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Towards a concerted plan to remove children from the streets of Saint-Louis, Senegal: humanitarian transition and the ethical principle of autonomy

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Summary

This article uses data from a field study conducted with the actors involved in providing humanitarian assistance to street children in Saint Louis of Senegal. It develops a reflection about these children's active social role in view of the humanitarian transition. In such a historic and religious city as St Louis, the vast majority of these children are said to be « Talibe », handed over by their parents to a Koranic master in order to learn the Holy Book. They become street beggars to provide themselves with food as well as to pay for their tuition. The author shows how the associative network, which has spread considerably over the past decade, is playing a key role in terms of mediation between the State and the street. As a plan for children's withdrawal from the streets has been announced by President MackySall, an involvement of civil society by the State would improve actions by working closely with the children and their tutors (religious leaders, godmothers, older Talibes...). As the children are becoming more and more active in designing their own urban experience, for instance by using the opportunities offered to them such as humanitarian support, it seems that non profitorganisations, with more resources and legitimacy, could push forward a constructive consensus with the children conducive to getting them off the street. In this context, it appears necessary to methodically apply the ethical principles favouring autonomy and benevolence in order to overcome a utilitarian approach of humanitarian action, and move on to a concerted withdrawal of children from the streets. If such an approach is not implemented, there is a great risk that removing the children from the streets will finally mean for them less freedom, by taking a number of both sanitary and social resources away from them, which were so far provided by the communities. They would therefore be more dependent on Koranic schools which can be marginalised, out of control and at times not respectful, either of national laws or basic children's rights.

Keywords: street children, talibe, education, agency, autonomy, benevolence, tourism, humanitarian.

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Introduction

As I was responding to the call for fellowships issued by the French Red Cross Foundation, in partnership with the Fondation Claire & François, for postdoctoral research on humanitarian transition and vulnerable children in Senegal, President MackySall announced a plan for removing children from his country's streets. This announcement, made in July 2016, had the effect of stirring up debate, awareness and citizen initiatives with regard to the fate of the 50 000 child beggars in Senegal. This question of street children has been an issue for a number of years. In this Muslim country in Sahelian Africa, the phenomenon of street children is more strongly linked than elsewhere to the traditional system of entrusting children to a master, who then become *Talibés* because they memorise and recite Koranic texts¹. For historical reasons linked to colonialism and the application of the principle of secularity, this traditional education is not managed by the State, and therefore takes place in difficult material and sanitary conditions. It sometimes includes a recourse to child begging, which traditionally corresponds to a form of apprenticeship in humility², but which is currently liable to excesses, since certain Koranic masters are suspected of benefiting from this practice.

In a critical demographic context³, the rural exodus of children is feeding the anarchic proliferation of a number of schools of this kind, called *daaras*, which take in children who

¹A *talib*, in literary Arabic, (طالب [tālib], student, candidate, seeker, supplicant, pl. طالبون [tālibūn] or talibān) is a student in the general sense, currently more directly associated with students of madrasas, referring to students from theological schools. The word has several pronunciations, derived from local dialects and various uses. In Senegal, *talibés* are those who are learning the text of the Koran with a master, but generally talibés are the disciples of a master who teaches them a religious doctrine. Hence the Mourides call themselves “talibés of Sérigne Touba”, which implies a master-student relationship.

²As Kae Amo noted after participant observation research within certain *daaras* in Saint-Louis: “The definition of “*defal nitt*” (the making of a human being), or moral education in Koranic schools, as well as the importance of “suffering” in the process of apprenticeship, therefore illustrate the logic which predominates in these educational spaces” (Kae Amo, 2014: 6). Hence, as several pieces of research have shown, begging is part of “training for life”. Its aim is not only to amass money or food, but also to teach talibés to acquire a set of behaviours proper to a “good human being” (Chehami, 2013: 21).

³Describing the demographic situation as critical is not an implicit injunction to limit the number of births in Senegal, where the fertility rate of 4,6 children per woman is only problematic in the light of the unequal distribution of economic resources. On this issue, Serge Michailof sounds the alarm in his book, controversially entitled *Africanistan* (2015). Rather, it is a question here of initiating an epistemological shift, as enabled by recent reflections by Barbara Cooper and Raphaël Boiteveau on the problems of sterility and fertility in the Sahel, where “the extremely negative perception of contraception throughout Africa [...] is itself a product of a history of population control, which unfortunately has lasting effects. In the Sahel, these negative ideas and other misunderstandings have

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have been separated from their families. These *daaras*⁴ are “transhumant”, and remain more or less itinerant in the cities, moving from makeshift housing to makeshift housing. The use of the metaphor of transhumance refers to the organisation of Peulh livestock, since a number of Koranic masters and talibé children come from these nomadic groups of farmers. During their time spent begging, talibé children spend a lot of time in the streets of Senegalese villages, to the extent that they can be considered as “street children”. The sanitary state of Talibés, their public visibility and the violence which they can be subjected to in the *daaras* and in the street move Senegalese and Western people, and a significant number of associative players, be they local, religious, or international, are concerned with this humanitarian question, without, as yet, having found a lasting solution.

The research upon which this article is based dealt more specifically with the humanitarian situation connected to this issue in the religious and tourist town of Saint-Louis in Senegal.

The Talibés of Saint-Louis

A coastal city on the Atlantic Ocean and criss-crossed by the branches of the Senegal river, Saint-Louis, or “Ndar” in Wolof, used to be a meeting place for Moors, Peulhs and the sedentary peoples of the precolonial kingdom of Jolof. It then became the gateway to West Africa for French colonisers, who gave it its Christian name, and a crossroads in the slave trade. After independence, Saint-Louis became a centre for the development of the Mouride and Tijaniyyah Muslim brotherhoods. It is a town with a complex history: a “hyper place”, according to Jean-Pierre Dozon’s analysis in his book “Saint-Louis du Sénégal: Palimpsested’uneville” (2012). Its geographical and historical characteristics make it particularly appealing for both tourists and Muslim scholars, and especially for Koranic masters, of Sufi extraction, who mainly belong to the Tijaniyyah brotherhood. The city’s occupation by great Tijaniyyah Koranic masters offsets the symbolic importance attributed to the town by the other Mouride brotherhood, namely through the organisation of the two *rakkasceremonies* in the town⁵. With over 200 000 inhabitants, Saint-Louis has not lost its function of a “Creole” city, where the cultural melting-pot dictates history and is anchored in the sometimes violent current global situation of ideological conflict between Islam and the West, which it might not be itself. Talibé children in Saint-Louis seem, in many respects, to carry forward this history and these possible encounters.

been exacerbated by the rejection and demonisation of Islam throughout the war on terror, and by a seemingly endless economic decline”. According to these same analyses, which deserve to be read in full, “it is high time for political decision-makers (and the sponsors who support them) to pay more attention to the needs of ordinary Africans in order to efficiently respond to the challenges of rapid population growth in the region” (Cooper and Botiveau, 2013: 19, 21).

⁴In this study, we have chosen to use the vernacular term of *daara* as opposed to the expression “Koranic school”, which, as Corinne Fortier points out, does not take the mobile and especially interpersonal character of Koranic teachings into account (Fortier, 1998: 214).

⁵This yearly ceremony celebrates the resistance of the spiritual leader of the Mourides to the colonial powers. On September 5th 1895, Serigne Touba was condemned to exile in Gabon after a legendary trial by the colonial court and responded by saying two prayers: the two *rakkas*. In September 2017, the celebration of the ceremony of the two *rakkas* provided the opportunity for pilgrims to take down a statue of the French general Faidherbe, which stood in a square of the same name. There is therefore a real reconquest of identity underway in the city in which the presence of different brotherhoods participates.

