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Human rights and respect for culture. The Talibè history in Guinea Bissau from an ethnopsychosocial perspective

Diritti umani e rispetto della cultura. La storia dei Talibè in Guinea Bissau da una prospettiva etnopsicosociale

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Abstract

This article examines the complex phenomenon of Talibè children in the territory between Guinea Bissau and Senegal, trying to analyse it from the different perspectives of the various people involved. Many Guinean children are sent by their families to study in Koranic schools typically in Senegal. These schools are run by teachers called 'marabouts'. In these, the child often finds himself (the children sent to this schools are male) having to spend most of his days on the streets to give alms and beg in order to then be able to bring a certain amount of money to the teacher. The teaching of the Koran, when it occurs, is only for a few hours a day and is carried out in a repetitive and mnemonic way. The goal is to offer the reader a complete analysis of the phenomenon that starts from the voices of the various protagonists. We start from the general vision of the context and the phenomenon and then going into detail by telling some stories and giving voice to the protagonists involved. Then we try to summarize what emerged trying to offer some useful ideas for possible interventions, always starting from past experiences trying to open new horizons.[1]

Riassunto

Questo articolo esamina il complesso fenomeno dei bambini Talibè nel territorio tra Guinea Bissau e Senegal, cercando di analizzarlo dalle diverse prospettive dei vari soggetti coinvolti. Molti bambini guineani vengono mandati dalle loro famiglie a studiare in scuole coraniche tipicamente senegalesi. Queste scuole sono gestite da insegnanti chiamati "marabout". In queste scuole, il bambino si trova spesso (i bambini mandati in queste scuole sono maschi) a

[1] This article is the outcome of a research project that had as its first step the elaboration of a Master thesis in "Clinical Psychology for Individuals, Families and Organisations" at the University of Bergamo. The thesis was discussed in September 2022. The authors sincerely thank Prof. Gandolfi for her contribution.

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dover passare la maggior parte delle sue giornate per strada a chiedere l'elemosina per poter poi portare una certa somma di denaro all'insegnante. L'insegnamento del Corano, quando avviene, dura solo poche ore al giorno ed è svolto in modo ripetitivo e mnemonico. L'obiettivo è quello di offrire al lettore un'analisi completa del fenomeno che parta dalla voce dei vari protagonisti. Si parte dalla visione generale del contesto e del fenomeno per poi entrare nel dettaglio raccontando alcune storie e dando voce ai protagonisti coinvolti. Si cerca poi di sintetizzare quanto emerso cercando di offrire alcuni spunti utili per possibili interventi, sempre partendo dalle esperienze passate cercando di aprire nuovi orizzonti.

Introduction

Talibè children in Guinea Bissau is a complex phenomenon, with different actors involved. In the regions of Bafatà and Gabu in Guinea Bissau, many children are sent by their families to study in the Koranic schools in Senegal, typically in Dakar (Zoumanigui, 2016). The management of these schools is entrusted to the masters who are defined as Marabout (Perry, 2004). In these, the child often finds himself having to spend most of his days on the streets to give alms and beg in order to be able to bring a certain amount of money to the teacher; this does not always happen, there are also marabouts that create a caring and constructive environment in which young people can study Islam (Ouedrago, 2021). The teaching of the Koran, when it occurs, is only for a few hours a day and is carried out in a repetitive and mnemonic way. The reasons that push parents to entrust their child to these people are varied and involve the level of scarce opportunities in the Guinean territory, the lack of formal education system, the religious and economic level (Boutin, 2019). NGOs working on this phenomenon try to take children off the street and often their programs include the repatriation and return of the child to their families of origin (ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States, 2016). Children find themselves immersed in different social contexts that influence their development of values and identity. This phenomenon sees actors from different contexts intertwine, generating a complex social system which, like all social groups, influences the growth of children (Tharp, 2012).

Guinea Bissau is a nation with a complex recent history. There have been numerous coups d'état, often linked to the problem of drug trafficking (Embalò, 2012). Currently, therefore, Guinea Bissau is one of the poorest nations in the world with an economy strongly tied to agriculture (The World Bank Data, 2020).

