with Yahaar to go over each question to make sure that the questions I was asking would yield the kinds of answers I was looking for. I asked Bill Roberts for input, and with all this help we came up with a four-page survey broken into three parts.

The first part of the survey was a series of short sociodemographic questions, followed by opinion questions that were answered by choosing a number that represented an opinion related to the question, and finally a long answer part called "home and career." From these surveys I gathered the data and began compiling and analyzing it through a program called SPSS, which allows you to organize your information, do cross tabulations and analysis, as well as perform a wide variety of other analytical functions. So my project basically has two parts which build off of one another: (1) studying the life history of Yahaar Jallow as a way of learning about a very successful and unique person; studying Yahaar Jallow to understand her own way in which she balanced her career and responsibilities at home (2) carrying out a survey about female teachers to learn about the ways in which they balance their careers and responsibilities at home.

### **Getting to Know Yaharr Jallow**

Sitting on the blue carpeted floor of Yaharr's living room, one of the nicest living rooms I had seen in Gambia, after a huge lunch of fish, rice, and mango, we began to discuss our first topic, the origin of her name. Often times I arrived just as she was praying, so I would wait a bit, eat with her, and then ease into a discussion. Yaharr Jallow is the name she goes by now, but her maiden name is Modoufu King. She was named after her aunt, Auntie Modou, a name she is often called by in her home today. She explains that in Africa all names have meanings attached to them. This is something I had taken notice of because it is very common to meet about ten people with the same name in one day. Either they have Arabic meanings after prophets or disciples or they are typical African names with specific meanings, like being

the first or the last born based on the month, year, or time you were born. Her mother, who insisted that she be named after her best friend, later changed her name. Her grandfather is a Sierra Leonean, and part of the Aku ethnic group. Her ancestors were slaves, and after the slave trade they returned to Sierra Leone. So it was in Sierra Leone that her grandfather was born. He came to the Gambia to sell kola nuts. This Muslim man met his wife in Gambia, but she was a Christian. Marrying outside of the faith is completely against the Koran, and even considered illegal, but they married anyway. They had four girls and one boy, her father. She is able to recount all of this so clearly. She even adds in stories that she was told as a young girl by her grandfather. With such detail she passes on to me a silly story about her grandfather's ability to knock the ground and make little people come out.

Yaharr was one of seven children. However, all of them died very young except one brother and herself. Her parents had only two children left. When she told me this I was astounded, and didn't really know what to say. She seemed to be mentioning it so casually. I quickly offered my apologies, which she thanked me for, but it didn't seem to be a very emotional topic for her to talk about. It was through that very casual way in which she mentioned the death of five of her siblings, and the ways in which other people talked about the deaths of loved ones, that I learned how realistically Gambians deal with death. In America, I thought, if a family lost five children it would be considered a horrible tragedy, and people would often be afraid to even mention the issue, but in Gambia people are very open and frank about death. They consider it something that is a natural part of life and perhaps an act of Allah. Also, death is much more common in Gambia, as well as in other African countries. Children often die very young, within the first couple years of life, and with malaria and other diseases that are life threatening due to the lack of medicine and other treatment, death is very much a part of life. That is not to say that people do not deeply mourn a death, but it's just something they are able to handle a bit more easily. So, after I was able to digest the idea of Yaharr losing five siblings, she continued to talk about growing up with her small family and the ways in which they had to struggle. Her father was a civil servant, a soldier, and her mother sold Kola nuts. Yaharr's mother, from the little that she made selling kola nuts and often a bit of smoked fish at a street vendor in the city market, saved as much as she could to send her daughter to school. Her mother was quite adamant about sending Yaharr to school to get a good education, but her father thought it was a waste of money. "He believed educating a girl was a waste of time and a waste of resources, because during our time at the age of 13 or 14 you were given to your husband. He believed he would not waste his resources on someone who would go and get married." This caused huge problems in her parents' marriage, and they eventually separated. It was her mother who left her father. "So my mother, all by herself, struggled." The three of them packed up their things and moved from Bakau to Banjul, and lived in a small house, which they rented. As her mother worked hard during the day, the children helped her as well. When they were old enough they started school, and each year it was a struggle just to get by. After primary school, at the age of 12 or 13, Yaharr decided to take the entrance exam to a mainly girls' missionary school. She did very well on the exam, but the school fees were too expensive.

