

Child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau

An explorative study

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Abbreviations

AMIC	Amigos de Criança (“Friends of Children”), an NGO based in Guinea-Bissau
AMWCY	African Movement of Working Children and Youth
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRCOPAC	Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict
CRCOPSC	Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
ENDA-TM	Environment and Development Action in the Third World, an international non-profit organization based in Dakar, Senegal
FGM	Female genital mutilation (Kriol: <i>fanado</i>)
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-IPEC	ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
IMC	Institute for Women and Children, governmental institute in Guinea-Bissau
INEP	Institute of Research and Studies, Guinea-Bissau
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
UN Trafficking Protocol	United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary

Adolescent	Person between 10 and 17 years of age
Almudu	Fula word for someone who is seeking knowledge. It is synonymous with the word <i>talibé</i> in Wolof.
Alouwal	Fula word for Koranic tables
Baloba	Kapok tree where an ancestral spirit has settled
Barké	Fula word for the Arabic word <i>baraka</i> that signifies benediction. In Fula, the perception is that person who has <i>barké</i> will have success in everything he does.
Bayda	Fula word for the young <i>almudu</i> who has not yet finished his studies to recite the Koran. <i>Bayda</i> participate in begging.
Child	Article 1 of the CRC: “For the purpose of this present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (see Hodgkin and Newell, 2007: 1-15).
Clin-clin	Boys from Guinea who work as shoe-shiners in Guinea-Bissau
Dua	Fula word for benediction
Dua alouwal	Important ceremony organized for children who have finished learning the Koran
Dudal	Fula word (in plural <i>Dudé</i>) for a traditional Koranic school, <i>madilis</i> , where children sit around the fire and recite the Koran
Fakhman	Wolof word for a group of children and adolescents who live on the streets in Senegal. They have broken off from their families, <i>marabouts</i> , schools and society in general.
Madilis	System of traditional Koranic teaching. In Guinea-Bissau the <i>marabouts</i> are the teachers and sessions are conducted in the open air with Koranic tablets.
Madrassa	School where children learn the Koran, Arabic and other subjects, for example, calculus and history
Marabout	Islamic religious leader and teacher
Sanda	Fula word for older <i>almudu</i> who have finished learning to recite the Koran and continue their studies in more depth. <i>Sanda</i> do not beg.
Talibé	Wolof word of Arabic origin, which refers to a student of the Koran, or someone who is seeking knowledge (see <i>almudu</i>)
Topinéde	Fula word for the ceremony organized for children when they start learning the Koran.
Trafficker	Person who engages in trafficking in persons (as defined by the UN Trafficking Protocol)

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Executive summary

The present study on child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau has been carried out at the request of UNICEF Iceland and UNICEF Guinea-Bissau. The aim is to describe the occurrences of and to identify determinants for child trafficking within Guinea-Bissau and across the borders to neighbouring countries. A further aim is to analyse the scope of the problem in the different regions and ethnic groups in the country, and the consequences for the children involved. Proposals and strategic approaches for the prevention of child trafficking are also suggested, in particular regarding family reunification of repatriated children.

The research team aimed to highlight customs and practices that negatively impact Bissau-Guinean children and that might be referred to as trafficking. In particular, they focused on the situation of boys, called *almudus* in Fula and *talibés* in Wolof, who can be found begging on the streets of Dakar, the capital of Senegal, and other larger towns in the country. These boys are Islamic students who study the Koran and beg on behalf of their teachers, called *marabouts*. International organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal classify the phenomenon as child trafficking. To curb the movement of such children, anti-trafficking activities such as educating policemen and border police have been implemented, as well as repatriating Bissau-Guinean children found begging in Senegal.

The study is based on traditional anthropological fieldwork methodology, albeit over a shorter timeframe. In July 2009, the research team visited all the regions of Guinea-Bissau, except the Bijagós Islands, which were excluded for logistical reasons. Thereafter, in August 2009, one member of the team (HB) visited the neighbouring countries, Senegal and the Gambia, and followed up some of the information gained during the first phase of research. The results of the study are based on interviews with several hundred people, either individually, in smaller groups, or in community meetings. The interviewees included local officials, religious leaders, religious organizations, the police, judges, health professionals, teachers, parents, former and repatriated *talibés/almudus* and *clin-clin* boys (shoe-shiners from Guinea), as well as representatives of the NGOs and institutions working with the type of children that are the subject of the present study. The interviews were done in Kriol, spoken by all the investigators, as well as in Mandinga, Fula and Wolof, spoken by one of the researchers (HB). The research team met in Iceland in December 2009 for further analysis of the data and writing up of the report.

During the study, various practices were exposed that may threaten children's rights and risk the health and well-being of children, irrespective of ethnic background. Marriage under the age of 14 years for girls and forced marriage is forbidden by law in Guinea-Bissau. This law is broken among all ethnic groups in the country. The custom of Balanta women to foster their brother's daughters to later become their co-wives is widespread. Balanta girls from Guinea-Bissau also frequently stay with relatives in Guinea-Bissau and in the neighbouring countries, where they often are engaged in domestic work, before at times being forced into an arranged marriage. However, there is evidence that girls increasingly reject early and/or forced marriages, and run away or seek help from the judicial system.

Children and adolescents from all ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau are engaged in work that contributes to the household economy. For example, Felupe girls are engaged in domestic work from an early age, most of the time within the family, both in Guinea-Bissau and abroad. Their income goes towards their future marriage and to helping their families in the home village. In the Gambia and Senegal, Papel boys, usually over the age of ten, can be found working as assistants to professional weavers. The weavers are most often relatives of the boys, and many stay abroad only during the dry season. If successful, these boys will learn how to weave, which will later allow them to earn a living. We found evidence of Papel boys begging for food in Dakar on behalf of their masters in exceptional situations, but there are no reports of repatriated Papel boys.

Fosterage is common among all ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau. The mother's need for help, traditions and divorce are likely to be the most common reasons for the practice. People are aware that fostered children may be badly treated and discriminated against. Yet, a study in Guinea-Bissau has found few indications of such treatment among motherless children. It revealed few differences between motherless children and the control group of children in terms of the nutrition, use of health care services, school attendance, quality of housing and clothing.