Objectives and Methodology

The aim of the article is to offer the reader a description of the Talibè Children phenomenon from the voices of the various protagonists. The idea is to try to enter into the complexity of the issue by trying to describe it as accurately as possible, giving space to the various narrative perspectives in order to hypothesise what could be an appropriate intervention methodology for this situation.

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The study has a socio-anthropological orientation and it was made using mainly bibliographic sources combined with some information gathered in Guinea Bissau. One of the main limitations of the study is the fact that the authors, due to certain personal conditions and the language barrier, were not able to personally go into the streets to conduct the interviews and therefore used third-party intermediaries. The authors are not connected to any of the NGOs involved in this study. Several telematic meetings were held with people involved in the phenomenon. These were either social workers working for some NGOs or a person resident in Guinea Bissau but outside the NGOs. During these meetings, in addition to having these people describe the phenomenon, the authors instructed the social workers of the NGOs to collect material by means of interviews, explaining the mode and objective of these interviews. Following these meetings, free, non-grid-guided interviews were conducted where the main focus was to offer the interviewee a space to tell their story. The material was sent to the authors digitally via various platforms (email, wetransfer, whatsapp). This way of collecting the material generates the second limitation of the research: the information is obviously influenced by the way the different operators collected the material. The decision to use this dual mode of research, first bibliographic and then fieldwork, also stems from the analysis of some texts describing this phenomenon. In the different studies, we can find different perspectives and different narratives that generate different perceptions in the reader. On the one hand, we find NGO reports that are often described using terms related to the Western world that have the main purpose of raising awareness of the issue. On the other hand, there are research studies that start from the contextualisation of the problem and the voices of the protagonists. Sometimes the former take little account of the cultural context of reference while the latter sometimes seem to become the defenders of the practices established in Koranic schools (Giegas, 2021). This study therefore seeks to offer a description that takes both of these perspectives into account, trying to offer a contextualised look at the phenomenon without, however, justifying practices that violate children's rights.

Talibè children

We can define the phenomenon of Talibé children as a socio-cultural phenomenon intrinsically linked to religion. Currently the term is used to describe boys, typically under the age of 18 who live under the tutelage of a Marabout (Perry, 2004). This exerts a great influence on children and has a mandate to be the teacher of the Koran. Parents informally entrust their children to marabouts who should provide for the teaching of the Koran (Zoumanigui, 2016). Within many of these schools, children are often sent by the teacher to give alms but there are also school in which the Koran is actually taught. Confusion can arise because the term Talibè is often used to describe children who beg without distinguishing the complexity of the various contexts, without considering that not all children who beg are linked to a Koranic school (Macleod, 2023). These children typically have very little contact with their parents and spend many years away from their country of origin. Contact with the family are perceived as an obstacle to the master’s discipline (Baux & Lewandowski, 2006).

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For many parents it would be shameful for the child to return home without having finished school or without the permission of the marabout, this would cause a dishonour for the family (Zoumanigui, 2016). Most of the children who are sent to Senegal from Guinea Bissau have Fula origins, which are one of the two largest ethnic groups found in Guinea Bissau (IRIN News, 2007). There is no precise data that informs about the exact number of Guinean children sent to Senegal, HRW claims that between 20 and 40% of children begging in Senegalese streets are of Guinean origin (HRW - Human Right Watch, 2019). Before the arrival of Western settlers, especially in Senegal, Koranic schools were the only educational system, especially in rural areas (André & Demonsant, 2013). These are called "Dudal" in Guinea Bissau and "Daaras" in Senegal (Boiro, Einarsdottir, & Gunnlaugsson, 2021). The age of entry of children in these schools is very low, there are estimates that indicate that about 30% of children when they enter the daaras are less than 5 years old (UCW - UNICEF, 2008). Each school has about 20 children, mostly boys. Access to girls is not prohibited but despite this the majority of children remain male (Einarsdóttir, Boiro, Geirsson, & Gunnlaugsson, 2010). In this system no one can tell the marabout how to treat children.

The acquisition of values such as submission, obedience and respect are an integral part of the path to becoming a good Muslim. Begging is seen as part of the educational process as it could lead to the discovery of the virtues of patience, perseverance and humility (Auriol & Demonsant, 2012). The concept of almsgiving is an idea that is rooted within Islamic. Muhammad wrote that Islam is built on five factors that Sunni Muslims have represented in five pillars (Bausani, 1999). One of this is the *Zakat*: giving alms. This is a form of charity linked to the welfare of the community (Weiss, 2007).