She then described something she calls a time she would never forget. She was sent, by her mother, to see her aunt (her father's older sister) in Bakau to

beg for help with the school fees. “She was an educated lady during that time. She was the nursing sister in charge of the Bakau health center, in charge of the Serekunda health center, so she was overseeing the whole division. So that woman was very wealthy. She had no children.” Again, with much detail, Yaharr shares with me this story. “My mom took me to the car park, and then paid the taxi man and asked him to take me to Bakau to see my aunt.” I was shocked by what she told me her aunt said to her. “My aunt asked, ‘Which class are you in?’ I said, ‘I am in form one.’ She said, ‘You have four more years to go?’ I said yes. She said, ‘Do you think you will complete your education?’ I said yes. She said, ‘no.’ She said it is all going to be a complete waste of resources. Your mother is going to give you to someone to marry.” I couldn’t believe that her aunt, an educated woman herself, would tell her own niece that spending money on her education was going to be a complete waste. I imagined a little girl in America trying that hard to be able to go to school. I thought of the resources that we have to help children go to school and the lack of interest and appreciation for education that many children have. Despite her aunt’s unwillingness to help her, her mother would just try harder to help send her to school. She was actually able to save enough to pay her school fees and books. A few years later she sat through the college entrance exam, and on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1962, Yaharr gained admission to the Yundum College in Gambia, which was the only college at the time. She talks about her mother’s constant love and support all through college. “Every Wednesday, she would make it a point to fry some fish, buy a gallon of milk, bring cheree, buy me other vegetables and would pay a transport to come visit me at the college.” She completed a three-year teacher’s training course at Yundum College, and on the first of July 1965 she became a qualified teacher.

### **Yaharr’s Teaching Career and her Mother’s Help**

By the time Yaharr began teaching, she had married a man named Tiaru (?) Jallow and had started having children. Both she and her husband were working as teachers in San Yang village, while living with Yaharr’s mother. “My mother was sort of taking care of me and my husband and my family.” Being a working woman and having to uphold the responsibilities of a Gambian woman such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, did not make things easy, but with her mother’s help she was able to manage. “When I had my first son, my mother would do everything as if she was the mother.” Frankly, Yaharr says that her mother loved her children more than she did. After a few years in San Yang, she moved to Serekunda, but was teaching in Bakau. The commute every morning was taking a toll on their lives. She says, “Commuting was a problem. I had to get up early. Here I have no mother anymore. My mother was in San Yang. So I have to get up early, wash my baby, prepare food for the family, wash the linen, clean my house, do some domestic chores all before I go to school. So I cannot do that and commute, it was easier for me to be in Bakau.” Hearing all of the work she had to do, with no help, sounded like a horrible life. But I quickly found that it is the typical life of Gambian women. It seemed impossible for women to be able to get an education and hold a career if Gambian society expects so much from their women. She requested a transfer to Bakau school and in 1975 she moved to Bakau and began teaching there. It was in Bakau that she and her husband began the construction of a compound for their family, the same compound that I visited everyday for these informal visits. After only two years of teaching at Bakau school she was promoted to Senior Mistress,

which meant that she had the added responsibility of coordinating the activities of the infant department of grades one, two, and three. She had nine classes, and teachers under her supervision. "The syllabus and everything was my responsibility. So I have to prepare the scheme and inspect the books. Inspect the teachers' registers, inspect the themes, sign the registers, and see the quantity and quality of work given to the children, if it is adequate or inadequate. Write reports, make suggestions, do some counseling, and also discipline the children and teachers. All the teachers under my supervision were my responsibility." Since I had the opportunity to visit some of the schools in the Gambia, at that moment I was picturing Yaharr working as a teacher in the hot, overcrowded classrooms with scarce resources. I imaged all the hard work she had to do before going to work, at work, and then returning home for more work. I was astounded by the amount of work that she had done in her life, but what was even harder for me to comprehend was the fact that this was the way almost all working women lived. Constantly working, it seemed. In 1980 she moved to Winley School in Banjul and was the acting depute head there. "I was acting depute head so they gave me more responsibilities. As a depute you are in charge of a whole school, the academic performance, you monitor programs, coordinate the syllabus, prepare exams, write reports, and in some cases you are even the financial controller." In addition to that she said, "You are everything. You serve as a teacher, you serve as a parent, you are also a doctor, you are also a lawyer." Her teaching career continued and so did her responsibilities.