Muslim parents attribute great importance to religious education far away from home, which is an important reason for sending abroad children who are considered intelligent and strong enough for such studies. The parents' obligation to give their children such an education was regarded as critical for the parents' afterlife and their children's future as respected community members. The Mandinga, Nalu, Biafada and Balanta Mané *almudus* do not generally beg during their studies. They mostly study in the Gambia, where begging is forbidden and the ban enforced. However, when studying in Senegal, where begging is common, they also do not beg but may be engaged in agricultural work for their *marabout*, during the cotton and peanut harvest, for example. Compared with the Fula, Mandinga and Nalu boys leave their home at a later age; one reason is that these ethnic groups have preserved their traditional religious sites in the form of *madilis* where students study the Koran from wooden tablets.

Among the *almudus* living in Senegal, Fula children are by far the most numerous and visible. There is evidence that the reason for the high number of Fula *almudus* begging in Senegal is due in part to an internal conflict between the two main Fula groups in Guinea-Bissau, the Futa Fula and the Fula of Guinea-Bissau. The Futa Fula are historically the religious leaders in their communities. However, in recent years, an increasing number of the Fula of Guinea-Bissau who have attended Koranic education in the Futa Tooro area in Senegal, where begging is practised, have begun taking on the role of *marabouts* in their communities. Villagers in Guinea-Bissau are not accustomed of giving charity to beggars; thus these new *marabouts* take the *almudus* to Senegal where they can sustain their schools through begging.

The practice of sending children to Senegal and the Gambia for religious education is based on religious and cultural values as well as historical factors. One key determinant for the extent of the practice is the general poor socio-economic situation of Guinea-Bissau and its political instability. The current situation forces people to seek their own solutions to help themselves and their children. Another important determinant is the precarious and weak official educational system in the country. The lack of public schools and the low operating level of those that do exist are felt everywhere. People complain they have no other solutions than to seek education for their children elsewhere in order to improve their current conditions and future prospects.

The experience of religious students in Senegal is claimed to have both positive and negative aspects. Parents send their children away with their best interests in mind, wanting them to return home and become respected members of the community. They accept suffering as part of acquiring knowledge, while begging is a means to finance their studies. Furthermore, former *almudus* have reported the benefits of learning other languages and culture. In contrast, some interviewees maintained that children who beg extensively during their time as *almudus* may return without the religious knowledge they were expected to acquire and without any professional training or knowledge of agricultural work. Consequently, they may risk ending up unemployed in smaller towns or in the capital, Bissau.

There is evidence that a considerable number of Bissau-Guinean children live on the streets of Dakar and other large towns in Senegal. Most of them have left their *marabouts*. They live in a vulnerable situation and are denied their human rights, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In addition, their physical health and psychological and mental well-being are at risk. Living on the streets they are exposed to criminality, sexual abuse and maltreatment, in addition to infectious diseases. Among this group of children, the plight of Bissau-Guinean *fakhman*, street children in Senegal, is probably the worst and their situation requires special consideration and an appropriate response.

Many Muslims in Guinea-Bissau, particularly the Fula, feel they are stigmatized in the ongoing discussion of child trafficking. Parents deny they are engaged in such practices. Their children are following religious studies abroad, and some parents are even in regular contact with them by telephone. The practice of repatriating *almudus* fuels the feeling of stigmatization still further. In addition to the shame of having one's child repatriated, parents are forced to sign a contract that criminalizes them in case their child returns to Senegal, something that appears to occur frequently. Furthermore, there is evidence that children are repatriated against their will. Repatriated children who return to Dakar or other large towns in Senegal do not normally return to their *marabout*, but risk instead ending up as *fakhman*.

There is a profound conflict and lack of trust between the *marabouts* and parents on one hand, and on the other, the international community and NGOs that are trying to "save" their children from the very situation the parents take pride in. Many Fula even claim that NGOs are using their children as a pretext to get funding from the international community, and at times they suspect their motive is to convert them to Christianity. Parents and *marabouts* consequently argue that they themselves should be given the opportunity to resolve the issue within their own ranks, instead of relying on people from outside.

Throughout our research, trafficking was repeatedly described as a "heavy" word. There are reasons to believe that the application of the concept *tráfico da criança* in Guinea-Bissau is not conducive to creating a constructive dialogue and mutual understanding among those involved. Most interviewees do not consider the cultural practices described in this report or the habit of sending *almudus* abroad as trafficking. The term trafficking was associated with drugs trafficking, and the communities involved found it outrageous to equate their sending children to study abroad with drugs trafficking. However, even while denouncing the concept *tráfico da criança*, many respondents voiced concerns about the plight of the children, and at times recognized that individuals with dubious motives might have infiltrated the Islamic religious educational system.

Many preventive measures were proposed by those interviewed, such as improving the public education system; building and supporting *madrassa* schools; educating the public, the police and border guards about situations that harm children and contravene the CRC; registering children; adopting and implementing relevant laws; establishing social policy; strengthening Amigos de Criança (AMIC – an NGO that works for children's rights in Guinea-Bissau); and creating a specialized centre for repatriated children. Finally, it was also suggested that NGOs and international organizations reconsider the use of the term trafficking in this context.

The authors of the report also propose several preventive measures, including activities suggested by our informants, as well as anti-trafficking activities already being implemented by UNICEF and other actors. Some of these activities should be strengthened, while others may need revision. The measures proposed should be discussed and further refined in collaboration with local stakeholders. The measures are divided into three categories: prevention, early intervention and response.

The first category, preventive measures, aims to stop trafficking or the transfer of children before they are recruited. They include defining trafficking in the local context, a crucial step in opening up dialogue between local populations and relevant child protection organizations; in its current use, the term trafficking risks blaming parents and victims. Information on the negative aspects of the life of children in Senegal is likely to be effective if delivered by actors whose motives cannot be questioned. Support for the local *marabout* system is needed in order to offer an alternative education to that in Senegal. Without improved educational alternatives in the villages, children will continue to leave for education or work.