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The Koranic masters (*serignedaara*), which others call “marabouts”, are responsible by custom for those children who have been entrusted to them for Koranic study, in order to “instil essential social and religious values in them so that they can live their lives in accordance with religious precepts” (Moubarack, 2010: 27). This system of entrusting children is common practice, and structures Senegalese society in the same way as alliances and marriages, creating and prolonging ties and active social solidarity networks (Jonckers, 1997; Lallemand, 1993). In Saint-Louis, there are between 115 and 322 *daaras*⁶, depending on the sources consulted, which host several Koranic masters, and are organised in different ways: live-in, live-out, mixed or not, resorting to child begging or not, exclusive or operating in parallel to primary schools, etc. As religious personalities with sacred knowledge (knowledge of the Koran), Koranic masters are particularly respected and have very significant authority (*ndigal*) not only over children, but over the whole community. The Koranic masters are respected because they are themselves former talibés who have interiorised the Koran, and transmit it, which is seen as a supreme function. Koranic study generally takes place between 7 and 14 years of age. It takes the form of an incorporation of the sacred text, rather than as a true understanding of its significance (Fortier 1998). The Koranic text is considered intrinsically capable of producing beneficial results for Muslims and for the community. The talibé children are considered to be receptacles of the divine Word. The daily alms allow donors to attract luck and *barakaon* themselves. Talibé children therefore have a very important social and religious function in Senegalese society, which is 90% Muslim. Moreover, Koranic study forges men. According to a former talibé, it is necessary to have “been dipped in a bath of suffering” in order to become a man (quoted by Launay and Ware, 2009: 127). Hence, Koranic study requires a certain discipline (*yar*)⁷ which can extend to mistreatment with regard to children’s rights. Children also have to pay their masters themselves and participate in their pittance, by giving them a share of the funds collected by begging. Well-intentioned Koranic masters must therefore find a balance between the demands of a traditional system of reference, within which each gesture has its place, and those of children’s rights, as stated in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and in Article 245 of the Senegalese criminal code, which forbids all mistreatment and exploitation of children through work or through begging⁸.

In the context of humanitarian transition

⁶115 according to the census on USAID’s website www.daara.sn; 322 according to a document published by the State, “Regional economic and social situation” (National Agency of Statistics and Demographics, Regional service of Saint-Louis, June 2015, p.5: <http://www.ansd.sn/ressources/ses/chapitres/7-action-sociale.pdf>); 300 according to most of the Saint-Louis residents we met. The informal and volatile nature of the *daaras* makes it difficult to establish an efficient and lasting census.

⁷*Yar* (discipline) is the foremost component of the spiritual experience of talibés. It must break the heart (*toj xol bi*), and then rebuild the character (*defarat jikko*). According to a Koranic master interviewed by Rudolph T. Ware, “The *jangle* (apprenticeship without the *yar* (discipline) would be like taking a bowl and putting food in it without washing it first” (Launay and Ware, 2009: 133).

⁸It must be noted that whilst mistreatment, violence and exploitation are forbidden, the parents’ freedom of choice regarding a religious or secular education, as well as the right for talibé children to beg in proximity to places of worship, are enshrined in these texts which are an African interpretation of universal children’s rights.

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Over the course of the last ten years, the city of Saint-Louis has developed a dynamic network of around 15 associations, placed under the control of the State, which bring humanitarian assistance, food, clothing and sanitary aid to talibé children in the *daaras* of the city. These associations also strive to provide talibé children with basic French training. This flourishing of associations is part of the process known as “humanitarian transition”: increasingly heterogenous humanitarian players are having to face up to an increase in needs linked to the rural exodus and uncontrolled growth of suburban areas (Mattei and Troit, 2016). The history of the town of Saint-Louis and its tourist appeal make it a town marked by a strong Western presence, with a significant number of expatriates involved in different sectors, be they commercial, touristic, cultural, or humanitarian. In Senegal, as elsewhere, the management of the needs of the most vulnerable increasingly falls to local social action. Western and Senegalese associative and community players are currently investing more and more in formalised aid for talibé children. In parallel, the number of talibé children arriving in Saint-Louis is increasingly substantially, currently reaching a figure of roughly 14 000⁹. The degree of collaboration between humanitarian associations¹⁰ and Koranic masters varies. Whilst certain associations refuse to work with the latter, for fear of indirectly supporting people capable of exploitation and mistreatment, others work closely with them, considering that it is the best way to sustainably improve the sanitary and social conditions of talibé children. The Koranic masters do not all have a positive image of the humanitarian work carried out by the associations, seen in some places as receiving Western funds without working very actively with street children. Finally, it must be noted that the development of “humanitarian tourism”, or “voluntourism”, has played a significant role in Saint-Louis in terms of the reconfiguration of the humanitarian landscape. Indeed, associations focused on child vulnerability host international volunteers every year, who want to bring support, acquire humanitarian experience, and discover the world. The talibé children of the streets of Saint-Louis therefore grow up caught between the rigorous apprenticeship of humility and the Koranic word, the donations of Westerners seduced by the city, the care of Senegalese devoted to their cause, under the more or less attentive gaze of the street educators who monitor this complex balance.

We know how delicate it is to evaluate “the best interests of the child”, in accordance with the third principle of the International Convention for Children’s Rights. In the context of Koranic education in Senegal, who, in the absence of the parents, can be the legal operator of this assessment? Koranic masters, the State, associative players, Western volunteers, or

⁹According to the census taken by the association “Maison de la Gare”, with the help of students from the Université Gaston Berger in 2016.

¹⁰Since we are interested for this study in the role of humanitarian actors in the protection of vulnerable children in Saint-Louis, we will define this category of actors as applying to *all those who are daily and actively concerned with the value of each child in the streets of Saint-Louis as a human being*. In this way we can draw inspiration from the almost etymological definition which Jean-François Mattei gives us of humanitarian aid, based on the meaning ascribed by the first edition of the Encyclopedia: “is humanitarian everything that aims for the good of mankind, which is to say, all the actions motivated by the value ascribed to each human being”. Indeed, researchers and actors can now easily agree on a broad, open and pragmatic vision of humanitarian aid. The distinctions which may formerly have prevailed between humanitarian action in developing countries and social action in the West, or between emergency action and development action, are no longer required. Hence, when everything is diluted, emergency into continuity, developing countries into the West, when vulnerability is on the increase everywhere and lastingly, humanitarian aid is any action which aims to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable human beings.

the children themselves, granted a *de facto* autonomy? In the course of this postdoctoral research, which involved taking a census of all the active associations focusing on child vulnerability in Saint-Louis, this was the foremost issue in my mind. Indeed, whilst everyone agrees with the government that the children must be “removed” from the streets, it occurred to me that, in the interstices of the city, the streets could also be seen in some ways as a precious space of freedom for the children concerned. On the subject of a *daara* the city which the talibé could not leave, the children spoke of “a prison”, and lived in fear of being placed there. Indeed, it is during the times when they are supposed to be begging in the street that the talibé children play, go to see their godmothers (*ndeyedaara*)¹¹ to receive a meal, to the market to earn money, and to the centres set up by humanitarian associations to wash themselves, eat something, dress a wound, change their clothes, meet teachers and international volunteers, draw, etc. The withdrawal of children from the streets could therefore be seen both as a reduction of the risks run by children, and as a curtailing of their freedom to act in the world. As Pape Demba Fall, the late regretted director of the Claire Enfance association in Saint-Louis, remarked to me: “the Senegalese streets have always been full of children, and one might ask what is disturbing in the fact of children being in the street”. The problem clearly lies more with the fact that the streets have become dangerous (delinquency, heavy traffic, a changing relationship to money...), as opposed to the freedom granted to children, and not only talibé children, to be there. How can we therefore guarantee the implementation of a plan for getting children off the streets in the best interests of the children concerned? Who can take steps in this direction, and with what mandate?