However, there is another type of charity which is "Sarax": a voluntary and daily almsgiving made to the poor (D'Hondt & Vandewiele, 1984). These acts are perceived as essential to becoming "Good Muslims". Religion is central to making the decision to give alms (Zoumanigui, 2016). We could define these practices as 'Mental Colonisation' and hypothesise that these activities - although conceived as educational - play the role of reproducing a climate of circular male oppression and violence: many Talibés, staying at the Dara even afterwards, become collaborators in the process of perpetrating violence against children. In Guinea, however, there is a different conception of almsgiving. Many Guinean families do not look favourably on children begging on the streets. Begging is only justified for elderly people or people with disabilities who find themselves without any kind of support. However, there are some exceptions. In particular, some fathers argue that begging is a useful methodology for teaching students humility (Einarsdottir & Boiro, 2016). The adherence of families to a programme of oppression and abuse of their children must be framed in a systemic perspective in which the colonised assumption of the 'values' of colonialism renders the colonised powerless to turn back (Fanon, 2015).

The most significant colonial transition occurs when small segmental societies - whose clan possesses the largest systemic unity - are aggregated by colonial practices into true radial ethnicities (Okenque, 2014). There is a shift from the fragmentation of independent clans to mutually dependent group units. Colonialism imposes a sudden change in ontology, clan segmental fragmentation

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becomes radial paranoid delirium. It is possible to say that it is a condition of 'mental colonisation'. This process generally develops through three channels: the linguistic, the political and the cultural (Wiredu, 2009).

The actors involved and their voices

In order to describe a complex phenomenon like this we want to give space to different narratives from different people involved in this. Narrative practices establish connections between individuals and the cultural worlds to which they belong and, at the same time, open or close windows on the world and other worlds. From an anthropological perspective, transiting through small worlds and different stories can reveal how a particular culture is learned, played with, interpreted and transformed (Clemente , 1999). We will then give space to the voices of some parents, marabouts, NGO workers and children.

The family

Parents' stories are interesting because they offer different perspectives and motivations that lead to entrusting one's child to a marabout. The villages furthest from the cities in Guinea Bissau generally do not have schools, so children are forced to walk even a few hours a day to reach the nearest school so many children end up not attending formal Guinean school. A father says that he sent his son to a Koranic school "*with the aim of fighting ignorance within his own family*", he also feels "*proud and lucky to have a son who studies in Senegal*" (Einarsdottir & Boiro, 2016, p. 869). Another parent claims that "*We are farmers and herders, but we don't want our sons to be the same, That's what drives us to send them away*" (Peyton, 2019).

Families tend to diversify their children's educational paths. This implies that some are sent to formal schools (if possible), others to the Koranic ones and sometimes some remain in their villages of origin to work in the fields, do housework or if there is the possibility to live some form of apprenticeship (Thorsen, 2012). The selection criteria are various. Kielland and Gaye (2010) tell of how the choice takes place according to who is more obedient and at the same time less affectionate to parents than other children. One parent reports "*usually you send the one you trust the most, moreover, from that point he will be able to inherit from the family. Only those who finish the Koranic studies will inherit from the family*"[2]. Sometimes it is pragmatism that prevails. The choice can be sometimes linked only to the age of the child because the younger the child is, the more he is considered able to learn. A father reports that "*when you are older it is late and it is difficult to reach knowledge*"[3].

This ideology therefore explains to us why the age of entry in many Koranic schools is very low. Parental awareness of the living conditions of the Talibè children is also very varied. Knowledge and suffering are often seen as

[2] Testimony collected on May 12, 2022 by L., a Guinean social worker. This story was sent to me privately via online message a few days after it was recorded.
[3] Testimony gathered on March 22, 2022 through a brief online interview with a parent living in Bafatà who was in Bissau.

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inseparable: learning necessarily implies suffering. One parent reports "*you have to work hard to learn*", another says "*you can get money without suffering, for example by winning the lottery, but you will never be able to acquire knowledge without suffering*"[4]. However, suffering seems to be tolerated only if something positive is generated from it, such as knowledge of the Koran. A mother says that "*it is okay for the child to be hit if it helps him to understand the right thing to do*" (Einarsdottir & Boiro, 2016, p. 865)[5].

