Children's play, generations and gender with special reference to the Ghrib
(Tunisian Sahara)

ABSTRACT: In this article, three questions are being discussed: Do relationships between generations influence the play activities, games and toys and are these relationships promoted through ludic activities? Is there a correlation between the intergenerational transmission of lifestyles, values and norms on the one hand and gender specific games of imitation on the other hand? How far do technological, economic, social and cultural changes from generation to generation interfere with these ludic activities and the upbringing of children?

Introduction

In the first place, the information of this article is based on fieldwork we have done among the Ghrib who are sedentarizing nomads living in the North-western Tunisian Sahara. Secondly, it results from research on the collection of the North African and Saharan toys of the Musée de l’Homme in Paris and finally from an analysis of the bibliography of these regions.

Our research among the Ghrib lasted for three periods of three months in spring and autumn 1975 and in spring 1977. This research was facilitated thanks to the intermediation of our friend and colleague Dr. Gilbert J.M. Claus who was already doing research among this population for his doctoral thesis from December 1972 onwards. Since then he has remained into very regular contact with them. The focus of our research originally was socialization, parent-child and child-child relationship. As we quickly found out that play activities offered an excellent approach to these topics, we centered our attention on play, games and toys, leaving for later years the other topics. However, due to professional circumstances we did not have the possibility to return to the Ghrib after spring 1977. Nevertheless, our contacts with Gilbert J.M. Claus offer the possibility to follow more or less the evolution of the Ghrib society and of children’s play among them.

We shall develop three aspects:
— the relationship between generations in ludic activities, and hence the socialization and the transfer of culture by means of games and toys;
— the transmission of gender differences, an analysis based on gender specific games of imitation of Ghrib girls and Ghrib boys;
— ludic activities in relation to the evolution of society, whereby it will be questioned whether the ludic heritage and the ludic creativity play a role in, relate to and reflect the evolution of society from one generation to the other.

As most of the examples of ludic activities, games and toys and all the photographs used in this article come from research among the Ghrib, a short introduction on this population and on childhood among them should provide the reader with the necessary background information.

The Ghrib society

The territory of the Ghrib extends from the southern limit of the Chott l-Djerid, the south-Tunisian salt lake, onto the Algerian border. The surface of this area covers about 6000 km² situated on the northern border of the Grand Erg Oriental, an immense sandy desert. The relief is quite flat with sand-dunes here and there.

As indicated on the map, the Ghrib share the Nefzaoua-territory and its environs with four other tribes: the Awlad Yacoub, the Marazig, the Adhara and the Sabria (Claus, 1983: 130).

The Ghrib were estimated at about 4,400 persons in 1975. Meanwhile this population has grown and numbers actually some 7,000 persons. These data and the following ones on the Ghrib society and on Ghrib childhood come from publications of Gilbert J.M. Claus or have been personally handed over to me.

Among these Arabic-speaking Ghrib, some fractions pretend to descend from Berber ancestors who migrated out of the south of Morocco, but other fractions claim to be the descendants of Arabs who lived in the south of Arabia or the north of Yemen.

Since the twenties and up to recently, their economy

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was based on seminomadism, with on the one hand dromedary-breeding, for which they were famous, goat-, sheep- and donkey-breeding, and on the other hand agriculture in the oases.

Since the seventies, the transition from nomadism to sedentariness in the oases on the border of the Chott I-Icterid has set through. Nowadays, the Ghrib have almost completely settled down in the oases of Ghidma, Hezw, Redjem Matoug and especially in the oasis of El Faouar, an oasis that has grown to an important urban centre, the principal centre of a Tunisian Délégation. This way the Ghrib have lost everything of their renown as dromedary-breeders, although the interest in this breeding increases slowly because of the promotion of Saharan tourism in the region of El Faouar where a transit hotel functions now.

The social structure is based on patrilineal kinship, the brides going to live in the family of their husbands. Public authority is based on kinship, age and the precedence of men over women. However, within the family and in private the mother has a far-reaching influence, especially if she has sons.

For the greater part, marriage is contracted between patrilineal cousins and to a lesser extent between matri- lineal cousins. Contracting marriage outside the extended family is seldom and to marry someone from another fraction or a non-Ghríb is highly exceptional.