Methodology of multi-situated action-research

The research on which the current reflections are based was carried out with the help of M. Magatte Fall, a Senegalese assistant with a degree in anthropology. The main methodology template used was that of research-action, which is to say, committed work on humanitarian action (the object of study), for action (interest in efficiency and improvement), and in action (inclusion of groups under study in the reflection) (Gueye, 2016: 36). For a decade, due to the development of new communication tools and humanitarian tourism, the cause of the talibé children of Saint-Louis has become a transnational concern, transcending Senegalese borders and implicating a network of interconnected people throughout the world. We therefore took into account the network of humanitarian actors in its transnational dimension in order to evaluate different economic, ideological and relational issues concerning the aid provided to children in Saint-Louis. A capitalisation of associative experiences thereby enabled us to organise dialogue and debate between different actors. As noted by Philippe Lavigne, researchers indubitably have a role to play: “the capitalisation of experiences often involves the support of a third party, who plays a facilitating and interrogative role and encourages practitioners engaged in capitalisation to take a step back from their spontaneous interpretations, deepen their analysis, and explore other interpretive leads” (Lavigne, 2016: 35).

¹¹The term “*ndeye daara*” literally means “the mothers of the Koranic school”, but it is more usually translated as “godmother”. Traditionally, women are sought out by one or several talibé children to take daily care of their lunch, by keeping a bowl from the family meal aside for them. If they accept, the children know that they can go to the same house every day for their meals. Some *ndeye daara* also offer to wash their clothes, give them their baths, etc. They can also monitor their sanitary and physical condition. In exchange, the talibé children carry out small household chores for the *ndeye daara*, such as sweeping the courtyards, carrying wastewater, emptying dustbins, etc.

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Aside from the capitalisation of experiences, participant observation, questionnaires and interviews with humanitarian actors working alongside street children in Saint-Louis enabled us to assemble seventeen files detailing the functioning of different associations, nineteen in-depth interviews with people committed to the cause of talibé children in Saint-Louis, six interviews with State officials in charge of child protection, ten leaflets and brochures edited by associations, and thirteen interviews with contact persons engaged in Europe. Finally, we followed the shooting of three video projects concerning the issue of talibé children, filmed in Senegal in 2017. Our research was also concerned with the aid recipients' perspectives, and included data collection amongst the children themselves, by means of five drawing workshops with associations and thirty-seven interviews with children and young talibés from 6 to 20 years of age, who were current or potential recipients of humanitarian aid. The drawing workshops provided an opportunity for the children to respond to three prompts: draw the most-loved person in this world, draw your everyday life, and draw your dream job. The two hundred drawings collected were analysed in a quantitative manner and with an anthropological, rather than clinical, perspective. Indeed, the projective dimension of children's drawings is debatable, namely because of the ethnocentric nature of the analysis criteria, but also because trauma does not appear in a systematic way in the drawings, even in those made by children with great psychological difficulties (Romano 2010). We therefore based ourselves more on the number of drawings collected in order to highlight several common characteristics, as indications of the ways in which the children see themselves in the social field and project themselves into the future, their relationship with adults, with their masters, with associative teachers, family, friends... The interviews were carried out in Wolof by M. Magatte Fall, following a list of simple, relatively closed questions, so as not to put the children in difficulty, whilst nevertheless allowing for a quantitative analysis of the answers concerning their backgrounds, time spent begging, sufferings endured, and their visits to the associations. It is always a delicate process to put oneself on the same level as the children¹², and see things from their point of view, without creating bias or false hope, all the more so since talibé children live in affinity groups within which each individual is often hard to access.

The other specificity of our work lies in the multi-situated nature of the study and the multiplication of spatial scales in the field. The multi-situated method, which involved a set of participant observations carried out within a network of relationships with spatially distant anchorings (Semin, 2009), seemed appropriate to use with today's humanitarian actors, a large part of whose social and international existence is carried out online. Cheikh Gaye, for example, who runs the activities of the "Coeur enOr" association in Saint-Louis remotely from Switzerland, is constantly connected and speaks several times a day with his team. After two months of fieldwork in Saint-Louis, a significant part of the research took place via social networks and software for long-distance conversations. This method is an adaptation of classical ethnography to the postmodern fluidification of social relations, where geographical

¹²This idea of height echoes the poem of Janus Korczak, the spiritual father of children's rights, quoted by the association "Maison de la Gare" on their Facebook page: "You say: 'Dealings with children are tiresome.' You're right. You say: 'Because we have to lower ourselves to their intellect. Lower, stoop, bend, crouch down.' You are mistaken. It isn't that which is so tiring, but rather because we have to reach up to their feelings. Reach up, stretch, stand on our tip-toes. So as not to offend." Janusz KORCZAK, prologue to *When I Am Little Again*.

proximity is no longer a prerequisite for interaction. In our study, the relationship to the territory is nevertheless significant, since affiliation, mastery, or at the very least a certain knowledge of the city of Saint-Louis remains a common denominator for all the actors we met. The delocalised network was built as an initial but unseen field of study, which it was important to integrate in order to observe the dynamics at work there.

In the current humanitarian field, these dynamics essentially concern a form of diversification of supply for talibé children, which has been revitalised over the past decade by the market for humanitarian tourism, and especially since the arrival in Saint-Louis of the company Project Abroad, in 2016. This market, which has more to do with tourism than with humanitarian aid, turned out to be a vocational source, and paved the way for a number of Western and Senegalese young professionals who were often dissatisfied by their experience of humanitarian tourism, but who wished to work towards a greater respect of children's rights. Faced with the prospect of this transition from the paternalistic humanitarian assistance provided up until a few years ago by major Western NGOs, and a diversification of the social aid delivered by a young, dynamic and multicultural generation, street children have been able to adapt and find new opportunities to deal with the social and economic constraints which they are subject to.

The active social roles of talibé children

In Saint-Louis, outside of the time dedicated to learning the Koran, street children, and predominantly talibés, are free to visit the public sphere and the humanitarian associations which have been developing there. In the street, they meet with problems of all kinds (cold, violence between children, sexual violence, road accidents, etc), and also use the opportunity to build a diversified and supportive social network. Left to their own devices, they call upon godmothers, shopkeepers, and associative players, all of whom are sources of support and community educators. Would the act of forbidding them access to the street, or of removing them from the street, not also amount to depriving them of a form of opening up to the world, and locking them into a Koranic apprenticeship which, though important, remains insufficient in the eyes of the majority of the community members, children, older talibés, and the Koranic masters themselves whom we interviewed? The question resonates with a concept which has become central in anthropology, that of *agency*. It refers to a being's capacity to act upon the world and his or her own life, and has been at the heart of studies on children's culture since the 1990s, so that: "the focus has gradually shifted towards the child's point of view, that is to say, towards the ways in which he perceives and acts upon the world" (de Suremain, Bonnet 2014: 4). With regard to the migrant children of West Africa, the work of Melanie Jacquemain and DorteThorsen allows us, for example, not to systematically conceive of children as the passive victims of a system, and to understand "how children, as social actors in the full sense of the term, can navigate between solidarity relationships (relations, pairs, allies) and power relationships (subordination, protest, resistance), in social contexts where economic, social and cultural contingencies and constraints figure heavily" (2015: 294).