The testimonies are not all the same and many are also linked to the reputation of the marabout. A mother relates: "*My husband informed me that my son will go to Senegal. When the man makes a decision, the woman must accept... I am not happy because I did not know that my son, who was so young, was living in difficult conditions in Dakar*"[6]. A father, on the other hand, says: "*My intention was not to make him suffer in Senegal. The person to whom I entrusted my son often returned to Guinea Bissau and left my son with another Quranic teacher who beat him. When I asked him why he replied that he had his own field to cultivate. Today I try to educate other parents to keep their children in the village*"[7].

Often NGO support practices for Talibé children include the return home of children. Many parents who see their child may return home without having finished learning this as a shameful fact that it could affect the good reputation and honour of the entire family unit. Some NGOs organize return trips in stages where they are cared for before taking the children themselves to their villages of origin. However, some relatives describe part of this process as humiliating especially when the radio is used. One parent relates: "*When you hear these announcements on the radio you really hope it doesn't ask questions to hear the name of one of your children. In the end we don't do anything wrong, we just want to offer an opportunity to get to know our children*" (Boiro & Einarsdóttir, 2020, p. 9). Obviously not all parents have this strongly negative perception of NGOs, especially those who had less awareness of what their children go to live in the Koranic schools are more inclined towards NGOs.

The Marabouts

The marabout is more than a person who uses the Koran to live, to work. Marabouts tells in the various circumstances of life which verse of the Koran is more appropriate to recite, it can teach Islamic knowledge but at the same time it can take care of directing the Talibé on the right path. The marabout can become a clairvoyant, a warrior, a dream interpreter, a magician, a scientist, an

[4] Testimonies collected on May 14, 2022 by L., a Guinean social worker. This story was sent to me privately via online message a few days after it was recorded.

[5] Boiro Hamadou and Jónína Einarsdóttir are two professors and researchers of anthropology and sociology at the University of Iceland who have conducted several studies on the Koranic schools and on the Talibé children in Senegal and Guinea Bissau. Their work has been a very important contribution as it has analyzed this reality for several years, including those following the COVID 19 lockdown

[6] Testimony of a mother from the Gabu region recounted in a video sent to me privately on March 22, 2022 by L., an NGO worker.

[7] Testimony of a father from the Gabu region recounted in a video sent to me privately on March 22, 2022 by Laudolino, an NGO worker.

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intermediary between the way of men and the higher divine powers (Finco, 2020). Surely the vision of the marabouts is oriented towards a learning of the Koran which also passes through suffering as this helps the child to discover the value of humility.

A Guinean claims: "*Myself, I have my children in the Koranic schools there in Dakar to learn the Koran. A child has to suffer to have knowledge. I myself, like the others, studied in Senegal. We left the village to go to Senegal. If a child stays there for a year or two, and asks him if he wants to visit his parents: he says yes. Here's what the problem is. A year or two is nothing to keep learning. Knowledge is gold. And before you have, you have to suffer. Here we cultivate, trees are cut down. Sometimes there are worms that get into your ears in your nose. There is a lot of tiredness and a lot of work before you have enough rice to eat* "[8].

This story testifies to a series of interesting passages, the first is that often they themselves have undergone what teachers experience with children themselves and believe that knowledge and suffering are intrinsically linked. It also tells us how the process of acquiring knowledge is long and should not be interrupted prematurely. Since these figures are respected in the communities, we understand even better the speech that is made by parents when they feel ashamed in seeing their children earlier than expected at home.

Another teacher says: "*Their wish was for the child to learn all the Koran and return to the village or its neighbourhood with honour. The evil derives above all from the fact that the son has returned home as he could not bear his suffering*" (Boiro & Einarsdóttir, 2020, p. 9). It is also a question of honour and pride. Another Quranic teacher emphasizes this by saying that *"children who return to their village with knowledge of the Qur'an will become the pride of their parents and of their entire ethnic group. Those who refuse to endure suffering, on the other hand, will become nothing*" (Boiro & Einarsdóttir, 2020, p. 10). There is a certain coherence in the vision of the return home by parents and marabouts as on both sides a return without having learned the Koran is seen as a problem. An important aspect is that not all marabouts teach the Koran and take advantage of children by sending them begging on the streets almost all day. The point on almsgiving is a delicate aspect as this, by marabouts and families, is partly justified within the learning device we are analysing. This is considered "right" to teach humility and if it "leads to something good" while from our perspective as European men and women within a western culture it is never tolerable.