For the Ghrib the profession of the Islam and the observance of the Islamic instructions are fundamental. Nevertheless, the worship of saints, especially of the ancestors who did reach that status, the belief in the evil spirits (jinns), in the throwing of the evil eye on someone or something and in all kinds of magic practices and exorcisms are really important in the popular belief.

**Childhood among the Ghrib**

To become pregnant and give birth to children, especially boys, probably is the greatest ambition of every newly-married woman. A childless marriage being almost invariably blamed on the women and often ending in a divorce.

The preference for boys is founded on the fact that they guarantee the continuity of the patrilineal lineage. Therefore, the birth of a son, especially a first son, brings great joy, whereas the birth of a daughter is seen as a quite ordinary event as she will go to live with another family once married. A proverb explains this difference between boys and girls as follows: “a boy brings prosperity, a girl means a loss”.

The imposition of the name on the seventh day is followed on the fourtieth day by the first haircutting on which occasion some magic practices are used to protect the child from whatever calamity.

As long as the baby cannot crawl about he remains under the direct supervision of his mother and is breast-fed whenever he asks for it. Girls are weaned at about the age of eighteen months and boys at about the age of two years. From this age, protective magic practices are not as necessary anymore as it is generally accepted that the child is now strong enough to withstand the evil influences largely by himself.

From the age of three years onwards, a clear distinction is being made between girls and boys. For example, the hair of the boys is cut very short or their head is completely shaved. The hair of the girls on the contrary should grow long until different hairplaits can be made.

The hygienic practices, as washing the hands before and after dinner, are inculcated upon the children by their mother. As soon as a toddler shouts after the donkeys to make them move or starts to play at being a herdsman, he normally does not sleep anymore with his mother, for it is probable that at that time his mother is pregnant again or that already a new baby is born which needs all the attention.

Each boy should be circumcised in order to become a true moslem. The age at which circumcision is practised varies from a few months to twelve years. With the exception of the boys' circumcision there are no initiation rites taking place.

During childhood the boys live a quite untroubled existence and although they have to carry out some tasks, they always have time to play. A boy up to the age of ten years does not have much contact with his father. It is his mother who brings him up and hereby coddles him a lot more than his sisters. Up to that age his father normally only orders him to carry out some little tasks. From the age of ten years, the father starts a more open and direct contact with his son, talking to him about the breeding of animals, the work in the oasis and so on. However, two topics will never be discussed, namely the search for a bride and sexuality. And even if a young man can talk about the choice of a bride with his mother if necessary, he cannot speak with her about sexuality.

Girls on the contrary, remain much more in the vicinity of the female world of their mother and aunts. From a child, they are trained to become good housewives and careful mothers. From the age of six years on, they are charged with all kinds of household tasks and are in charge of younger brothers or sisters. Still the girls also find some time to play and to make dolls or other toys. Their ludic activities however are quite often inspired by their future life as adult women. From puberty, the girls are very actively engaged in their mother's household, learning everything a married woman should know.

One cannot speak of a real adolescence among the Ghríb, certainly not for girls. Childhood slowly goes over in puberty and then into adulthood. The real demarcation...
tion between childhood and adulthood being marriage. According to the Tunisian law the minimum age for marriage is 17 years for girls and 19 years for boys. Marriage is arranged by the parents and their choice should not be opposed. When exceptionally and in spite of the pressures exerted on him, a young man refuses the bride chosen for him, his parents will finally accept this, but the opinion of a young girl is never asked.

In relation to the use of the concept of adolescence, with its typical Western connotations of specific age group values, behaviour and activities, one has to be warned against the real danger of transposing our Western interpretation on the growing up and socialization in other cultural traditions. We, therefore, fully agree with Hein Retter (1986, p. 45) who stigmatizes the easy way in which children of the European Middle Ages and early Modern Times are labelled as “miniature adults”. A label that is also used in so-called traditional or pre-industrial communities. Here, the influence and control of adults regarding children is sometimes overstressed as the important role of the peer group is easily forgotten.