And yet children, and talibés in particular, are not traditionally considered by Senegalese society as being subjects capable of changing their own condition. Loved as intercessors before God, their lives are defined by Islam, and they are taught a form of humility such that they often struggle to define themselves as subjects. This was noticeable when, during

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interviews, they were asked somewhat personal questions about their hopes and fears. We noted their silences, translating the embarrassment on their faces, and the extremely stereotyped nature of their answers. To the question “Why did you come to Saint-Louis”, all the children, without exception, answered the same thing: “diang al koran”: “to study the Koran”. The ability to decide for themselves is not traditionally valued. The autonomy of talibé children is even sometimes frowned upon by certain Koranic masters, who forbid their children from going out and visiting associative centres, since the activities on offer distract the children from their study of the Koran, which therefore becomes more lengthy, difficult, and requires greater coercion¹³. In the discourse of the Koranic masters, talibé children who are too autonomous run away and become *farkmans* (street children in breach, negatively regarded by society). The teachers from the association “Maison de la Gare” often pick up children at night who have escaped from their *daarasas* a result of the mistreatment they suffered there. It is not always easy to know where the child should return to: the *daara*, back home? Many children would prefer to stay in the associative centres, which are not authorised to offer shelter for long periods and are not designed to replace the role of schools or families.

The willingness to consider children’s capacity to choose for themselves is a recent educational choice which has emerged in Western societies since the 1970s, and we must not fall here into the trap of an ethnographic error highlighted by David Lancy, which would consist in considering this child agency from the outset as an end in itself, an emancipation to be encouraged, as was the case for women in women’s studies. Yet if we consider this child agency as data or as an emerging culture, it is clear that street talibés in Saint-Louis, like other street children throughout the world, do indeed have increasing access to a set of resources provided by the city which are enabling them to become actors of their own lives. In his controversial article on the concept of agency as applied to street children throughout the world, David Lancy incidentally concludes, quite rightly, that:

“They didn’t need any help from NGOs or other moral authorities in order to be granted agency. They already had it, enjoying tremendous freedom of movement and association, and thanks to the acquisition of their own funds, resources which enabled them to choose their own lifestyles.” (Lancy, 2012: 14).

This is true in Saint-Louis. Without exception, the thirty talibé children we interviewed declared that they worked during their free time at the market as porters and cleaners. Only two-thirds admitted to begging on behalf of their masters. The distinction between children begging and working is therefore more tenuous than humanitarian campaigns on the subject would lead us to believe. On public transport, we observed how they were able to collect large sums in coins which they exchanged for banknotes with the ticket-seller. Thanks to actors in the field, we know that they organise talibé tontines and talibé markets where they sell off the day’s unsold articles for their own profit. In the same way, they are very skilled at taking advantage of the different forms of humanitarian assistance which are developing in Saint-Louis, in order to benefit from food distribution, care, new boubous for religious holidays, medicine, etc. It is also in the street that they are able to win the loyalty of a godmother, who can regularly provide them with meals and often give them alms.

Indeed, children are able to save more or less significant sums to buy themselves footballs, shoes, biscuits, mobile phones... The street is also a play area where they devote

¹³Interviews with Yénil Sow, Koranic master

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themselves to football. Hence begging and the payments due to their masters are far from being the only reasons for the children's presence in the streets. The children's experiences, their social roles and their needs must also be considered, taking into account the different worlds they are in contact with: the one they create themselves through their games and their affinity groups, the one that is created for them by their relationship to apprenticeship and to different institutions, and the one in which they operate in the markets, neighbourhoods and families (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 2007).

Whilst the social function of talibé children, as recipients of salvational almsgiving, is recognised, it is important to note that their social role is currently not defined solely by what adults expect of them. This is not to deny the constraints which rest on their shoulders, nor their vulnerability. Being aware of children's choices, without giving them more weight than those of adults, enables us to include them in the complexity of social and cultural relationships. It is a question of integrating the children's point of view into a pluralistic and polyphonic perception of a globalised society, which is transforming itself and becoming more complicated according to variable and sometimes contradictory influences. This paradigm shift from the point of view of the social sciences, which leads us to consider the child as the actor of his own destiny, echoes what is happening in the associative and humanitarian fields with regard to the subject of childhood. For example, it is as actors that the association "Les Films au Clair de Lune" addresses "vulnerable" children throughout the world, by producing short participative fiction films, which serve a preventive function. One of their films, made in Senegal, clearly sets out the active role of talibé children, and their capacity to change the world¹⁴. In the film, three children help a fourth by showing him the way to an association. This is a reasonably accurate reflection of reality. Children who grow up between their *daara* and the street develop very significant horizontal affinities and work together in discovering associations likely to help them in case of difficulties. They therefore take part in the construction of the humanitarian and community aid which concerns them. The dynamic diversification of humanitarian assistance over the course of the last decade has also enabled them to make choices, and therefore to construct themselves as subjects.

Finally, the question of the children's agency reveals a paradox, which we shall only touch upon here, linked to the recent development of a form of delinquency amongst younger and older street talibés. Many of them commit minor or more serious offenses in the eyes of the law (theft, rape, assaults...). Over the course of the interviews, several teachers emphasised the children's lack of framework beyond "the whip" sometimes used in Koranic study. During the distribution of community snacks, teachers from the "Coeur en Or" association take care to "disarm" the children, who often carry knives, metal points, or whips, which they use to attack or to defend themselves. Rewarding their agency should make them responsible for the crimes they commit, which they are not currently seen as being according to Senegalese law, which itself tends to protect minors from prison, and which is being increasingly better applied. Thanks to the resources provided by the city, the children are therefore becoming actors of their own lives, without being held responsible for the violence they may be led to carry out, especially against the younger ones. Yet being responsible is nothing more than setting oneself obligations, which is to say in the language of classical philosophy, to give oneself one's own law: auto-nomia.

¹⁴<https://www.filmsclairdelune.org/senegal-talibes>

The ethical principle of autonomy applied to child protection

The principle of autonomy currently plays a central role in ethics, and particularly in medical ethics, which Jean-François Mattei proposes to apply to the humanitarian and social process in the broadest sense. In terms of ethics, the concept of agency can be likened to what humanitarian workers and nurses call “autonomy”. In these two fields, patients and aid recipients are increasingly considered as being actors in their own treatment pathways and social reintegration. The current development of this ethical sense represents a break from a form of paternalism which was formerly required, in the name, in particular, of beneficence. Indeed, without autonomy, no moral responsibility would be possible. As Kant’s famous imperative shows, people must be treated as ends in themselves, and not only as means. It is because human beings are potentially capable of autonomy that we must not réify them or in other ways use them for our own ends, for touristic or financial gain, for example. In practice, the actual capacity for autonomy is often limited by a lack of discernment, information, maturity, education, material resources, etc. And it is precisely because autonomy is fragile that it must be defended. Let us therefore remember that the principle of autonomy, as defined by Jean-François Mattei, guarantees the freedom of persons receiving humanitarian aid to decide for themselves, and insists on taking into consideration “the aid recipient’s capacity to take part in the decision-making process” (Mattei, 2014: 116). When the aid recipients of mass humanitarian assistance are easily-influenced children with little aptitude for discernment, one might wonder how the ethical principle of autonomy, a cornerstone of successful and efficient humanitarian transition, can apply.

