

## **BOOK REVIEW: CHERNO OMAR BARRY, A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN THE GAMBIA, IOU PRESS, 2022, 118 PAGES**

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A Brief History of Education in The Gambia by Cherno Omar Barry is a well-researched book that contextualizes the history of education in West Africa, the challenges of education policies and the government's response to education in general.

The book is divided into nine concise chapters which comprehensively discuss the story of Western education in The Gambia from the 1820s to the more modern period. The author discusses the religious, political, and social context in which Western education thrived in the country in the introduction to the book. The British colonial structure of indirect rule, the Colony and Protectorate, influenced the spread of Western education. The Colony had better access to schools much earlier (p.2). The context of Christianity and Islam was also significant in the development of Western education in The Gambia. The author explains that Islamic education had already taken firm root before the 1820s, meaning that the British did not find a completely illiterate populace when they were building the first Western schools in the 1820s. Western education, therefore, benefitted from the literacy tradition of Islamic education, which predated it.

The author traces the tenuous roots of Western education in what is today called The Gambia. He narrates that it was exactly 200 years ago that the Quakers William Singleton and Hannah Kilham set up a school for the new settlement of Bathurst at Bakau, where the headman was kind enough to give them a plot of land to set up a school for boys and a school for girls. This separation of the sexes was due to the dictates of Victorian prudishness rather than religious obligations. However, it is clear from the involvement of the Quakers, who are a branch of the Anglican church, that early Western education was largely, and in fact, the business of missionary societies.

The author explains the missionary factor in the spread and attainment of Western education in The Gambia, including the work of the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Ahmadiyya in spreading Western education through the establishment of schools and training of teachers. The author contends in these two chapters that during the colonial period from 1889 to 1965, Western education spread and grew despite government support and attention. The leitmotiv in these chapters is that the success of the spread of Western education is linked directly to missionary influence and support.

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The author goes on to highlight the bottlenecks missionaries faced in their quest to spread Western education, including social taboos and religious suspicion. The missionaries found that the soil was too rocky to allow Christianity or its corollary to take seed in many areas.

The author painstakingly takes us through the multiple attempts by the colonial and post-colonial states to literally paper over or policy over the shortfalls in access to education. Through numerous ordinances as far back as 1882 to reports, studies and policies, what the state was unwilling or unable to do to educate the people, it hid in lengthy paperwork which few people read and therefore had little impact on the ground. With each new paperwork commissioned by the colonial rulers, the stronger the subterfuge of the colonial government to study the state of education, and so the stronger the subterfuge not to do anything. A notable exception was the 1882 Ordinance which created the Board of Education, and the Gwilliam Report of 1957, which promoted the involvement of women in educational administration.

More recent issues related to examination boards, private and international schools' madrassa, and university and vocational training are discussed subsequently. These emerging issues show that any society's history of education, however small, is always evolving and taking new twists and turns, weaving intricate patterns of numerous dimensions and distances.

Aside from the very eloquent narrative, this book is replete with references, footnotes, and an index, with suitable and relevant appendices to boot. This shows that a high degree of meticulous research has gone into this work.

This book is an important addition to the available corpus on the subject and can help chart a course for our education planners as they continue to scour the horizon for an educational system and situation more suited for our development. Therefore, it is a suitable handbook for not only aficionados of history like me but also educationists and teachers.

In upcoming future editions of this book, I suggest that Kristikunda, Armitage and Mohammedan schools are awarded a special new chapter for the great roles they played in Western education in our country. I also suggest that the Gambia Teachers Union, established in 1938, get a special chapter for its wonderful role in teacher mobilization.

It is highly recommended as an exciting work on an important topic in Gambian history.