The traditional childhood of the Ghrib children, especially the boys, is undergoing important changes, changes provoked for a larger part by the creation of a primary school in El Faouar in 1961. Up to that year no Ghrib child went to school. Of the 158 children enlisted in the primary school of El Faouar in 1974 there only were 53 Ghrib boys and not one Ghrib girl. The other 105 pupils belonged to the Sabria, a population also living in El Faouar and in this oasis numerically of about the same size as the Ghrib. Of these 105 children there were 8 girls. Some seventeen years later, most of the Ghrib girls are going to school.

At the time of our research in 1975 and 1977, schooling was influencing more and more the growing up of most of the Ghrib boys, but almost not the growing up of the girls, who remained within the traditional female world. Sending a girl to school was complete nonsense according to Ghrib parents and they took only very little interest in the school life of their sons.

Although schooling is a condition for the integration of the Ghrib youth in the evolution of the contemporary Tunisian society, it also has negative consequences. As this schooling by no means is adapted to the lifestyle and the cultural past of this community the danger exists of creating a cultural gap between parents and children, especially the sons, and also between the schoolboys and the home-trained girls, although the very recent increase in school attendance by the Ghrib girls will somewhat diminish this gender-based differentiation. Another problem is to be found in the situation, caused by a lot of circumstances among which irregular school attendance, whereby the Ghrib schoolchildren only have few educational or professional perspectives once they leave the primary school.

Notwithstanding the influence of the school system and more recently of television, the values, norms and attitudes towards childhood and marriage among the Ghrib have not been affected yet and neither is the status of the parents and the family elders questioned.

**Relationship between generations in ludic activities**

Although play activities, games and toys are almost invariably associated with childhood, generations of adolescents, adults and elderly have their own specific entertainment and games. This occurs not only in highly industrialized societies where labour and leisure time are clearly opposed, but also in more traditional rural or nomadic societies where labour and leisure are not as distinct.

In North Africa and the Sahara certain games are typical for adults and even more for elderly people, especially for older men who have more time for playing games than their female counterparts. In these games linguistic or strategic skills are often on the foreground.

Our research on games and toys in North Africa and the Sahara and the information gained from the bibliography of these regions do not give much concrete data on generation differences in ludic activities, whereas those who have focused on entertainment of adults and those who have studied children’s play very seldom wondered about the relationship between both categories of ludic activities.

On the contrary, our research on children’s play among the Ghrib of the Tunisian desert offers detailed information on the relationship between generations in ludic activities.

In a lot of spontaneous situations and games, a member of an older generation who is often somebody of the child’s relatives, playfully interacts with a youngster, especially when toddlers or young children are concerned.

Among the Ghrib, as elsewhere in North Africa and the Sahara and probably all over the world, it is the mother, grandmother or older sister who most of the time soothes and amuses the little girls and boys of the family. Nevertheless, we have more than once observed that a father or an uncle, an adult brother or cousin played just for fun with a toddler, as well a girl as a boy. However, if the child gives trouble or starts crying, it is easily handed over to its mother or older sister. When a female family member plays with a little child it can also be just for fun but more often it serves the purpose of pacifying, distracting, occupying or entertaining the baby or toddler.

Our notes are based on detailed observation – on a minute to minute basis for longer periods of time – and
were made in 1975 in the oasis of El Faouar and in the small campsites set up in spring in the desert area between El Faouar and the Algerian border. They refer among other things to different circumstances in which a mother, older sister or grandmother spontaneously and affectionately plays with a little child.

The following text exemplifies some of these observations, while the additional aid of photographs has been used to depict the observed play sequences.

Photos 1 and 2 illustrate a mother, who playfully tries to divert her pouting son, Bechir, or two and a half years old. This happens regularly during more than one hour so that she can carry on with setting up the horizontal weaving loom (photo 1).2

Therefore she more than once makes little holes in the sand which Bechir immediately refills. However all this doesn't calm him down.

His eight-year-old brother carries Bechir twice away to four boys of four to five years, playing nearby at finding small objects hidden by one of them in a heap of sand, but he soon hurries back to his mother.

A few minutes later, the mother makes another little hole in the sand and puts a number of little sticks on top of it. First Bechir throws them away but then plays with them for a short time. Finally, the mother gives up her job and entertains her son by turning around very quickly a little stone attached to a string.