The NGO

The narration of this phenomenon by NGOs opens a different perspective. Starting from the terminology used by their narrative we can identify this change; marabouts and the people around them are often referred to as child traffickers. In the report "Trafficking in persons" (US Department of State, 2012) inherent to Guinea Bissau it is told how the parents of these children are circumvented by traffickers. NGO programs were born since the early 1990s when UNICEF has created special programs such as the "Reinstating the rights of the Talibes".

[8] Testimony of a chernos from the Bafatà region recounted in a video sent to me privately on April, 14 2022 by an NGO worker.

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Since then, various local and international NGOs have created different projects, always starting from the perspective of children's rights. Often these projects provide for the reintegration of the child into the families of origin as well as paths to raise awareness of the problem. As Perry (2004) points out, NGOs have had the merit of focusing well on the macro factors, such as poverty and population growth. Often these same organizations have failed to keep in mind the religious, spiritual and moral context.

We made an interview with Laudolino Carlos Medina[9], director of AMIC Associaçào dos Amigos da Criança (Children's Friends Association) to try to understand in which way the NGO operate in Guinea Bissau. The first reception facilities are created in collaboration with the Senegalese government. In these the child benefits from psychosocial support. Here an individual reintegration project is considered, discussed and defined with the young person in relation to his age and maturity. Before starting the return process, families are identified and an attempt is made to assess their ability to take care of their children again. Before starting repatriation, for children are guaranteed a medical check-up. Once back in Guinea, a small welcome ceremony is usually organized in Gabu. Following the ceremony, they always go through a court to sign a necessary legal act. The court is the guarantor and controls all phases of NGO work.

Laudolino in an interview with Mani Tese (2019) also explains how the perception of the return among the various inhabitants can vary, arguing: "*Each case is unique, some communities welcome them easily, other parents instead offer resistance*".

Laudolino also told us how the daily difficulties reported in the villages increases the risk of vulnerability of children, which increases the likelihood that they will be sent to Senegal. Given this problem, what "*we have therefore tried to create, together with the local people, alternatives to combat poverty and social hardship*". These forms of community support also help to reintegrate the children who return to the villages. A villager tells of a resource sharing project developed above all among the women of the village that helps young people to get educated: "*We, a group of women, have organized ourselves together…. we have gardens in our villages and we cultivate them. Each woman can earn from 25000 to 50000CFA (40 - 80 euros)…With the profits that each woman earns, she helps her family and the children. For example, I bought a bike for my daughter who studies far in Bambamdinka Hambalay*"[10].

The NGOs deal both with the identification phase of children and families, with their reunification but also with projects in the area to try to avoid that children are sent with marabouts and that those who return are welcomed in a positive way by the communities of origin.

However, NGOs often suffer from various criticisms, especially relating to the manner and style in which the identification and repatriation of children take place. The first step often criticized is the work that some NGOs do on the ground. Local communities often perceive these children as "captured" or "arrested" by some NGOs (Boiro & Einarsdóttir, 2020). In contrast the NGOs tell

[9] Interview conducted via video call on 23 March 2022.

[10] Testimony of a father from the Gabu region recounted in a video sent to me privately the 14March 2022 by Laudolino.

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of how the will of the child is fundamental in this repatriation process and therefore how they are protected at every stage (Laudolino, 2018).

The second criticism levelled at NGOs is linked to the way families are identified and located. This is complicated and when the family cannot be traced, traditional media channels (radio and television) are used to make public announcements with the names of the children. These are perceived as humiliating, as not only does the child return home without having completed his course in the Koranic school but also the whole family is humiliated with the spread of his name through the media.