To take the issue of hygiene, for example, it appears that if talibé children do not take care of themselves, it is not necessarily because they do not have access to water. According to the questionnaires filled in by the children, most of the *daarashave* running water, and for those that do not, a number of associative centres allow children to take showers. If the children do not take care of their bodily hygiene, it is mainly because when they are left to their own devices, they are free not to do so. Taking a shower does not necessarily appeal to them, and does not always appear to be a good thing in their eyes. One need not have much experience with children to know that they do not willingly wash themselves. Incidentally, according to MaïmounaTounkara from the association “And TaxawuTalibés”, talibé children’s relationship to water and hygiene changes during the hot season. But it may also be a case, as Marcel Mauss so rightly specified, of “everything being connected”, because by carefully avoiding washing themselves, talibés are also conforming to the image which society projects onto them, regarding their role which is often associated with defilement. A volunteer in the field working for an association told me that some children refuse to wash for fear of no longer arousing pity and receiving alms. We can also note that the implementation of a hygiene programme by a Polish volunteer in a Saint-Louis association, consisting of washing herself the talibé children’s bodies, was not readily accepted, either by local actors or by the children themselves. The interviews also revealed that talibé children are often responsible for “carrying wastewater” or “taking out the rubbish”, in the same way that in the market, they are “porters” or “cleaners”. For the children this is not considered work so much as a duty or service rendered due to their condition. Hence, to the question “Do you work at your godmother’s house?”, all of the children answered “no”, and some added, “I help out, I sweep”, or “I take out the garbage” (subtext: to the nearest waste pile). The relationship to

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work can therefore also be the subject of questioning with regard to the children's autonomy, and not only with regard to their exploitation.

If we were to take inspiration from medical ethics, it would be appropriate prior to the launch of any humanitarian programme to obtain not only the children's essential consent, but also what is called the "substitute consent" of a close relation authorised to actively represent the child's interests and values. In the case of street talibés, these close relations, in the absence of parents, are customarily the masters with whom the children are placed¹⁵. In some cases, the latter can themselves be using the children as a means to receive an income from begging. This is incidentally what they are openly accused of by networks of human rights defenders, such as Human Rights Watch and certain European activists in Saint-Louis¹⁶, who consider that the Koranic masters are deliberately exploiting the children in order to enrich themselves. Given the impenetrable and uncontrollable nature of the *daaras*, it is difficult to get formal proof of this. The Koranic master whom we questioned on this subject specified that the enrichment of the marabouts is not the product of child begging, but of their own renown: "if the children were taken away from the Koranic masters, that would not stop them from making a living by dispensing advice and prayers to the believers who come to consult them. That is how we make our living - not from children"¹⁷. In any event, when it comes to children, the application of the principle of autonomy, which implies consent and substitute consent, must be combined with the principle of beneficence which "requires the constant concern for the wellbeing of the patient" (Mattei, 2014: 96). This wellbeing must be thought out by the community and must include the choices of the aid recipients. The development of a humanitarian programme on the subject of talibé children's hygiene or their "work" must therefore, in accordance with the application of the principles of autonomy and beneficence, take into account the children's point of view, that of the parents, where possible, and otherwise of the Koranic masters, but also of the associative and community players (godmothers, older talibés, district leaders), in order to determine the extent to which the programme can be implemented ethically, in the respect of both custom and the children's dignity. Although it might take some time to reach a consensus, this kind of programme would have a better chance of being efficiently and sustainably applied, since each party could monitor its implementation.

In the same way, if the plan to get children off the streets is indeed a humanitarian and sanitary one, it ought to be the subject of community analysis involving the children, parents, local associative actors, Koranic masters, godmothers, and the population at large. Is it for the good of the children? Are the affected children part of the decision-making process? According to the interviews carried out with the children, we note that to the question, "Would you like to go home?", half of the children answered in the affirmative, a quarter replied that they would rather finish their Koranic studies and a quarter answered in the negative. Since the prohibition of begging is not universally accepted, when the children, withdrawn from the

¹⁵Danielle Jonckers' work on "entrusted children" allows us to clarify this customary rule: "In societies where the placement of children is commonplace, parents do not appropriate their children, and willingly hand them over to relatives who educate them temporarily. The latter are entirely responsible during these years of custody, without the parents subtracting from their duties or forfeiting their rights. [...] The parents' lack of intervention in the relationship between their children and their tutors, or, by extension, with the teacher or the doctor, is an act of trust, often wrongly interpreted by the social services as an abandonment which, in Europe, could lead to the suspension of parental rights" (Jonckers, 1997: 203).

¹⁶Interview with Jean-Philippe Dupuy, an expatriate French activist in Saint-Louis.

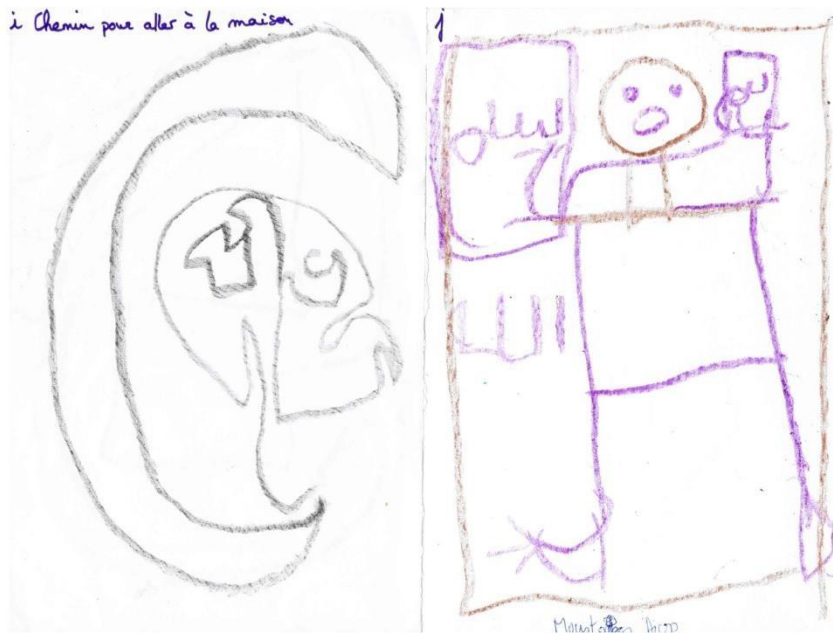
¹⁷Interview with Yénil Sow, Koranic master.

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streets, return to the *daaras*, there is a good chance that the removal will only be temporary, or worse, that the children remain shut up in the *daaras*. In Dakar, the implementation of the governmental plan to remove children from the streets began with 1500 children being picked up in the streets and returned to their homes or *daaras*. The Swiss researcher Nicolas Mabillard, who was in Dakar during the first stages of this removal plan, gave us a description of the conduct of the operation:

“A small van had been loaned by the SamuSocial, three police officers from the juvenile division used the van to make “pick-ups” in the Dakar neighbourhoods two days a week, or sometimes once a week. The children “picked up” in the street were taken to the GINDDI centre where the phone numbers of their Koranic masters, or their parents or relatives, were quickly obtained. The Koranic masters were summoned to an office in the centre to be lectured, whilst being reminded that the operation was not against them, but against exaggerated begging practices, which the Koran does not justify. They left a few days or weeks later with “their” children.”

The witness accounts of street educators, as well as the anthropological research carried out in 2012 at the Dakar Samu Social by Véronique Gilbert, nevertheless clearly show that street removals and returns to families are not easy operations to put in place. The children are not necessarily willing, some lie about their identities, some go reluctantly back home to rural areas, and sometimes it is clear that they will not stay there. One of the main problems lies in the mobility and precariousness of talibé children’s families, who often turn out to be difficult to contact or find. Other children wandering the street would genuinely like to go home, without anything being done for them. The path may seem winding for them, as suggested by this drawing made during a workshop and associated by the child author with “the road to go home”, with no further comments.