The above mentioned close relationship between female family members and little children too easily leads to the conclusion that in traditional societies fathers, grandfathers and uncles do not interact with young children. However, as we have already mentioned above, one should be careful with such hasty conclusions. The following picture shows a father stimulating his youngest son to play with him by grabbing a small metal box the father continuously sticks to his own sweating forehead (photo 2).

This little game that went on for some five minutes was very much enjoyed by the father and the almost two-year-old boy as well as by his mother who is sitting near the entrance of the tent and veils her face because a photograph is being taken. Through this game the father spontaneously creates an intimate relationship with his little son.

Such an intimate relationship may also be created between a father and his little daughter, or between young men and their little sisters. The following example, including some play activities, is based on a three-hours-long observation (13h-16h) done on Thursday 20.3.1975 in an encampment near Shusha En-Nuga, situated about 38 km from El Faouar.

Our observation protocol starts with Wahida, a girl of 22 months, sitting on her father's legs. Her father (62 years) moves his legs up and down so that it looks like his little daughter is riding a horse. Then he gives to Wahida and her two youngest brothers, Mhammed (3½ years) and Ali (7 years), an orange that he has brought with him when coming with us from El Faouar. Five minutes later (13.07h), Wahida starts walking around. Meanwhile, the youngest son Mhammed has made use of the situation to climb in his father's lap. However, Wahida walks back to her father and tries to push Mhammed away. As she does not succeed, she starts to cry. Mhammed is then ordered by his father and his mother to leave the place to his little sister. Some ten minutes later and after she walked around in the tent for a while, Wahida is again going to sit in her father's lap.

13.20h: Wahida's mother (41 years) comes to play with her little daughter who sits near her father. She tries to make Wahida laugh and gives her a little garment to play with. Holding this garment in her hand, Wahida crawls to her father who uses the little garment to play with his daughter and gives her a kiss on the cheek.

13.40h: the eldest brother Marzouq (19 years) starts playing with Wahida. He puts her hand in his mouth and bites gently in it. Shortly after this, the father takes Wahida in his lap. Later on and while he is lying down on the sand, Salim, the 16-year-old brother of Wahida, plays with his little sister by repeatedly lifting her up and placing her on his belly (14.03h). 14.15h: Marzouq takes Wahida in his arms and amuses her, but soon she crawls back to her father who is sitting next to us. We offer Wahida the sunshade of our camera. She takes it and gives it to her father who, using it as a toy, plays with her little games such as putting it over her fingers, hiding it and rolling it over the ground, each time stimulating Wahida to do the same. After a while Wahida walks to her mother and lays her head in her mother's lap.

14.45h: once more Wahida is going back to her father who plays with her, among others by shouting gently "da, da, da" at her to make her laugh. 15.17h: Wahida enters the tent after she has been playing outside with her youngest brothers who were pulling over the sand a thrown away electric wire bobbin. When she is passing nearby Marzouq he wants to pick her up but Wahida refuses and walks to her father sitting beside and who takes her in his lap. From this place of safety, Wahida starts playing with Marzouq's feet. Marzouq talks pleasantly to her, does as if he will take her away and tickles her.

Other occasions of ludic interactions between children on the one hand and adults on the other hand can be found in the process of toy making. In North Africa and the Sahara – at least until recently and nowadays still so in rural areas and among poor city dwellers – older children, girls as well as boys, make most of their own toys. However, making toys for toddlers and little children is a pleasant task for adult members of the child's
family. This is the case among the Ghrib where not one toy was purchased until some years ago. On the next photograph a mother is making a small disk with two holes in it. When a string has been put through these holes, the game consists in winding up the string and tearing it so that the disk rotates very quickly. In Flanders the same game was played during our childhood but with a button serving as disk (photo 3).

The ludic interactions between children and adults are of the uttermost importance for the development and socialization of children.

In his "Spieltheorie und pädagogische Praxis", Wolfgang Hering argues for the "conscious or unconscious, wanted or unwanted influence of adults on children's play activities" grading from weak forms, as when children spontaneously imitate their adult playmates, to very direct and goal-oriented interferences through – for example – didactic games (1979, p. 130-132).