The second category of measures, early intervention, targets children who are already victims or in the process of recruitment or living away from home under unacceptable conditions. They include activities such as enforcing border controls and revising repatriation procedures. In line with the policy adopted by IOM and UNICEF, the repatriation of children should be voluntary. Practices that contribute to shame and humiliation for children and

parents should be revised. Constructive approaches that discourage repatriated *almudus* from returning abroad to a life on the streets are sorely needed and should include concrete solutions for education.

The third category of measures provides a well-coordinated response to children at most risk and in the most vulnerable situations. Special attention should be given to Bissau-Guinean *fakhman* in Dakar and options for repatriating these children. In this situation, collaborating with former *almudus* or *fakhman* and drawing on their experience of the special needs of children living on the street is a critical factor in ensuring the success of the planning and implementation of activities. A specialized centre is needed to address the psychological and mental health and the well-being of the worst affected children. In addition, we propose that more research is needed on the current situation of repatriated children, and in particular how it appears that the best intentions of repatriation may in fact make the situation worse for some of the children involved.

Finally, the system from prevention through early intervention and response needs to be seen in the context of a comprehensive child protection system, not only services focused on trafficking and costly repatriation. This report proposes that IMC and AMIC should continue to receive support from UNICEF for their child protection activities, and that their capacity should be strengthened to address the full spectrum of child protection more effectively.

Introduction

The aim of the research presented in this report is to investigate child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. Child trafficking is recognized as a worldwide practice and a matter of concern. It is frequently referred to as a form of modern-day slavery and attracts attention among the general public, media, NGOs and governments. Africa, and in particular West Africa, is no exception. High numbers of adolescents and children migrate within the western part of the continent looking for a better life. Most of them appear to leave home voluntarily to seek work on a seasonal basis, while some leave either for a long-term stay or aim to migrate permanently (De Lange, 2007; Hashim, 2006). It is often claimed that these children are in a vulnerable position and risk becoming victims of abuse or exploitation, or forced to work in a dangerous and unhealthy environment. Many of these situations have by the International Labour Organization (ILO) been defined as the worst forms of child labour or trafficking (Dottridge, 2008). In addition, fosterage practices, religious learning, and marriage customs in Africa have been implicated in situations defined as child trafficking (Hashim, 2006; Surtees, 2005).

There are international legal frameworks and conventions to protect children from the worst forms of labour and trafficking, as well as to enhance their rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the UN Trafficking Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (also referred to as the Palermo Protocol), the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (and recommendation 190), the Optional Protocol to the CRC (on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRCOPAC) and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRCOPSC)), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (ILO Convention 105) and the Forced Labour Convention (ILO Convention 29) all aim to protect children from all kinds of abuse and exploitation (Handbook for action-oriented research, 2002: 9). This legal framework has put the responsibility on national governments of states to make serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons. This is to be achieved by ratifying laws or taking any legal action or policy measures in the country to prohibit severe forms of trafficking in persons and to punish such acts. Consequently, many governments have put in place new legislation to prosecute traffickers; and various categories of NGOs have organized and coordinated action plans, and rescued trafficked children with the establishment of open shelters and centres for victims (United States Department of Labor, 2009).

Table 1 Definition of human trafficking based on the UN Trafficking Protocol, simplified by the Solidarity Center, Washington, DC

Human trafficking is:

Process	+	Way/Means	+	Goal
Recruitment or Transportation or Transferring or Harboring or Receiving	A N D	Threat or Coercion or Abduction or Fraud or Deceit or Deception or Abuse of power	A N D	Prostitution or Pornography or Violence/ Sexual exploitation or Forced labor or Involuntary servitude or Debt bondage (with unfair wages) or Slavery/ Similar practices

Despite the vast international legal framework and conventions, identifying trafficking is not always easy and straightforward. The Solidarity Center, a U.S. based NGO¹ whose aim is to promote workers' rights worldwide, has simplified the definition found in the UN Trafficking Protocol in a charter, which can be used to help assess individual cases to determine whether or not they can be classified as trafficking (see Table 1).

For adults, a case of suspected trafficking must have at least one condition from each of the columns in Table 1 to be considered as trafficking. On the other hand, in cases of suspected child trafficking, the central column, "way/means," is not included because consent is irrelevant regard-

¹ See <http://www.solidaritycenter.org/index.asp>

ing children (United States Department of State, 2008: 290). According to the UN Trafficking Protocol, Article 3, the forms of exploitation associated with human trafficking include “at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (UN, 2000). Dottridge notes that the definition of trafficking in the Protocol “is wide reaching when it comes to children, implying that all cases in which children are recruited and moved away from home so that they can be exploited are cases of trafficking” (2004: 42). He further points out that the word “exploitation” does not refer to the Marxist sense of an employer profiting from their workers; rather it refers “to situations that are prohibited as an abuse of human rights” (2004: 43).

Working in the field of child trafficking and carrying out research into the phenomenon is a challenge (Goździak, 2008). Trafficking is a complex, underground, illegal activity that changes rapidly. It is also difficult to estimate the causes, scale and consequences of trafficking. Part of the reason is the “hidden” nature of the phenomenon, but also the inconsistent definition of what counts as trafficking. For example, some include almost all cases of children who work at a young age, while others tend to restrict the definition to include only victims of sexual exploitation (Dottridge, 2008).

Statistics are often unavailable and are at times contradictory. Obviously, the wider the definition used, the higher the numbers of children who are involved in trafficking. Some estimate that up to 1.2 million children are globally trafficked every year.² Although statistics on trafficking are important for policy-making, low reliability is a concern, and statistics are frequently based on estimates without adequate explanation of how the figures presented were calculated (Kangaspunta, 2007). In an article in *The Lancet*, Loff and Sanghera (2004) maintain that, despite attempts to clarify the concept of child trafficking, there is ample space for interpretation and disagreement when it comes to classifying a particular case. Therefore, the difficulty in finding accurate data on trafficking should not be a surprise, as “such data, as exist, are often contaminated with ideological and moral bias” (2004: 566). Kangaspunta (2007) and Loff and Sanghera (2004) find it problematic that inaccurate data is used to raise funds for advocacy and research on trafficking.