For the most part, talibé children are placed with a Koranic master at their parents’ request, and there is a form of negation of the parental legitimacy and authority in wanting to

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send the children home, if their parents are not part in the process. Indeed, there is a significant risk of failure to this kind of return. Although the parents are often poorly informed as to the conditions in which their children are being raised, the placement with a Koranic master corresponds, for them, to the implementation of their own system of values and relationships. A current programme, implemented by the associations “Maison de la Gare” and “AMOHS” in Saint-Louis, aims to establish the link between *daaras* and the children’s family homes, by reporting the children’s living conditions to the people in their home villages. The programme has met great success, to the extent that certain parents have come to check the living conditions of their children themselves and have charged the associations with watching over the proper running of the *daaras*.

We questioned older talibés (over 16 years of age), who grew up in Saint-Louis far away from their parents, about their childhood. They were marked by the memory of difficult, if not unbearable, childhood experiences: “it’s a real jungle!”, “indescribable!”, “I always wonder how I got away”... They essentially attribute the responsibility for the difficulties which they experienced and overcame to their parents, and in particular to their fathers. Yet they also add that the parental decision was ultimately taken for their good and their success: “but it was for the best”, “it’s what is necessary to become a Koranic master”¹⁸. Currently, children and older talibés do not therefore reject the tradition of Koranic teaching, but instead subscribe to it. Culture being essentially cumulative, it is transmitted from generation to generation, which implies an adhesion on behalf of the children to the system upheld by the parents and the community. It may therefore seem intrusive to want to deter children from this Koranic culture by suggesting that they go home, or take part in the play activities of a humanitarian associative centre. These activities may seem more attractive to the children, without the community considering them as being in the latter’s interest.

In order to fit into the framework of humanitarian ethics, it seems that it is now therefore particularly important for associations working with talibés in Saint-Louis to reflect on the data concerning the active social role or agency of the children concerned, and to work around the ethical principles of autonomy and beneficence. The failure to take these factors into account could have adverse effects. Indeed, the last ten years of humanitarian transition appear to have led to an “irrational”¹⁹ proliferation of humanitarian assistance for street children, thereby itself contributing to increased need. In spite of the dynamism and effervescence of the associative sector, which has gained ten new associations in ten years, or six times more than over the course of the ten preceding years, and whilst the children’s sanitary situation has, thanks to them, been substantially improved, the phenomenon of street children is becoming increasingly important and ever more visible. So much so that that we can wonder, at times, the extent to which these associations “contribute to the system which produces their own necessity” (Gueye, 2016: 41). As our research confirms, the street children in

¹⁸One of the issues addressed during the research was the professional future of talibé children. A significant number of them want to become and do become Koranic masters in turn, to the extent that the sector of Koranic apprenticeship will quickly become saturated. The Koranic masters’ vocation linked to the original rural areas encourages the children’s exodus. Since the profession is barely supervised, the begging of the younger talibés can be sufficient to provide an income for new Koranic masters...

¹⁹Jean-François Mattei and Virginie Troit explain this kind of irrationality, applied to the process of humanitarian transition, by the fact that each actor has their own motivations, norms, and methods of intervention (Mattei and Troit, 2016: 213).

Saint-Louis mainly come from rural areas of Senegal. It can be assumed that the presence of so many offers of humanitarian assistance contributes to the city's appeal²⁰. Saint-Louis, which is full of humanitarian workers from various backgrounds, represents fertile ground for economic and social opportunities which are more or less consciously discernable for the parents, Koranic masters, and for the children themselves. In this regard, if we want to partially stem the rural exodus in order to allow for a response to the needs of the children in Saint-Louis, it is important to be aware of the risks of the children developing a consumerist relationship to humanitarian assistance²¹. All of the organisers from the associative centres who we met agreed that talibé children are aware, by word of mouth, of the timetables of food distribution and activities offered by each centre, and organise themselves in order to benefit from each humanitarian donation. Thus, when we convened a drawing workshop requiring the participation of 10 children, we found ourselves with over a hundred children at the door of the hosting centre.

The respect of the principles of autonomy and beneficence involves taking the needs and sufferings expressed by the children as a starting point for organising action, with the substitute consent of their parents or their tutors, rather than risking the creation of new needs through a proliferation of ill thought-out offers. Satisfying the imperative of consent implies acting with the people who are directly concerned, in this case, the talibé children, older talibés (who are often responsible for the daily monitoring of the younger ones), Koranic masters, godmothers, organisers from associative centres, etc. The quest for such a consensus can only take place on a city-wide scale. Another risk of failing to include humanitarian aid in an ethical and epistemological reflection would be to ratify a breakdown in communication between Koranic masters and formal institutions, thereby isolating the children in marginal *daaras* which are removed from the imperatives of the respect of fundamental rights, and in some places at risk of radicalisation.

Acting and reflecting at field scale

In Saint-Louis, the postdoctoral research carried out enabled the identification of a dynamic network of associative actors committed to providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable children. The associative centres, organised by neighbourhood, are mostly operational and mainly act alongside community players (Koranic masters, district leaders, godmothers, etc). We identified sixteen associations and one NGO (ENDA) which actively provided humanitarian aid to street children. They have varying international connections. The identified players focus on immediate results by supplying emergency aid to the children as a priority, but they also give French lessons and occasionally organise joint awareness campaigns amongst the people from the children's home villages, and in the city of Saint-Louis, thereby accompanying "a kind of affirmative social action which is programmed to a

²⁰The research-actions carried out within Enda Graf Tiers Monde, and especially the one led by the anthropologist Dominique Gomis in 2008, report on witness accounts by children stating that they have easier access in town, not only to consumer goods which they did not have in their villages (footballs, telephones, etc), but also to a kind of freedom not permitted by the traditional patriarchal system, which subjects women and children to the authority of the father and to work in the fields.

²¹This kind of relationship to the humanitarian supply is not specific to street children in Saint Louis. Muriel Champy also addresses it amongst the street children of Ouagadougou, for example (Champy, 2014: 137).

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greater or lesser degree” (Marie, 2005). With more human resources, method, and legitimacy, they could work efficiently to implement a concerted plan for the removal of children from the streets, as commissioned by the State.

Human resources

The implementation of the ethical principles of autonomy and beneficence requires the presence in the field of social workers capable of interacting directly and constructively with the children and their tutors. With regard to current human resources, based on the data collected, there are roughly 37 employees for 17 organisations, 35 people on expenses²², and 70 volunteers, who are essentially board members from associations, and foreigners in Saint-Louis at their own cost. Finally, this engaged civil society hosts around 100 international volunteers every year, who are allocated to the different associations. These foreigners are very active in the field during their stay, and represent an important contribution to the operational budget of their host organisations. As well as these, the Project Abroad company alone hosts between 50 and 75 young volunteers per year dedicated to child issues, who currently work exclusively with the association “Aider Sans Frontières”, and in a few of the city’s schools. The volunteer’s length of stay in Saint-Louis ranges from two weeks to six months, but the average is one month. Whilst their participation is important in terms of human resources, the volatile and short-lived nature of their presence precludes them from being counted as part of the permanently deployed educational human resources.