Although less striking, adults are influenced as well by their playful interaction with babies and young children. Their playing together provides the adults with opportunities to adjust their behaviour to the specificities of the child. "In general one can suppose that parents, behaving uncertain in the upbringing of a child – be it that they are overprotective or that they put their expectations on behalf of the children too high – learn through their participation in children's games an educative behaviour better adapted to children". (Hering, 1979, p. 155). Moreover, the interaction between youngsters and adults through ludic activities creates possibilities for reciprocal and spontaneous influences and for the development of reciprocal positive feelings.

In every human context, games seem to have served socializing purposes, namely the reproduction of roles, attitudes and customs from one generation to the next. Games and toys and the attitudes towards them truly reflect the spirit and the social relations of a given period. In this view, imitative games occupy a preponderant function in the daily upbringing of girls or boys and in the acquisition of female or male roles.

Gender-specific games of imitation

As an example, we shall propose here some gender-specific games of imitation of the Ghrib children. First, we shall describe some imitative games of Ghrib girls and then of Ghrib boys.

Previous to this, some remarks on our research can elucidate certain specificities of the information given below. As said in the introduction, we focused our attention on the ludic activities of the Ghrib children, as well those of boys as of girls and from the age of about one year till puberty. Generally speaking, it concerned a group of some eighty children belonging to about twelve related families. The information was gathered through observation, participation and questioning. This was made possible by participating daily in the life of the families. However, although a lot of effort has been made to cover the play activities of the girls, it remains true that, being a man, we could not participate in their games as we could do in the boys’ games, sometimes even becoming a member of the young boys’ play group. Moreover, the questioning of the girls was almost always done through an older brother or male cousin of the girls. This way a male bias cannot be excluded especially for the play activities of the girls above the age of six years.

A lot of imitative games of the Ghrib girls are games through which they represent the everyday life of their mothers and aunts. In the second half of the seventies, the Ghrib women still lived the traditional life of a seminomadic wife. Each day they fetched water and firewood, baked bread, cooked, brought up the children, ground the corn and milked the goats, wove the burnous-overcoat and the tent-canvas.

Thus, it is not at all surprising that the little and somewhat older girls imitated these typical female activities before they had to carry them out in reality from the age of about thirteen years.

Not only is playing with dolls reflecting adult womanhood but the dolls themselves are a real copy of an adult woman, and more specifically of a bride – the most enviable status for a young girl (photo 4).

As young as three years, little girls play with these dolls. It is not until they are six or seven years old that they actually make them. These dolls have a stereotype frame of two crossed sticks. They are individualized by their clothes made of all kinds of rags. The jewels they wear are a replication of those a girl receives from her future husband but they are made out of iron wire, pieces of tin cans and aluminium fragments. Finally, the dolls wear two plaits of goat-hair which hang before the ears, just as married women do, and one or more pieces of clothes serve as kerchief.

The girls also make a male doll representing the bridegroom (photo 5).

Such a doll wears men's clothes. On its head it has a little red cap and a piece of white or khaki cloth serving as a turban. On the belt, a sharpened stick is fixed representing a sword. This distinctive object is worn by the bridegroom during marriage festivities.

Dolls representing the bridegroom are much less frequent than dolls personifying the bride. As it is true to tradition, neither female nor male dolls have facial marks.

The girls mostly play with their female dolls in small playgroups consisting of a few girls most frequently of the same extended patrilinetal family and roughly of the
same age. For their doll-play they create miniature tents and household items. When a male doll is available, the girls can celebrate a wedding and sing and dance just as is being done during real marriage festivities. As far as we know, no rituals are re-enacted in the girls' doll-play, but when playing that their doll is ill they can imitate some traditional healing practices.

The little tent that girls erect from six years of age onwards, is called the "tent of the bride". The girls try to create a realistic copy of the nomad's tent where rags represent the bags and furniture of a tent. In front of and behind the tent a small earthen wall delimits the enclosure (photo 6). This toy-tent together with the female doll are also used in playing household, but this can also be played in another type of miniature "houses" and without dolls as will be explained later on.

On the foreground of photo 6, we can see four branches stuck into the ground. This is the beginning of another imitative game reflecting a formerly important female activity, namely weaving. Girls of eight years old or older make their own horizontal loom on which they really can weave. Mothers take this game seriously and view it as a real training. This is attested by the fact that, before the girl on the photograph starts to weave, her mother comes to verify if her daughter's miniature loom has been constructed accurately (photo 7). The weave made by the girl can be used for example as a sleeping mat for her doll.