#### **Coming to Bakau Newtown Primary School and starting with a bang. ....**

Eventually she made her way to Bakau Newtown Primary school, one of the best primary schools in Gambia, known for its academic success as well as its environmental awareness efforts. I decided to visit this school. Inside the office of the current headmistress, Saffi Bobjob, were countless framed awards that the school had received in the last ten years. This was one of the places during my research that I spent most of my time. I loved walking into the school seeing all the children playing at lunchtime, surrounded by beautiful red flowers and lush green plants. After only one visit, and a half-hour session of sitting in on Fatou Camara's first grade class, I became increasingly interested in this school, and the thought of coming to such a beautiful and positive atmosphere to observe and do research sounded wonderful to me. After the 30 minutes I spent sitting in one Fatou's class, I asked her if I could talk to her for a bit. She was so welcoming and sweet. We immediately bonded over the fact that my given African name was Hawa Camara, the same surname as hers, and we laughed about that quite a bit. Within just about ten minutes of talking to her and asking her a few questions about her life I once again learned about another incredible person. Fatou Camara is a 30 year old married woman who has been teaching for five years. She is the mother of three children, although she would have had four had one of her twins not died after only a few months due to hydrocephalus (a birth defect in which the skull is soft and oversized due to extra water in the brain). The necessary medical procedure is expensive and must be done in another country because Gambia does not have the supplies to perform such a surgery. She put word out in the local paper asking for donations for the surgery, but not enough money was given. Her husband works at a hotel in Bakau, but all of the money he makes he gives to his mother. This means that Fatou is the sole breadwinner of the family. All of her money goes to feeding the children and herself, clothing the family, medicine, hospital bills, etc.

Every morning she wakes at 5:00 and works all day. Once again I was shocked by what I was hearing. I was also just so impressed with her life. That day she invited me to come to her compound the next day and meet her family, which I happily did. I met the one twin who was still alive, as well as all of the rest of the family in her compound. In addition to becoming more and more interested in Yaharr Jallow's life, I was becoming more and more interested in the life of working women in general. That was something to work on.

It was 1995 when Yaharr started at Bakau Newtown as a headmistress, and by this point she had gained quite a reputation in the field of education. In fact, the teachers at the school were very nervous about her arrival. She told me, "When I was posted there, some of the teachers I found were sort of terrified, scared, because they have heard about Mrs. Jallow coming here. Oh, she is a disciplinarian. She is strict. She corrects us. She corrects teachers English. She does this, she does that. As a result, everybody was afraid. So I came to the school and I have my principles. As an administrator when you start, you must start hard. Hit hard. Start with a bang and get them all alert. Then when you lose the looks, you get them. You can get them they way you want them. But if you are the type of leader that wants cheap popularity, you want to please everybody, you will end up not pleasing anyone. So it is better to please yourself, and in pleasing yourself you will please others."

In this way she was able to win the support and acceptance of all the teachers. She believes very strongly in group participation and giving everyone equal credit for the school's success. The mission statement of the school was formed through a series of group meetings in which everyone contributed and agreed upon the goals for the school. "We listened to each other. They give me their ideas. We have everything written down so we agree on terms. Now it is not my mission statement, but it is our mission statement."

After gaining the respect of the teachers and collective support for the mission of the school, Yaharr said she discovered that "the fear they had of me was diminishing, instead it was replaced with love and respect." One important thing Yaharr did, which I think greatly contributed to her gaining the respect of the teachers at the school, was her genuine interest in the teachers' personal as well as professional well being. She often inquired about their husbands, family lives, children, fights with their husbands, financial situations, and tried hard to help as much as she could. "So you see Mrs. Jallow is not the giant or lion headmistress they expected but is the mother who cared for everybody." She told me this when we were sitting in the living room of her home, but it was confirmed when I visited the school a second time with her. She had retired from that school in 2000 but was named the honorary headmistress and still had a lot of power in decision making meetings at the school. While we were at the school together she spent at least two hours visiting with members of the staff after school. She talked to them, joked with them, and it was obvious that even though she wasn't officially teaching or working there, many people treated her with seniority and still sat quietly while she spoke.