The third criticism is inherent to the projects that are carried out after the repatriation. Returning children are called "*Ribatadu*" in Criolo. These are often seen as the ones who got caught, arrested by NGOs. In this way children encounter a very complicated situation, often being stigmatized, ostracized or accused of failure and being the shame of the family (Brunovsky & Surtees, 2013). Many relatives do not believe the stories of children who therefore suffer from mistrust and rejection even by their own families (Bearup, 2016). Although there are these critical issues that we have noted, it is important to emphasise that the work carried out by NGOs is often essential in terms of protecting and safeguarding the rights of children who often live in difficult conditions without having their rights recognised. We therefore believe it is important to open up reflections on how to intervene by making rights the foundation on which to try to develop any project.

The child

In this process, children are often the silent protagonists as they are the only ones who go through the whole story from the first to the last moment. The Guinean children who are entrusted to the Marabouts find themselves in a distant and different social context from the usual one. This is also evident on the linguistic level. They often come from rural villages in Guinea Bissau where Criolo or other local languages are generally spoken (and rarely Portuguese too). In Senegal, on the other hand, the most widely spoken language is Wolof and the colonial language is French. Furthermore the language used for teaching the verses of the Koran is Arabic. Children therefore not only find themselves immersed in a very different reality but also find themselves to face communication obstacles (UNICEF, 2015).

In this difficult social context there are different ways and reasons why the child return to his own community of origin. There are the children who, in agreement with the marabout and the families, return home during the agricultural season and then return to Senegal once it is over. Another children sometimes go directly to the centers in the hope of avoiding further abuse, other times they remain on the street until they meet a social worker to help them return home. One child who is returning home that describes well the process of entrusting the marabout and what life in a Koranic school can be like. This child, D., says: "*The Koranic teacher had told my father that I would not always ask for alms, that I would spend time learning the Koran. Since I arrived, every day, at 5 am we woke up to go begging until noon before returning home with the sum of 600*

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CFA (about 1 €*). Otherwise, we were beaten. In the afternoon we learned the Quran until 6pm and went out into the street again to return at night. Then we learned until 11pm and went to bed... In the Koranic school, my teacher brought another teacher. It was bad. If you didn't bring your payment, he hit you. Four people held you by the legs and arms and he hit you. Knowing that I was going to be beaten, I fled. Then Amic's operators found me at the seaside while we were taking a bath. When I grow up I want to become a journalist. I am happy and proud to be returning home. I am so happy. I am happy to see my father. Now I can't wait to see my mother and my brothers*"[11]. In this case the child was found by NGO workers while in other cases it is the children themselves who come to them. For example, M. says that "*I left the Koranic school because I paid 400CFA (0.60 €) every day. One day I arrived at the Koranic school without the 400CFA. The Koranic master struck me. This is why I came to the Empire des enfants, a welcome and accommodation center"[12].*

These two testimonies are aligned and tell of how often marabouts take advantage of the situation of children. Another child, on the other hand, tells how begging is an important aspect for one's health and that the marabout uses that money for their protection (Boiro, Einarsdottir, & Gunnlaugsson, 2021, p. 4).

The children's stories also offer us an interesting perspective on the return home. The first testimony is that of a ten-year-old boy who was repatriated from Senegal to Guinea Bissau in 2016. This child wanted to go home because "*I miss my parents, especially my mother"*. He escaped from the Koranic school and decided to hide from the marabout. The marabout called the family of origin to inform them of what happened. "*While I was hiding from the marabout, I met people from an association who asked me if I wanted to return to my country and I said yes. At that point they took me to one of their centers where there were other children like me... I just wanted to see my parents again"* (Boiro & Einarsdóttir, 2020, p. 6).

Two other children who had a desire to go home on their return journey, when asked what they expect, had the following dialogue:

Child I .: "*As soon as we arrive in our village I will go immediately to visit my parents and my neighbours, then I will change my clothes to go and play. Then later we will also help our parents in the fields*".

Child D.: "*As soon as I arrive, I will also say goodbye to my mom, my dad is dead. I will tell my mother that I no longer want to go back to the Koranic school but that I want to go to the real school*".

Child I .: *"I also want to go to school so when I grow up I can go to work. When I grow up I would like to do your job, to help other children".[13]*

A child recounts that one day he was begging in the streets when "*a car stopped and they asked me to get into this and in exchange they would give me*

[11] D. is a child of about 8 years old who lived in Senegal, testimony collected online in April 2022 through the mediation of Laudolino, president of Amic.