Guinea-Bissau has responded to increased concerns about trafficking of children in the country. The government ratified the CRC in 1990, the Palermo Protocol in 2007 and the ILO Convention 182 relating to child labour in 2008. However, the government has not adopted ILO Convention 138, CRCOPAC, CRCOPSC and is not a participating country in the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) (U.S. Department of State, 2009a). According to the Bissau-Guinean law, the minimum age for employment is fourteen years, and the minimum age for heavy or dangerous labour is eighteen years. Forced child labour and prostitution are illegal. However, violations have not been prosecuted in courts, and there is limited awareness about the laws (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009: 96-97).

Trafficking offences can be prosecuted in Guinea-Bissau by referring to laws against kidnapping and the removal of minors, sexual exploitation and abuse; imprisonment in such cases can be from 2-10 years. Parents who collaborate with traffickers can also be prosecuted. Guinea-Bissau has adopted the Multilateral Cooperative Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the Joint Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in West and Central African Regions. Cases of suspected trafficking should be investigated and offenders prosecuted and victims should be rehabilitated and reintegrated. Suspected child traffickers have been arrested and parents suspected of collaboration with traffickers have been investigated; but not a single case of prosecution has yet appeared. Certain factors contribute to this outcome, such as limited resources to patrol the borders, lack of prisons, and irregular salaries for the police and border guards that may foster a culture of bribery. However, the police actively refer children to a shelter for victims managed by a local NGO that receives approximately USD16 000 per year from the Guinea-Bissau Government (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009: 96-97).

² See http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_exploitation.html

The U.S. Government Trafficking in Persons Report 2009 summarizes the situation of the country as follows:

Guinea-Bissau is a source country for children trafficked to other West African countries and within the country for forced begging, forced agricultural labour, and commercial sexual exploitation. The majority of victims are boys who are religious students, called *talibé*, who are trafficked by religious instructors called *marabouts* to other West African countries, primarily Senegal, for forced begging. The eastern cities of Bafatá and Gabú are key source areas for *talibé*, and the most frequented route to Senegal is overland via the porous border, especially near the town of Pirada. A 2008 study by the African Center for the Advanced Studies in Management found that 30 percent of children forced to beg in Dakar were from Guinea-Bissau. Deceived into believing that their children will receive a religious education, parents often agree to send their child away with *marabouts*. Instead, the instructors force the children to beg daily for up to twelve hours in urban centers and physically abuse them if they fail to collect a certain quota of money. Bissau-Guinean boys are also trafficked to Senegal for forced labor in cotton fields. NGOs report that Bissau-Guinean girls who perform domestic work within the country and in Senegal may be victims of trafficking, while girls reportedly are trafficked to Senegal for forced domestic labor. Within Guinea-Bissau, girls are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in small bars and restaurants. UNICEF estimates that 200 Bissau-Guinean children are trafficked each month. NGOs report that the large population of children from Guinea-Conakry engaged in street vending and shoe shining in Guinea-Bissau may indicate that Guinea-Bissau is a destination country for trafficking victims from Guinea. (U.S. Department of State, 2009a: 148)

In the following pages, we will describe our findings on the issues raised in this summary and other aspects related to child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, with particular attention given to the viewpoint of the population involved.



Background and methodology

In the spring of 2009, the offices of UNICEF Iceland and UNICEF Guinea-Bissau decided to collaborate on a study to analyse the current situation of child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. After agreements on the Terms of Reference, two researchers were recruited by the Iceland office, i.e., Dr Jónína Einarsdóttir, professor of anthropology at the University of Iceland (team leader) and Dr Geir Gunnlaugsson, a paediatrician and professor of public health at Reykjavík University. They recruited Mr Gunnlaugur Geirsson, B.A. in law and M.A. student, as a research assistant. One researcher was recruited by the UNICEF Guinea-Bissau office, Mr Hamadou Boiro, anthropologist and researcher at the National Institute for Studies and Research (INEP) in Bissau.

The study is based on traditional anthropological fieldwork methodology, albeit over a shorter timeframe. Throughout the preparations and fieldwork, due attention was given to the Handbook for Action-Oriented Research on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Including Trafficking in Children (Regional Working Group on Child Labour in Asia, 2002). The aim of this explorative study is to throw light on the situation of trafficking of Bissau-Guinean children. The aim is not to measure the scale of trafficking, although our results might be used as a guideline for an educated guess. With more or less formal interviews and encounters with local populations, religious leaders and government employees, we aim to present their varied views and experiences on the issue under study. Thereafter, through qualitative analysis of our data, we strive to understand the determinants and consequences of trafficking of Bissau-Guinean children, and to produce relevant proposals with the best interests of children in mind.

Timeframe

In June 2009, secondary and background material for the study was collected and analysed in Iceland. The Iceland team stayed in Dakar June 23-25, 2009, and visited the UNICEF regional office and a few NGOs working in Dakar. In the first week of July, the research team met in the UNICEF Guinea-Bissau office, and the work schedule and approach was set up and agreed upon by the research team and the office.

The research was conducted in three distinct phases. The first phase was conducted in July 2009. It was partly exploratory in nature, focusing on eventual trafficking of Bissau-Guinean children, and partly a study of Bissau-Guinean children participating in Koranic studies. In this phase we aimed to identify determinants of trafficking, e.g., aspects that relate to religion, culture, socio-economic situation and the educational system. We also identified the NGOs that are implicated in working to combat child trafficking. Finally, we attempted to explore different situations of children that are susceptible to becoming victims of trafficking. During this phase of the study, the research team drove more than 2 500 km in different regions of Guinea-Bissau. At the end of this phase of the study, preliminary findings were presented to and discussed with UNICEF Guinea-Bissau staff.

Preliminary results indicated that it would be valuable to conduct further fieldwork in the Gambia and Senegal, in order to improve understanding of the situation of Bissau-Guinean children there. In addition, there was evidence that the repatriation of *almudus* from Senegal was a focus of conflict within Guinea-Bissau. For example, we heard accusations of children being manipulated to give up their religious studies abroad and later returned home against their and their parents' wishes. Further research in Bafatá region was proposed, as well as an examination of the procedures for identification and repatriation of children to Guinea-Bissau.