However, it was what she did for a young 12-year-old Sierra Leonean girl that day which really touched and showed me how genuinely interested she was in the personal well-being of everyone at Bakau Newtown School. While



Yaharr and I were sitting with some of the teachers, a young girl was brought into the office. Her face was emotionless, and she stared at the ground. She was wearing the blue and white school uniform and had small braids done in her hair. Yaharr called the girl to sit down next to her. She asked her what was wrong several times. She asked the girl to open her heart to her and explained that whatever it was she could help her. The little girl did not want to tell her anything, but the troubled look that she had showed everyone in the room that something was definitely wrong. After about 10 minutes of trying to get this young girl to confide in Yaharr, she did. She told Yaharr everything. Eventually it came out that for several months the young girl had been sexually abused everyday by her best friend's blind father. She had been going over to this man's house everyday, and had almost begun to think what she was doing was ok.ay. Her mother had been dead for some time, and rebels in the recent war in Sierra Leone had killed her father, so she was living with her grandmother. I was sitting next to Yaharr as all of this was unfolding, and I didn't know if it was something that I should have left the room in privacy for or if I should have just looked away. Yaharr comforted the girl in telling her that it would stop, but also warned the girl that if she didn't stop going to the man's house she would get in big trouble. Yaharr took it upon herself to take care of the incident. She told the current headmistress, and the next day the man was confronted. Several days after that Yaharr checked up on the girl and made sure she was not going back there. The saddest thing to hear Yaharr say after that was that it was not the first time by any means that she had to deal with situations like this one. She even said that once sexual abuse had occurred at the school by an intruder. The intruder had followed an eight-year-old second grader into the bathroom and proceeded to sexually abuse her.

All of these stories were too much for me to handle in one day. I went back to our hotel that day in such a state of confusion. I didn't know how to deal with all of the thoughts that were running through my mind. This was only the second day into my research, and when friends on the trip asked me how my day went I felt exhausted and speechless just trying to spit out a measly, "Oh, it was overwhelming." I will never forget that day in Bakau Newtown School, and that little girl. I made several more visits to that school after that day, and I saw that little girl a few more times. I wondered if she remembered me being in the office the day she told everything to Yaharr. I certainly remembered everything. I often asked the headmistress if she knew how she was doing and if everything had worked out all right, but I just remembered the look on her face that day and I will never ever forget it. I can so easily close my eyes and see her sitting with her head down in shame and emotional exhaustion. I was just glad that someone like Yaharr was there to take the time and interest needed to help this girl and the school even though she was no longer officially working there. The way in which Yaharr handled that sexual abuse situation was similar to the way in which I saw how she had handled family deaths. There was such a sense of frankness in a concerned way. It was as if the people had been through so much in their lives that things that we consider tragic were just more problems life threw their way.

Because of the growing success of Bakau Newtown Primary School, one problem the school and Yaharr had to deal with was the school's capacity. Each summer parents could go to Bakau Newtown and register their children for 55 dalasis for the coming year. It was on a first-come, first-served basis. Yaharr said, "In 1999 I had 57 extra children together with their parents in the

school compound crying. They did everything to get their children to the school. We couldn't take them. That was one of the saddest days in my teaching life because those unhappy parents, and those unhappy children were there and there was nothing I could do." That day really troubled Yaharr. She couldn't stand to turn people away and she very insightfully said, "My survival depends on these children." She didn't just send them away to try to get into a different school or even leave them with the consequence of not getting into a school at all. Instead she used the dining hall of the school as a temporary classroom for those 57 children. She hired an extra teacher and set up a chalkboard in there and had classes for them. She did whatever she had to make sure they got an education.