Adding up the employees, people on expenses and volunteers, there are a total of 140 members of civil society who are sustainably working for the cause of vulnerable children in Saint-Louis. According to several organisation leaders, and without generalising, it can be noted that the people on expenses often struggle to fully commit to the field, since they must seek out other means of subsistence for their families. Volunteers are sometimes more invested, since they are there by conviction and have sufficient alternative sources of income. Since the latest census identified around 14 000 talibé child beggars in Saint-Louis, we end up with a ratio of one (1) active social worker for 100 children. In order to remove children from the street, it is clear, as Véronique Gilbert suggests, that it can only be done efficiently on a case-by-case basis: “indeed, there is no miracle cure for a successful long-term removal, unless it is to accept that each child has an own rhythm, and each project for getting children off the streets will be different and dependent on the factors which led the child to the streets in the first place, and the time spent there” (Gilbert, 2012: 154). The work of getting those children who want to go home off the streets therefore involves the implementation of social mediation which can take several months and must be carried out by trained and committed social workers. In spite of a significant mobilisation of volunteers, there is therefore a paradoxical lack of active educators in the field. The implementation of a concerted humanitarian plan for the removal of the city’s street children would therefore require the temporary recruitment of additional Senegalese educators, who could be allocated to the existing associative organisations, and be responsible for the social monitoring of several dozen children. A call for long-term volunteering could also be

²²The average monthly wage in Senegal is 100 000 CFA francs. People on expenses generally receive 50 000 CFA, sometimes 80 000 CFA per month.

launched by different associations with the possibility of hosting international volunteers, with a minimum requirement of training in a social profession.

Method

Talibé children can be observed in the streets of Saint-Louis freely wandering throughout the city, and found in proximity to the different forms of humanitarian assistance on offer. Children and older talibés claimed to have witnessed the proliferation of associations created to help them over the past decade: “when I was a younger talibé, there were not as many associations to help us”. They are aware of this movement in civil society, and are in regular contact with Western volunteers. The impacts seem to be both positive and negative. These meetings open up their vision of the world, to different conceptions of childhood, religion and charity. Indeed, the international volunteers who intervene in associative centres sometime develop interpersonal relationships with the children they work with. One example is Saliou, who was treated in 2015 for a leg infection thanks to the intervention of Christine, in partnership with the “Association JeunesseEspoir”. He was also able to return home after his convalescence. The child’s life was therefore marked and transformed by his regular contact with Christine. We can see in a video published by “EspoirsTalibés” that the child’s personality was affected by this²³. Nevertheless, the children can also be seduced and attracted by a kind of materialism induced by excessive donations which are out of proportion with their real needs. I was struck by a strange scene, at the foot of the Community Development building in the centre of Saint-Louis. A group of talibés between 9 and 12 years of age were playing on the steps with 4 or 5 little plastic figurines: cars, soldiers, animals... They had strange green bobs on their heads, and everything had come from a humanitarian donation. They were playing with these little objects. Clearly these objects did not correspond to their universe, and they did not really know what to do with them. One of the children was injured, and his wound, covered with a piece of goat skin, was beginning to fester. On another occasion, I observed the children as they came out of a drawing workshop, and they had kept the coloured crayons which I had given them at the end of the afternoon, and were pushing them into the cracks in the wall, obviously damaging them. Then they left them there, possibly intending to come back for them later. When I asked them what they were doing, they ran away, laughing. They do not have the opportunity to take care of the humanitarian donations which seem to fall from the sky and exert on them a kind of short-lived fascination. It should be noted that this is a problem common to children the world over in the face of consumer societies.

When we interviewed children receiving humanitarian aid about the actions of the associations, they seemed fairly satisfied with humanitarian work, which, as they often remarked, fits in with Islamic logics of charity and gifts: “I think that they are doing something good. We must help our brother when he is in need, according to Islam. We want jobs and to speak French”²⁴. Without generalising, it must be noted that the talibés we interviewed did not, however, spontaneously mention humanitarian workers as “allies” in the process of their personal development and resilience. To the question of who their “allies” were, they often mentioned their marabouts, older talibés, and other children: the same people, in fact, as

²³<http://www.espoir-talibes.com/video-105-mars-2015-saliou-a-retrouve-lespoir.html>

²⁴Interview with a talibé, aged 20, who was placed with a Koranic master in Saint-Louis twelve years ago.

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those they identified as being the source of their suffering. Only one child included “the good-willed people of Saint-Louis” in the list of his allies, referring to the Senegalese humanitarian workers rich enough to help the children. It would appear that talibé children develop a primarily utilitarian relationship with associations. They come to take a shower, pick up clothing, take a class, receive a donation... In practice, most of the associative centres are day care centres and as Claude Hallégot, the director of the “La Liane” shelter, specified: “without shelter, there can be no real personalised social monitoring”²⁵.

The possibility of ensuring social follow-up, and therefore getting children off the streets, would at the very least involve the children developing some kind of loyalty to a given centre. If the children were affiliated to one centre in particular, it would become possible to help them to get off the streets in a way which was adapted to each one, and negotiated with their tutors, be it a return to family, negotiations with the teachers or placement in a daarain line with national laws, with the daily monitoring of a godmother for food and hygiene, for example. In terms of social support, Senegalese teams might draw on the experience of the Samu Social in Dakar, which applies a holistic and constructivist method enabling them to work with communities on the causes of problems, rather than just their symptoms: “the Samu Social acts as a transmission conduit, a catalyst which helps to create a resilient environment, or at least one likely to produce family and social interactions which will foster the children’s resilience in the process of getting off the streets” (Gilbert, 2012: 148).

The first thing would therefore be to create loyalty amongst children in Saint-Louis for the associative centre in their neighbourhood, to identify and reference them in a reliable way, to ensure an individualised follow-up of each situation in the sense of respecting the principles of autonomy and beneficence. It obviously becomes difficult to manage when the community food distribution events attract over three hundred children in one go. The children’s loyalties should be developed according to a methodology proper to each centre, according to their neighbourhood of residency, and in agreement with the Koranic masters and the godmothers. It must be noted that the godmothers are starting to organise themselves associatively. Out of the thirty (30) talibé children interviewed, of an average age of 10 years, only fourteen (14) benefited from the daily support of andeyedaara. These godmothers do not, however, completely cover the children’s food needs, since ten (10) of those who have a godmother still need to beg to eat. The linking of each child with a godmother and a greater involvement of these ndeyedaara in humanitarian associations would also be beneficial to the holistic follow-up of the children. It would therefore be necessary to take the living experience of each child as a starting point, which they alone can explain.

The questions of method in social work necessarily involve those relating to the training of the actors in the field. Currently, although they are sometimes baccalaureate-holders, the people who are most active in the protection of talibé children in Saint-Louis are essentially learning in the field. Exchanges with Western volunteers, some of whom are committed for the long term, contribute at times to a real transfer of skills, which fits into the process of humanitarian transition. Indeed, at least four of the young Western volunteers who were involved in a lasting way alongside young Saint-Louis actors had the benefit of considerable training and/or professional experience in the social sector in Europe and in Senegal. By working closely with Saint-Louis teams and sharing their tools and savoir-faire, they took part in an informal way in the training of workers. In the context of the implementation of a

²⁵Interview with Claude Hallégot, expatriate, head of the “La Liane” association in Saint-Louis.

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concerted plan for the removal of children from the streets, it would be desirable to set up a training period for field actors. The fact that all the street educators involved could therefore follow the same training would, moreover, be a vehicle for coherence.