In response to the above, the second phase of the research was conducted by one of the researchers (HB) in August 6-22, 2009. During this time period Bafatá region and a number of places in the Gambia and Senegal were visited. In this second phase we aimed to investigate

some of the aspects examined in the first phase of the study, including the severe conflicts around the issue of trafficking in Bafatá region.

The third phase of the study was conducted in Reykjavík, Iceland, in the period December 4-26, 2009. During the time in Reykjavík, the research team discussed and worked through the data and prepared the first draft of the report. On December 21, 2009, the research team presented preliminary results to UNICEF Iceland staff at a meeting that was open to the general public. Later, on January 21, 2010, a draft of the report was presented to UNICEF Iceland and UNICEF Bissau. In this published report, comments given by many people in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal have been given due consideration, and the report has been revised accordingly, and edited regarding language.

Settings

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau covers 36 125 km² on the west coast of Africa on a latitude of 12° North. To the north are Senegal and the Gambia, while in the south it shares a border with Guinea. River estuaries intersect the coastal plain while the eastern part of the country is more arid and slightly hilly. The climate is hot and humid with one rainy season from May through October. The socio-economic situation of Guinea-Bissau is characterized by extremely low national income and political instability, and the country belongs to a group of countries classified by international organizations as a fragile state.³



Figure 1 - Map of Guinea-Bissau

Source: UN Cartographic Section. See <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/guinea-bissau-administrative-map.htm>

³ See Einarsdóttir (2007), Vigh (2006), Temudo (2008) and World Bank (2006; 2008).

The estimated population of Guinea-Bissau in 2009 is 1.5 million. About 40-45 percent of the population is Muslim (Fula, Mandinga, Nalu and Biafada), 5-10 percent is Christian and the remaining population adheres to African religious beliefs (animists) (e.g., Balanta, Papel, Manjaco, Mancanha, Felupe and Bijagós).⁴ Each ethnic group has its own language or dialect. Portuguese is the official language, spoken by only a minority of the population, while Kriol has in recent years increasingly taken over as the lingua franca. All nine regions of Guinea-Bissau, including the capital area Bissau, are covered in the present study, with the exception of the Bolama-Bijagós Islands, which were excluded for logistical reasons.

Bissau capital area: The capital Bissau is the administrative and economic centre of the country, with various ministerial and administrative services. Various NGOs, institutes, programme offices of the United Nations and other international donors are situated in the capital. Bissau is a multicultural melting point with all the different ethnic groups represented. In Bissau, we interviewed representatives of a number of NGOs and associations, and included the *clin-clin* boys from Guinea, who are frequently seen on the streets of Bissau offering their services as shoe-shiners.



Bafatá region: The main ethnic groups are the Mandinga and Fula. Both groups practice Islam and most are engaged in agricultural work and trade. The research team visited several places in the Bafatá region, including the administrative centre Bafatá where the SOS Talibé has its centre of activities. Four villages with residents of Fula and Mandinga ethnic groups were visited. These villages represent a population with many Fula children who live as *almudus* in Senegal, returned *almudus*, as well as traditionally influential Mandinga *marabout* villages with many Koranic schools.

Biombo region: The region is mainly populated by the Papel, who engage mostly in agriculture, particularly the seasonal cashew production, and fishing, as well as trade and textile production. Most Papel practice African religion, and *balobas*, sacred places for religious

⁴ See U.S. Department of State (2009b).

practices, are widely found in the area served by *katandeiros*, or young girls. Many weavers migrate seasonally to Senegal and the Gambia together with their assistant boys where they practice their art and sell their products. The study team visited the administrative centre Quinhamel and a few villages in the Quinhamel sector.

Cacheu region: The region is mainly populated by the Manjaco, Mancanha and Felupe. Most are involved in agriculture and trade. The Manjaco have a long history of migration, and a particular group of Manjaco women is engaged in prostitution. The Felupe are known for their tradition of involving young girls in domestic work in-and-out of country. The study team visited the administrative centre, Canchungo, and São Domingo, a town near the border with Senegal. In addition we visited a village that receives children who have run away from their *marabouts* in Senegal, and the Muslim Manjaco community in the region.

Gabú region: As in Bafata region, the main ethnic groups are the Mandinga and Fula. The research team visited several places in the Gabú region, including the administrative centre Gabú and three villages. One of these villages is mostly inhabited by the Futa Fula and it is a *marabout* village with a long tradition of teaching the Koran to Bissau-Guinean children as well as children from neighbouring countries. Another two villages are inhabited by Fula from Gabú and have a considerable number of repatriated *almudus*, some of whom have returned to Senegal.

Oio region: This is a multiethnic region with a high representation of Mandinga. Most inhabitants depend on agriculture and trade. In the Oio region, the research team visited the town of Farim and a respected Mandinga *marabout* village. It is an ancient village from which many *almudu* children originate. The people of the Mandinga ethnic group predominantly inhabit the areas visited by the research team.

Quinara region: The population is multiethnic with Biafada and Balanta being the main ethnic groups. While the Biafada are Muslims, the Balanta adhere to African religion. The inhab-



itants are primarily engaged in agriculture, principally rice and palm oil cultivation, but also seasonal cashew production. The research team visited Buba, the administrative centre and the NGO Rede Ajuda. The situation of Balanta children was a particular subject of interest for the team. We visited a Fula village that has many *almudus* studying in Senegal, as well as others who have returned.

Tombali region: The Balanta are the most numerous ethnic group in the region, together with the Nalu, who recently converted to Islam. The team visited the administrative centre Catio, as well as two Nalu villages. A significant number of child *almudus* who live in the Gambia and the Casamance, Senegal, originate from these villages. We also visited a Balanta village and studied the situation of their children in the area.