Another imitative game for girls is the grinding of cereals. In order to do this, a girl manufactures a small hand-mill in plaster which is an exact copy of the hand-mill of the housewives. Sand is used instead of grains, although they sometimes are replaced by real cereals (photo 8).

As a final example of games reproducing female tasks, we can mention the game of imitating dinner. For this game, the girls use sun-dried earthen replicas of their mothers' traditional cooking pots and prepare fake couscous, meat, sauces and vegetables. a "meal" to be eaten by the girls themselves.

After a rare rain shower, the girls also make small uncovered playhouses delimited by little earthen sand walls of about 50 centimeters high. Sometimes stones replace the sand-walls. In many cases, these houses are well elaborated and given one or more annexes in which the utensils are placed (photo 10).

In this type of house, the young girls wholeheartedly imitate the life of their mothers and the older girls even try to prepare a real dinner.

Already from the age of five or even younger, Ghrib boys imitate the life of shepherds in their playing activities with pieces of dried dromedary excrement representing the goats and little white stones depicting the sheep. A handle of a jar is the shepherd's dog and the shepherd's boy is made out of a cylindrical sandstone if not a rarely dressed little stick. With these simple toys, small boys practise shouting after and manipulating the herd using the typical shepherd's vocabulary.

For the herdsman game, older boys make two types of dromedaries. As for the first type, the form of a dromedary is cut out of a piece of dried dromedary excrement or seldomly out of a flat fragment of soft sandstone. A more elaborate dromedary is made with the jawbone of a goat on top of which a saddle is placed fabricated with a little branch or cut out of white iron. A lock of goat hair is being used to represent the rider (photo 11).

With these toy dromedaries, the boys play at watering and feeding their herd, at mounting a caravan, engaging in a race or organizing a dromedary-fight during which they shout "attack, attack" and "bite him, bite him".

In a game of cattle-stealing for which the little children serve as goats, the following exaltation of the shepherd's role can be heard: "The shepherd, he is an apple among the little apple-blossoms! Staying at home never brings along something valuable!" This call for prudence in being a shepherd is a reply to the thieves who are mocking at the shepherd by saying: "The shepherd, oh what a life he is enduring! As a bed, he only has a date tree offshoot bearing a cluster of dates and a knapsack is his pillow!"

Another imitative boys' game, referring to the traditional way of life, is the game of being a cattle-dealer. Here, children serve as goats, sheep or dromedaries and money is symbolized by pieces of paper, cardboard, white iron and aluminium.

Traditionally Ghriss boys also build with wet sand copies of houses, cattle enclosures, and even religious buildings such as a saint's tomb or a mosque. Photo 12 shows a beautiful mosque erected by a thirteen-year-old boy.

Among the Ghriss, the playgroup of toddlers and young children up to roughly the age of seven are under the supervision of older girls. Such playgroups are composed of children belonging to the same extended patrilineal family and living in each other's vicinity, although occasionally another not related young child but living in the same neighbourhood can join the playgroup (photo 13). The size of these playgroups varies from a few up to fifteen children, seldom more. Boys up to the age of six or seven years participate in such groups. In the playgroups of the older boys no girls are found.

Nefissa Zerdoumi confirms this situation as she writes: "The parents..., in traditional Algeria, do not concern themselves with the games of their children, except when smiling occasionally at them or when punishing transgressions. However, the children, as soon as they are no longer babies, do not need their parents
anymore to enjoy themselves. They transmit directly between them the ways of playing, through imitation or simple contact". (p. 224).

From their seven years onwards, Ghrib boys spend a lot of their free time together and enjoy relative freedom of action as long as norms and order are not too strikingly contravened. They also have the possibility to move farther away from home, thus escaping from the direct control of their parents and other adult patrilineal relatives. In contrast, the girls remain under a more direct control of their mothers and in the vicinity of their home where they must help in the household tasks or take care of toddlers and young children. While taking care of the little ones, the older girls find the opportunity to play. However, the boundary line between the duty of entertaining the children and personal amusement is difficult to draw.