### **Yaharr's Other Involvements**

Besides the many things Yaharr does daily, she is also involved in many organizations in Gambia that have helped to contribute to the overall success of Gambian education. At the age of 12, Yaharr became a Girl Guide, which is quite similar to our American Girl Scout organization. When she went to college she was trained as a young Guide leader. Since then she has continued with the Girl Guide program. The emphasis of the program is moral education. As a result of her involvement in that program, which she brought to many of the schools at which she taught, in 1991 she was chosen to represent the Gambia in England along with three young guides for a camp. Through a friend in Gambia she was able to set up a Girl Guiders program in England. This friend, Sally, then established a program she calls FROGS, Friends of Gambian Schools. For the past five or more years these friends send over forty-foot containers filled with educational materials. The FROGS program has gotten bigger every year and has greatly contributed to their access to resources that are otherwise not available to them. For many years she was a part of the Gambia Teachers Union, which was formed in 1937. In 1992 she was elected as the first woman regional secretary of the Gambia Teachers Union. "So I had a lot of things to do. We would talk to teachers. We would inspect schools. We would see conditions of service, the conditions under which they work, their problems at work." She has held this position for nine years. Through the Gambia Teachers Union she also represented the Gambia in 1991 at a woman's leadership training program in Ghana. She has also participated in a series of writer workshops on health issues affecting women like STDs, HIV, and female circumcision. As a result she says, "I am very grateful to the Gambia Teachers Union because they have exposed me to a lot. I have learned a lot as a result of my interaction with teachers from Sierra Leone, educated woman leaders from Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana." She never failed to mention who had helped her or to whom she was grateful. She even represented the Gambian Department of State for Education in France. She says, "I was highly honored to be identified among all those 5000+ teachers we have in The Gambia". One of the projects she has been a part of that I found the most interesting related to an event, which occurred on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2000. The Gambian national army opened fire at a school and shot and killed about 13 children. Yaharr was chosen, along with Roman Catholic priests, Anglican priests, imams, and the minister of justice, as the only woman to accompany this group to deal with the grieving parents. These are the titled honors she has received, but what she does for people everyday and continues to do is just as amazing.

### **Her great appreciation of her mother**

One thing that definitely stood out to me during my conversations with Yaharr was how much she lived and appreciated all that her mother did for her. Her mother struggled so hard to give her children everything they needed. One thing she appreciates the most was her mother sharing that struggle with her children. "Because we were exposed to everything she was doing, we knew she was struggling. She showed us she was struggling. We participated in the struggle. We sympathized with her, and as a result we loved and supported her." Her mother's persistence and determination in giving her daughter an education was a concept well above her time. Even today many women consider educating a girl a waste, but Yaharr is an excellent example of faith in the education of women. She often said that if her mother hadn't been so concerned with educating her then she would not have the same concern with educating her own daughters. She openly admitted many times that she was more concerned with educating her four daughters than her four sons. After Yaharr retired in 2000 she opened up a small two-room nursery school in her compound. She named it after her mother.

### **Themes in Yahaar's Life**

After spending days with Yahaar listening to her life, watching her interact with people, listening to other people talk about her, reading over what was transcribed, I began to see some themes in Yahaar's life. I guess you can call them themes, and even ideas she likes to live by. However, anyone can see that education is a very important part of her life. She believes strongly in educating women, but not giving anyone preferential treatment. She believes that all students should have the right to go to school, and tried her hardest not to turn any child away, no matter what it meant she had to do. Often it meant that children took classes in the lunch area or teachers were not fully paid, but whatever it was she tried. She is also a firm believer in discipline. She often proudly labeled herself a "disciplinarian." She said discipline was necessary to gain respect from students, the teachers working under her, and on a less direct use of the word, to gain respect from the other people. She believes in giving everyone equal credit for the success of the schools she had worked in. As someone who has had to work very hard for the things in her life, naturally she believes that a good work ethic will provide a greater appreciation for the things in one's life. One of the notions that is important to Yahaar, which I experienced, is love and family. Yahaar loves children and her family. She openly accepts people into her family, claiming them as her real children, often a practice in Gambian homes. By the end of my stay I was considered one of her daughters, and she expressed her love to me when I left. Yahaar holds firm in her beliefs and is both a very soft and solid person.

### **The Results from my Survey**

Once I collected my survey I entered all of the data into SPSS. From there I did cross tabulations with variables I thought would tell me something valuable about the information the female teachers gave.