Senegal

Kolda: The city is the administrative centre of a region with the same name that borders Guinea-Bissau. There are many Koranic schools in Kolda run by Bissau-Guinean *marabouts* with *almudu* children from their village of origin. The number of Balanta children is also considerable. Kolda is an important crossroads for the movement of Bissau-Guinean *almudu* children, and their sheer number poses a particular challenge to the local authorities. In Kolda, the NGO La Lumière runs a centre for the transit of children on their way back to Guinea-Bissau, and it collaborates with the NGO SOS Talibé in Bafatá. In Kolda there are several other NGOs that work with *almudu* children, e.g., Project Vitalis (Vie des talibés au Senegal) from the Irish branch of the World Vision, and Medina Gounass, a Senegalese NGO.

Mbour: Mbour, in the Thiès region, is a fishing town and attracts many tourists. We anticipated observing Mandinga *almudus* claiming to work for their *marabout* within the fishing sector. However, we found only older Bissau-Guinean Mandinga people who are not the focus of this study. In contrast, we found many Fula *almudu* children begging on the streets of Mbour.

Dakar: Dakar is the capital of Senegal. It is the principal place for *almudu* children coming from within and out-of-country, as well as other children who are in a situation of trafficking. We aimed to learn how Bissau-Guinean children are identified on the streets and how they are sent back to their home country. In the city there are many NGOs, different associations and organizations that are involved in the prevention of child trafficking. In addition, Bissau-Guinean *marabouts* live there with their *almudus*, as well as *almudu* children who have left their own *marabout*, or *almudu* children who have returned to Dakar after being sent back to Guinea-Bissau. In addition to Bissau-Guinean *almudu* children in Dakar, we also interviewed Bissau-Guinean Papel children who are involved in traditional textile work.

The Gambia

Diara Soma: We visited the town Diara Soma in response to information we had on many Bissau-Guinean Nalu children living there.

Basori: Basori village is close to Bricama and has a significant number of *almudu* Mandinga children from the area of Bissora in Guinea-Bissau.

Bricama and Serakunda: In these two towns there is an important community of Bissau-Guineans who are not *almudus*. A significant number of Balanta girls who work for their aunts live in the area. In addition, there are Felupe girls engaged in domestic work, as well as Papel boys involved in traditional textile work.

Data collection

Data is based on multiple and varied sources of information. Interviews were conducted with people individually or in groups of different sizes. In addition, we gathered information through informal conversations and direct observations. Key informants included people such as

- Regional authorities
- Health professionals
- Educational authorities and teachers
- Parliamentarians
- Police authorities, including border officials
- Staff of the regional and sector courts including judges and their assistants
- Traditional, religious, and cultural leaders, e.g., village headmen and marabouts, members of parliament.
- Parents, repatriated children, and former *almudus*
- Community members of different ages and with diverse backgrounds
- Representatives of NGOs and other associations that are involved in anti-trafficking work, e.g., AMIC, SOS Talibé, Al Ansar, and the Institute of Women and Children (IMC) in Bissau.

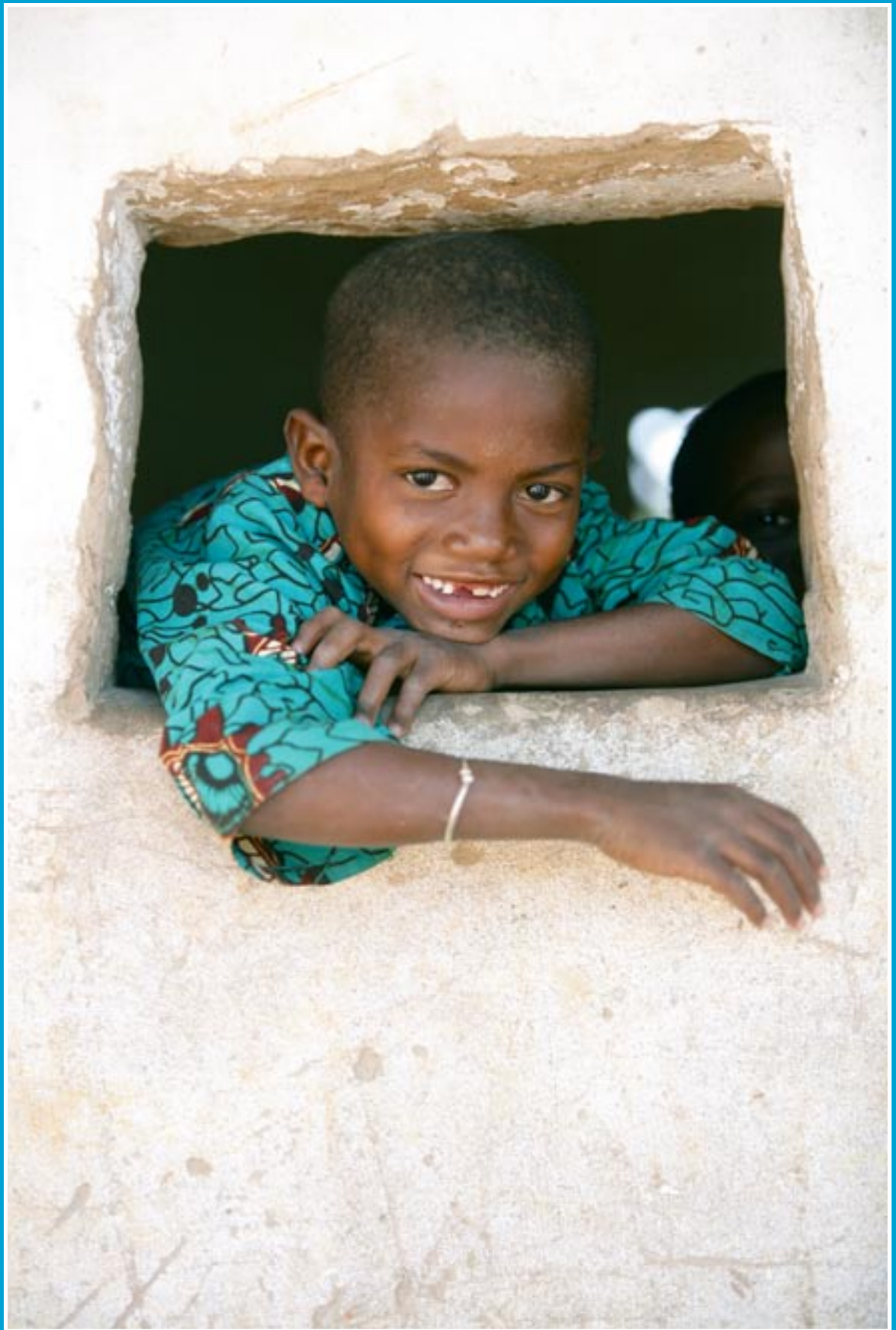
The interviews were structured around a set of specific questions adapted to the group in question; at the same time the interviews were always open for the possibility of including unexpected information that might be relevant for the issues under study. The organization of each session was done in collaboration with village leaders and interviewees. In general, the data collection was conducted without difficulties, despite child trafficking being a sensitive issue in Guinea-Bissau.