Legitimacy

Finally, the third factor which seems to be lacking from civil society in order to implement a concerted plan for the removal of children from the streets in Saint-Louis is that of the legitimacy granted to the associative sector by the State. As M. Papa Demba Fall put it when he was the “focal point” representing the associations at the heart of the Departmental Committee for Child Welfare (CDPE), placed under the authority of the Prefect, “it is now vital to act under the cupola of the State in order to carry out humanitarian actions for the children of Senegal!”. According to several associative actors, however, the work in coordination with the State seems undermined by the lack of time, regulatory approvals and legitimacy granted to associative actors. Following the death of M. Pepe Demba Fall last July, associations are, for example, still waiting for a summons from the Prefect to name a new focal point. It is a pity that so many tensions exist between the State’s will for sovereignty and the association’s need for recognition. MmeMbow, President of the CDPE, says she is sometimes wary of the associative sector, due to a certain number of “diversions from objectives”. She asks for a monthly report from each association. Indeed, all of the actors recognise the existence of a certain number of diversions since the issue of street children represents a wealth of external funding, generating opportunism and greed. MmeMbow acknowledges that some of them manage to function thanks to the implementation of participative and community funding, which she welcomes. In the direct interaction between field actors and State officials, it is difficult to build trust. But associations complain of a lack of autonomy: “The State is blocking us, for example, after two years of activity, we could claim NGO status by filing an application with the Department of Supervised Education and Social Protection (DSPE), by way of Open-Environment Educational Action (AEMO) or Community Development. But we are blocked because once we get the agreement to become an NGO we are autonomous”²⁶. And yet, the recognition of the effective work of associations, the granting of accreditations and the necessary authorisations for fieldwork would improve the effectiveness of the national strategy for child welfare. Indeed, Saint-Louis associations currently play a central mediating role between the streets and the State in specific cases of children in situations of extreme vulnerability. It is to them that community actors, populations, the police, and the children themselves turn to in times of need. The members of Saint-Louis civil society seem to want to tend towards a transparent and collective prevention of the risk of “diversions from objectives”, not to say “diversions of funds”, which undoubtedly exist. In the meantime, the lack of synergy deprives Saint-Louis of certain financial engagements. IssaKouyaté, from the association “Maison de la Gare”, speaks for example of an “aborted subsidy” concerning an amount of UNICEF funding, which could not be allocated in the absence of an agreement between the Prefect, Community Development and civil society. This funding, if correctly used, could nevertheless contribute to the ongoing construction of a successful humanitarian transition, and to a concerted plan for the removal of children from the street where the State services would coordinate, and genuinely support a local, dynamic and cleaned-up associative sector.

²⁶Interview with Lamine Tall, president of the AJE association.

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At present, our study seems to confirm, at the associative level, the results of Sadio Ba Gning and Kelly Poullet's work carried out last year with support from the French Red Cross Fund concerning NGOs, which is to say, the perception which Senegalese public authorities have of the role of civil society as being one of mere implementation agents for public policy. Conversely, for civil society, administrative delays and the financial difficulties of the State are seen as a brake on the development of practical action in the field on behalf of vulnerable children. Certain actors also criticise State officials for wanting to appropriate the activities developed by the associative sector for their own gain, for political publicity. Yet it would appear that civil society is relatively efficient in the field of humanitarian aid and is ready to carry the social changes which President MackySall is calling for. If the sector could be granted a certain legitimacy in this way, the State would be able to concentrate on its role of controlling and carrying out justice. Indeed, the implementation of a concerted plan for the withdrawal of children from the streets will have to address the effective condemnation by justice of the abuses brought to light regarding certain Koranic masters. And yet, in this Senegalese context, where peace (*diam*) takes precedence over justice and involves the dignity of each person (*jom*), the sanctions can only intervene in the context of prevention and community coordination borne by an innovative civil society and supported in this direction by the State and by international funding.

Conclusion

Talib children arriving in Saint-Louis told us in their interviews that they were placed in Saint-Louis because of their parents' will, and often specifically because of their fathers²⁷. They are often victims of an exodus which was not of their choosing, and which has separated them from their families. And yet, in the streets, they become actors of their urban journey and of their resilience. During their periods of begging, they experience the freedom of seeking out support where they see fit. One only has to observe them operating in groups in the streets of Saint-Louis in order to consider their capacity to seize the opportunities provided by the city (the market, humanitarian associations, tourists, community actors, public transport, charitable religious spaces, table football, etc) as an established fact. In parallel to the will to satisfy a religious ideal, the acquisition of this ability to adapt and fulfill themselves in spite of the hostility of the environment is perhaps part of what parents expect of their children. The application of the ethical principle of autonomy in humanitarian aid encourages field actors to listen to children's voices, however timid they may be. Hence, humanitarian transition invites talibé street children to make choices, and contrasts in this way with a tradition which makes of them recipients of the divine word and of salvational almsgiving for the donors and the community of believers. This tension between the universal movement of the world and the local figures of respect and success is not unique to Saint-Louis, but can be observed in a number of contexts where humanitarian reasoning comes up against a form of traditional education (De Suremain and, Bonnet 2011). This tension is not necessarily problematic, as long as it can be accompanied for humanitarian actors and researchers by the "permanent fluctuation between questions of methodology, epistemology and ethics", of which Laurent Vidal and Laetitia AtlaniDuault have highlighted the necessity (2009: 22). Indeed, whilst anthropologists and humanitarian actors can perceive this capacity of street children to be actors of their own destinies, the latter

²⁷One child even specified that his mother was opposed to the placement.

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nevertheless remain the most vulnerable members of society. And we cannot stop questioning the mechanical model of a coexistence between the capacity for action and the vulnerability of migrant children (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 2007, Razy and Rodet, 2011).

In practice, the talibé street children of Saint-Louis have a real and specific need for various forms of support: material, food-based, sanitary, educational, and affective. They also need the tradition of “good suffering” to be respected (KaeAmo, 2014), because it is what makes them men. Currently, in spite of the significant presence of associations operating in the city, it is impossible to give this specific attention to all the children in the streets, because there are too many of them. This is one of the reasons why the implementation of a plan for the removal of children from the streets is necessary, as decreed in 2016 by the President of Senegal. In order to be realistic and constructive, this plan must itself be subject to ethical and methodological reflection, which takes this mix of vulnerability and capacity for action into account. This is why, in my opinion, such a plan should not run the risk of causing an excessive reduction of children’s liberties, thereby effectively limiting their chances of being able to meet their own needs through their interaction with the world. It would be both counterproductive and dangerous. They would be tempted to run away again, to satisfy the need for freedom which the street alone affords them. And certain penniless Koranic masters might then be tempted to keep them locked up again.

The implementation of a necessary plan for the removal of children from the street, in the respect of the principles of autonomy and beneficence, therefore implies consensus-building at the local level. The starting point for this construction can be found at the level of children who are recipients of a well-founded humanitarian aid implanted in Saint-Louis. In this sense, the taking into consideration of these children and their vulnerabilities by community actors calls for a dialogue in each separate case, which could be led by associative actors. Based on cases identified by the associations, the follow-up should involve an educator from the social or humanitarian sectors, whose role would be to build coherence between a child and his family, a child and his teacher, a family and the teacher of their children, an association and a *daara*, a child and his godmother... This idea is for each party to take part in coming up with a solution, in which the children could find the means to satisfy their needs elsewhere than in the streets, in different places. The role of the new generation of humanitarian actors belonging to a relatively dynamic transnational civil society is to dare to initiate a dialogue between the different cultural positions, thereby allowing for ethical consensus-building between all parties. Whilst dynamism is not lacking, it is time which is in short supply: the possibility of another relationship to time, the availability of each party, and the time to listen. Hence, as suggested by the Saint-Louis academic FelwineSarr, the definition of social and humanitarian action in decolonised Africa fits into “the establishment of its own timeframe, which allows it to bring its own experiments to term. It is the time of the forge, necessary for the combustion and formation of metal alloys” (Sarr, 2016).

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