The results from some of the sociodemographic and opinion questions were interesting. When asked to give a 24-hour recall of all the things they did at home or at work, almost all of the respondents said that they work very early (usually between 5:30 a.m. and 7 a.m.) to prepare for the day. The morning

preparation included bathing themselves and their children, preparing food for the family, arriving at work around 8 a.m., working until 2:00 or later, going home to children, helping the children with their homework, preparing dinner, doing some chores, watching the news, and getting to bed around 10:00 p.m. This questions (the 24-hour recall) generated the largest response, although still some people only gave a few words. The duties at home, which seemed to take the most time, were taking care of children, cleaning, washing clothing, cooking, and preparing lessons for their students. I was also very interested as to whether these women had maids, which is common in Africa, to help with some of their duties. Initially I thought that many wouldn't because of the added expense, but of my 33 respondents, 16 did have maids, 13 did not, and four didn't answer. This shows that many are taking on additional help with their duties at home due to the balance they must maintain with their career and at home. The fourth question asked how they balanced their duties at home with their careers. The results show that many were unsure as to how they were supposed to answer such a question. Five people did not answer, and many gave such responses as "I balance my responsibilities by dividing my work in parts," or "I don't mix them up," or "I do not balance my responsibilities at home with my career." Others did, in fact, understand the question and said that they had trouble balancing their duties. Many said that either their responsibilities at home or their careers were lacking. Only one person reported getting help from her husband. A few said they had a time schedule and planned each week. However, it was my last question which I found to be the most interesting. The question asked, "In your opinion, what kind of lives do uneducated women have?" Four said that the lives of uneducated and educated women were not different. The majority said that uneducated women had "pitiful," "restricted," "miserable," and "difficult" lives. A few mentioned early childbearing and early marriage as the consequences of being an uneducated woman.

The cross tabulations from **SPSS** show that the mean number of children that the respondents have is 2.84. This number might contribute to the workload that these women are dealing with at home. Their responsibilities greatly increase with the number of children they bear. The mean number of years these women have been married is 16.21. Years married was an important factor to study, because it can help explain how roles in the family may be divided. For example, if a woman has been married for many years and has more children, she might get some help from her husband with the duties at home. On the other hand, however, a newly wed bride might be getting help from a more liberal and less traditional husband who believes in lending his wife a hand.

The mean age of my respondents was 40.38 years old. However, there were some very young teachers who were also wives and mothers. The opinion questions also yielded some interesting information concerning self-reflective views of themselves as women, teachers, and professionals. About 50% of the women strongly agreed that teaching is a very rewarding profession. Although about half viewed their job as rewarding, about 46% strongly agreed that teaching is a very difficult profession. While 45%, almost half, agreed that, on average, females make better teachers than males, 34.4% agreed and 34.4% had no opinion to the statement that Gambians give equal respect to male and female teachers. This showed that almost half felt that they as females made better teachers, but it didn't necessarily show that they felt they were given equal respect as men. Sixty-four percent disagreed that a

Gambian teacher is given more respect than other civil servants. More specific to my topic of how females balance their responsibilities at home with those at work, 36% agreed that a girl's family responsibilities are the biggest obstacle for achieving her educational goals. Seventy-nine percent agreed that it is just as important for girls to be educated as boys. This is interesting because it shows a major shift in the way women are viewing themselves, their potential, and their opportunities. Traditionally a woman's education was not important because women didn't hold professional careers but rather worked solely at home tending to the children and chores. Perhaps they might make some money selling nuts or fruit, but their main work was at home. As more women are recognizing the importance of female education, more are entering the work force and changing the roles women traditionally held.

All of what I learned on this trip has helped me since returning from the Gambia. I feel confident and happy with my decision to be an anthropology and German double major. In my Research Methods in Sociology and Anthropology course, my experience with designing and implementing a survey to a culture different from my own has greatly helped me and given me first-hand experience to contribute to the class. This experience has also helped in other courses I have taken such as Practicing Anthropology, Socio-Cultural Anthropology, and African-American Cultures. From the trip I was able to acquire knowledge first-hand, establish new friendships, travel, learn some of the language, and leave with an incredible sense of accomplishment.