Basically, there are two main groups accused of being involved in trafficking, and each has a negative view of the other. On one side, with regard to *almudu* children, some parents and *marabouts* view the associations and the NGOs that are engaged in anti-trafficking activities as part of a Western conspiracy to fight Islam, or else as Christian soul savers. Western countries are felt to have the resources and power to prevent their children from having an Islamic education, as well as to keep the population in ignorance. On other hand, the associations and NGOs maintain that the religious education is a pretext for exploitation on part of the *marabouts* and even, at times, by the parents. In this context, the researcher is always under suspicion, and his motives may be questioned. Consequently, it can be difficult to engage in an open dialogue. To give an example, in a suburban area in Dakar, one of the researchers (HB) was threatened by followers of one of the Bissau-Guinean *marabouts*. The incident was resolved by the *marabout* himself, who had previously received and been interviewed by the researcher in his native village in Guinea-Bissau. Evidently, the subject of child trafficking evokes many emotions and can at times be dangerous for those conducting such a study.

In Guinea-Bissau, the research team travelled in a car marked by the symbol of UNICEF, a UN Agency that promotes child protection, development and survival, including anti-trafficking activities in the country. Despite not having made appointments beforehand with the local authorities and individuals, we were always well received. At times individuals who heard about our mission and wanted to forward their opinion took the initiative to meet with us. We introduced ourselves as researchers who had been recruited by UNICEF to conduct a study on child trafficking and other situations that might have a negative impact on children. We urged people to give us their honest opinion in a mutual effort to clarify the controversial issue of trafficking.

The interviews were either manually transcribed during the conversation or digitally recorded and transcribed later. The interviews were conducted in Kriol, spoken by all the authors of this report, or in local languages with the help of a translator. One of the researchers (HB) speaks several of the local languages, i.e., Fula, Mandinga, and Wolof and some Balanta and Felupe. Later, the interviews were either translated into English or French. Thereafter, the research team analysed the interviews and identified the themes presented in this report.





Results

Ethnic groups

Guinea-Bissau is a multiethnic country. The most numerous groups are Balanta (30%), Fula (20%), Manjaco (14%), Mandinga (13%) and Papel (7%). Other groups (16%) are Biafada, Mancanha, Bidyogo, Ejamat, Mansoanka, Bainoukgunyuno, Nalu, Soninke, Badjara, Bayote, Kobiana, Cassanga and Basary.⁵

In the following section, we present data on the most numerous ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau and highlight practices that may negatively impact children. In addition to trafficking, these practices include fosterage, marriage practices and certain forms of child labour.

Felupe

Most of the Felupe living in Guinea-Bissau reside in the northern coastal subregion, São Domingó, in Cacheu region, bordering Senegal. Their number is estimated to be about 25 000 people. However, most Felupe reside in the Casamance region of Senegal and in the Gambia south of the Gambia River where they are most often referred to as Jola/Diola.

In general, the Felupe are considered to be a closed society that does not easily give outsiders access into their lives. Our non-Felupe interviewees who reside in the São Domingo area agreed that it takes a long time to get to know them and their customs. We were told that the villagers resolve their disputes in the villages, and normally do not go to a formal tribunal.

Fosterage is not common practice among the Felupe. As with many other ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau, we were told, "This occurs mainly when a brother or a sister does not have children and you will give them one of your own in case you have many." Older siblings commonly raise their younger brothers and sisters from the age of 8-10 years and raise them away from home.

In Felupe society, work has high value. Felupe are hardworking people, we were told, and they do not accept begging, and they never steal, even if money is left on the table: "If you lose your telephone, a Felupe will pick it up and make it visible for all to see. Only the owner will take it, and if not, the telephone will stay there until it becomes destroyed."⁶ This makes Felupe girls popular as domestic workers, and it is claimed that some mothers send away their daughters from the age of five years for such work in Bissau, Senegal and the Gambia. The mothers get no payment at the time of recruitment but the girls receive salaries and send some of it to their mothers in the home village. The girls also use some of the money they earn to prepare for their own marriage. Sometimes the girls will visit their mothers, in particular when they become old, to assist them with the agricultural work, e.g., planting the rice.

Adolescents have some liberty in Felupe society. Teenage girls often look for work outside their village. Sometimes they are encouraged to leave by Senegalese female traders who come to their village to buy products, for example, red palm oil, straw-sweepers and other products. We were told of young Felupe girls who from the age of thirteen years go to Cap Skirring in Senegal, often with their age-mates. Cap Skirring attracts many tourists, and there are many income-generating opportunities, including sexual services.

Felupe boys are from a young age engaged in agricultural work, in particular in the rice fields, and attending the cows. As of the age of fifteen years, they have great freedom of choice and start to move away; and the parents cannot stop them. Nevertheless, there are rules that the boys are expected to follow, for example, sexual activity before marriage. Times are, however, changing and the old rules are not respected as they once were.

⁵ See Lewis (2009) and Nations Online: Countries of the World at http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/guinea_bissau.htm

⁶ See also Davidson (2007).

Our respondents agree that none of the customs described above amount to trafficking of children. Trafficking is felt to be a problem in other ethnic groups.