Ludic activities and the evolution of society

The last viewpoint on play, generations and gender discussed here relates to the question whether ludic heritage and ludic creativity play a role in, relate to and reflect the evolution of society from one generation to the following generation.

This topic clearly came to my attention when analyzing the games and toys of the Ghrib children, who lived in a community that in the mid-seventies quickly changed from a nomadic towards a sedentary society. As an example, we mention a number of Ghrib games referring to recent socio-economic changes such as:

- games referring to sedentarization: playing with a miniature cart with a toy-mule as draught-animal, with a miniature oasis garden (photo 14) or playing at being a village merchant; great pains are taken to portray reality as accurately as possible. One of the boys I observed playing in summer 1975, constructed a correct copy of an oasis garden, in which he irrigated some wild roses, representing the vegetables. When boys played at being merchants, all kinds of waste objects were used as merchandise and the balance of the unique - at that time - shop of El Faouar was represented as well (photo 15).

- games referring to modern transport and technology: playing with an imitation of bicycles (photo 16), cars, or trucks and even of a telephone, or playing to obtain a driver's licence by quickly running an empty barril along a small and sinuous path delimited in the sand.

Western type schooling can also change profoundly rooted attitudes. Some boys, who attended primary school in El Faouar in 1975 designed facial features on the dolls their sisters had made. Traditionally, these dolls did not have such facial features and the Ghrib girls respected this norm. Nevertheless, the girls did not oppose their brothers' spontaneous action and one of them even tried to do the same. For the fact that the Ghrib dolls traditionally do not have facial features, a general rule in the Sahara and in the rural areas of North Africa, we have no clear explanation. However, it is a fact that Islam strictly prohibits representations giving shadow, for example statues, although the prophet Mohammed has made an exception for dolls.

The introduction of television in El Faouar in 1980 immediately resulted in a new play activity. When Ghrib boys watched a television series on the crusades during the fast month of July-August 1980, they soon began to fight with bows and arrows, wooden swords and bamboo lances.

Now that the oasis settlement of El Faouar has grown out to be an important administrative and Urbanized centre, it becomes possible to buy a number of small plastic toys in its shops, especially during festivities. When this toy selling will expand, it certainly will cause a regression of toy making by the children themselves.

Through imitative or phantasy games, children not only react to changing situations in their material and social environment but can also foresee them. A phenomenon Alain Polcz called "anticipating play" (1987, p. 1). The playing of Ghrib boys with imitation cars or the game of the telephone in a period when these technological items were still very seldom in the Ghrib community of El Faouar certainly made the boys better acquainted with them and anticipated the actual situation.

A truly important consequence of the impact of sedentarization and modernization on Ghrib families is the development of a new gender differentiation in children's play activities. As one probably has already noticed in the examples of the relationship between society evolution and games or toys, we only have discussed new games or toys of Ghrib boys. This is not because of a personal choice or sheer chance. It reflects the reality of children's games among the Ghrib in the second half of the seventies when only boys seemed to be affected by the recent introduction in their society of modern technology and new ways of life. In contrast with the boys, Ghrib girls stuck to traditional games and toys, thus remaining much more than their brothers under the impact of the traditional way of life. Moreover, this gender-based distinction was not restricted to the sphere of ludic activities. In the primary school of El Faouar, which was established in 1960, there were no Ghrib girls attending the lessons during the schoolyear of 1974-1975. Gilbert Claus wrote in 1983: "Actually, the Ghrib parents do not care much about the school education of their children, and giving a school education to girls is in their viewpoint still an incomprehensible act" (p. 137-138).

The opposition between Ghrib boys and Ghrib girls reflects a growing disparity between the childhood of
boys and girls and consequently between the male and female living conditions. Indeed, Ghrib boys can find the opportunity to prepare themselves for their insertion into the modern educational, economic, social and other structures of the Tunisian state. However, Ghrib girls remain in their play activities and in their growing up within the traditional way of life. Nevertheless, since the second half of the eighties, there has been a major alteration in the attitude towards the schooling of girls among Ghrib families. As a result, nowadays, many Ghrib girls are attending the primary school of El Faouar. In this way, the upbringing of girls will surely be affected by the Western type of school system. A school system that, among other factors, will influence the play activities, games and toys of these girls.