[12] M. is a child of about 7/8 years old that at the moment of the interview live inside a center, this testimony was collected online in April 2022 through the mediation of Laudolino, president of Amic.

[13] Interview conducted by a social worker of two Chile included in a video sent to me online in April 2022 by Laudolino.

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some money. I then chose to enter and found myself in a house with many other children like me. I stayed there one day and then they took me back to Guinea Bissau. However, I wish to return to Senegal to finish my Koranic studies" (Boiro & Einarsdóttir, 2020, p. 6).

The strong bond with the family of origin is also narrated by a 10-year-old boy who has been in Senegal for 6 years begging who says: *"I am very happy to be back in Guinea so that I don't have to beg. I am happy to be able to spend time with my family. Now I would like to study and stay healthy. I remember well the trip back to Guinea Bissau, it was very emotional because I felt that I would see my family again. Now I am very happy to be here with them and I hope to be able to do something for my country*" [14].

Furthermore, the repatriation process is not experienced in the same way by everyone, there are those who wanted to return, those who did not and felt cheated by NGO operators and those who use this mechanism to return only in the season in which there is work to be done in agricultural fields in Guinea Bissau.

The collection of these stories tells us about a complex and very diverse reality. Each story obviously has its own peculiarities, but all of them together describe to us what happens in a specific geographical area between Guinea Bissau and Senegal and how in this region the issue of Talibé children has a strong impact on communities and people's lives. The complexity of the phenomenon requires us to avoid simplifications and trivialisations, as each perspective analysed has provided us with a different interpretation of what is happening. These interpretations tell us how certain aspects, such as begging, must always be contextualised within the reference culture. This analysis opens up the delicate topic of the relationship between human rights and different cultures and social context. In this case we have told of abuses and mistreatments that appear unacceptable to us. In this reality, however, there are also aspects that can be perceived in a more controversial way, such as the theme of suffering as an important element in everyone's growth. As much as we believe that suffering should not be generated by the educator, however, we must also try to reflect on how this is actually part of the life of every person and every child and how it should not be perceived as a taboo element in the growth path of each one.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of Talibé children is complex, with many different faces and nuances but it is clear that these children find themselves living in a condition in which their fundamental rights are violated. With this article we intend to open reflections related to the world of psychosocial interventions. Each intervention must therefore have in mind the current situation in which this must take place and must try to give a voice to every person on the field. Each

[14] This testimony was collected online in April 2022 through the mediation of Laudolino, president of Amic.

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person lives constantly immersed in different social contexts, is strongly influenced by the spaces and times that surround him.

Every story that is told is placed in context, and the context itself changes when a story is told (Barbetta, Finco, & Rossi, 2018). Therefore, being able to create links with local people in order to co-design a new corporate model in which to try to minimize risk factors for children should be one of the pillars on which to build an intervention. Taking care of the context implies taking care of relationships. The relationship between people becomes the heart of any type of intervention. In addiction it is important to note that the suffering of others does not authorize anyone to project their expectations on that subject (Lizzola, 2008), but rather imposes on us even more empathic and listening skills which are the prerequisite for any form of relationship. Wanting to intervene implies knowing how to listen, knowing how to be there but letting it be, not being afraid of what cannot be foreseen but rather being open to the unpredictable (Gandolfi & Fogliata, 2017).

Only with these assumptions can one try to create relationships that respect and restore dignity to all the people involved. Children have seen their dignity violated more severely and significantly than family members and other stakeholders, and this should always be taken into account. The relationship is an essential element for the human being. Our whole life is influenced by the people we meet. Our identity is formed on the basis of the relationships that characterize our growth from the first years of life (Visani & Solfaroli Camillocci, 2006). I therefore believe that one of the goals that we must try to pursue is to try to create spaces-times in which each person is able to express themselves and in which the meeting of diversity is the foundation of the community journey. The relationships that develop between the protagonists of this phenomenon become a central element: children, families, Marabout, anthropologists, psychologists and social workers. It is a question of developing interventions "designed with" and not "designed for" them; this implies making children protagonists, with their dreams and expectations.

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