The Ghrib society has been altered thoroughly as a result of definitive sedentarisation, the loss of a nomadic way of life, the dying out of herdsmen and dromedary breeding and the integration in an urban society. Renewed research among the Ghrib the forthcoming years should provide an answer to the question in how far these economic, social and cultural changes have affected the play activities, games and toys of the Ghrib children, especially the girls who nowadays regularly attend the primary school of El Faouar. There certainly must occur marked changes in the imitative games we have mentioned since the everyday life of male and female members of the Ghrib community has profoundly changed. If the mothers do not grind cereals, weave or live in tent settlements anymore, a lot of the girls' games in which they imitate a woman's life will inevitably change. The same can be said about the boys. One can wonder how long games connected with herding will continue to exist after the disappearance of dromedary-breeding which occurred around 1985. And what is left of the meaning of imitating the virtues of herding as in the game of steeling dromedaries? Except maybe as a ludic reminiscence of the vanished grandeur of the famous Ghrib dromedary-breeding art?

Before concluding, we want to stress the influence of television among the Ghrib in general and among the male youths and the young adult men in particular. In Ghrib households it was till recently only possible to receive the programmes of the Tunisian television, programmes that conform to the norms and values of the Tunisian Islamic society. According to Gilbert J.M. Claus; it is nowadays also possible to receive some European television broadcasts such as those of the French A2, the Italian RAI Uno and the private Super Channel.

The Ghrib women and girls, and also the young boys and older men only watch the Tunisian programmes. These programmes certainly influence them, for example through the publicity, in the direction of a consumption-oriented society but do not change their deeply rooted attitudes towards childhood, socialization and male-female relationship, at least not in a short time. Still this television watching is disrupting the intergenerational transmission of the cultural heritage, especially of oral literature, local history and entertainments, a transmission that in former days was an important evening pastime.

Some young adult men and boys from sixteen years onwards, the age at which they traditionally can claim some freedom of personal decision making, do not limit themselves to the Tunisian television programmes. They also look at television broadcasts of the above mentioned European television stations, especially the publicity and the programmes in which female nudity is shown. This is done in secret and with the sound cut off, and no one would ever think of looking at such images in the presence of a father or an uncle. There is no doubt that this possibility for Ghrib young men to look at these 'erotic' images, a possibility that does not at all exist for girls and women, will influence as well their psychological development as their behaviour in male-female relationship.

Taking all this into account, these is another crucial question that requires an answer: are these changes not causing a dramatic rupture of the intergenerational transmission of lifestyle, customs, culture, oral literature and also of ludic activities? As one has seen, the answer to this question seems to be affirmative, especially for the male youth and the young adult men, much less so for the girls and the women.

As the disruption of the Ghrib cultural identity seems to be inevitable, one can only hope that this disruption facilitates the integration of the Ghrib younger generations into a broader Tunisian identity.

Notes

1. This research has been subventioned by the Belgian National Foundation for Scientific Research from 1975 onwards.
2. All photographs were made by the author in 1975 and 1977, except photo 1 which was made by Dr. Gilbert J.M. Claus in 1975.
3. Observed by Dr. Gilbert J.M. Claus.
Map of the Ghrib area in the 1970s
1. A Ghrib mother tries to divert her little son in a playful way

2. A remarkable ludic interaction between a Ghrib father and his youngest son
3. A Ghrib mother making a toy

4. An adolescent Ghrib girl with her self-made bride doll
5. The bride doll and bridegroom doll of the Ghrib girls

6. Ghrib girls playing with a doll’s tent
7. A Ghrib girl weaves on a miniature loom

8. A copy of the hand-mill used for a playful grinding of cereals
9. Sun-dried earthen replicas of cooking pots made by Ghrib girls for their household games

10. An elaborate playhouse of some Ghrib girls
11. A jaw-bone toy dromedary mounted by a dromedarists made of a lock of goat hair

12. This artistically made mosque was erected by a thirteen-year-old Ghrib boy
13. A group of small Ghrib children playing together under the supervision of older girls

14. A Ghrib boy irrigates wild roses in his miniature oasis garden
15. Ghrib boys playing at being merchants

16. Toy bicycles refer to the modernization of the Ghrib society