Balanta

The Balanta are the largest ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau, with a population of approximately 440 000. The Balanta reside mainly in the southern region of Tombali, but many Balanta reside elsewhere, e.g., in Oio and Biombo regions and in Senegal, the Gambia and Guinea.



Children are highly valued by the Balanta; because boys inherit the house, they are particularly important for the family. Fosterage is widely practised within the family. If someone in the family does not have any children, a relative with many children is duty-bound to give them one of their own. However, an elderly man explained that, despite parents loving all their children, "you do not send away the one you like the most."

In our interviews, it was repeatedly stated that it is a duty among the Balanta to help each other raise their children. An adult male told us he himself had a daughter and a son of one of his brothers residing in his house: "Brothers' children are the same as yours, or even more important. It is hard to cut in between." In the village where his brother lived there was no school so he had invited his children to stay with him. In addition he had better living conditions than his brother. For the interviewee this kind of fosterage was more like a scholarship (Kriol: *bolsa di estudu*). "You should also help raise children of your friends in case of need," he argued.

Children do not only become fostered due to childless relatives or economic difficulties. Married Balanta women frequently foster their brothers' or sisters' daughters from the age of 5-6 years old; later, these girls often become their co-wives. At other times, the girls will marry the sons of the house. The underlying principle with this arrangement is that the wife

will have a member of her family married within the lineage of her husband. There are restrictions, however. A young girl cannot marry the husband of their aunts if either of her parents and the aunt are children of the same father and mother. On the other hand, if the young girl is the daughter of the aunt's brother with the same father but not mother she can marry her husband. When asked about the frequency of this arrangement, it was stated to be a fact in all Balanta compounds. The girls are even sent to families in the Gambia, Guinea and Senegal for the same reason.

The tradition of fosterage described above is considered to be an obstacle for Balanta girls attending school. Through education, the girls can learn that this practice may not be compatible with their rights to choose a husband. According to Guinean law, marriage is not an obligation, and increasingly the girls are said to know their rights and deny marriage according to the Balanta custom. One of our interviewees stated that in school children are taught about their rights; nevertheless, he explained, "We pay their school, give them food and they have to obey their father." Other interviewees claimed that early and/or forced marriage is on the decline because parents want their daughters to go to school. Nowadays many parents demand that their girls attend school before they agree to give their daughters away, a promise not always fulfilled later on. One interviewee explained: "It is not prohibited to educate the children of others; you have to send them to school and give them freedom."

We were informed by policemen, judges and others of several cases of young Balanta girls who had run away to avoid marriage with the husbands of their aunts or forced marriage of any kind. We were also told that at times girls who had been forcibly married managed to turn the situation to their advantage, treating their husband much better than his older wife, who would be consequently thrown out of her house. Aunts were therefore reported to be less willing than before to raise young girls to become their future co-wives.

Some respondents argued that the custom had taken on a new form, with Balanta girls becoming employed as domestic workers, rather than as foster children. In these cases they are invited by relatives to migrate to the neighbouring countries. The parents are sometimes told the girls will attend school, contrary to the truth, which could cause conflict when parents come to visit. Later, the girl's marriage is arranged and the aunt takes the bride price for herself, and neither the girl nor the parents receive anything. An NGO representative argued that such practices had existed since colonial times; the city people (Kriol: *gentis di praza*) would ask for young, rural girls to take care of domestic work, and later they might arrange their marriage or the husband might marry the maid himself, or have her as his extra wife. "All groups do this, but especially Balanta," he argued.

Married Balanta women may return to their home village and establish relationships with other men. In cases where a woman gets pregnant and gives birth, her legal husband will raise the child, even though he is obviously not the biological father. These children are traditionally referred to in Balanta as *Ra Ni Binaga*, and it is claimed that these days Balanta men increasingly deny any responsibility for them. Subsequently, it is possible that these children might be more likely to be given away for fosterage than other children.

In contrast to the Balanta girls, who are engaged in domestic work, boys begin attending the cows (Balanta: *bidoki nharé*) at the age of 8-10 years. They also assist in agricultural work. At the age of 12-14 years boys may decide by their own free will to leave the house, and follow in the footsteps of their friends who may have left earlier. We were told several stories about teenage Balanta boys who had left their village seeking their fortune elsewhere, e.g., in Buba and Bissau. Some had started to steal and others become drug addicts. Complaints about delinquent adolescent behaviour were commonly heard: "Today young people do not listen to the older generation as in the old days."

Our interviewees did not consider the Balanta practices described above to be child trafficking. That issue was commonly associated with begging and Koranic studies abroad. An elderly man confirmed: "We [Balantas] do not accept begging - you have to work - we are hard-working people." A government employee in Catio agreed that in general the Balanta did not accept begging: "Here there is nobody who begs without a reason, for instance, in the

cases of orphans, old people or those who do not have children. That is normal. Those who do not want to work should not beg.” Another public employee in the same region argued that it was a custom among all ethnic groups in the country that mothers of twins would beg on Fridays: “We say it saves the child; it has nothing to do with lack of food. People here do not beg. Everybody has enough food in the villages.”

While several of our respondents argued against early and forced marriage, they did not consider these Balanta practices to be child trafficking.

Papel, Mancanha and Manjaco

The Papel, Mancanha and Manjaco reside mainly in western Guinea-Bissau. The Papel is the principal ethnic group in Biombo region while most Mancanha and Manjaco reside in Cacheu region. All the groups are also found in the Gambia and Senegal, while many Manjaco, who have a long and well known tradition of migration within and out-of-country, reside in France and Portugal. These ethnic groups are related and their languages are intelligible to each other.

While children are highly valued and parents aim to have many of them, fosterage is at the same time common among all groups. Fosterage among the Papel exhibits some particularities related to their practices of matrilineal descent and inheritance. According to a village survey one of the authors (JE) conducted in Biombo region in 1995-1996, about one third of Papel mothers of children younger than five years had one or more of her children staying with others (Einarsdóttir, 2004). Of these, about two fifths stayed with their maternal grandmother. Close relatives, mostly maternal or paternal aunts, took care of about one fifth of the fostered children, and about one fifth stayed with their father and their mother's co-wives. Only in exceptional cases did children stay with individuals outside the family.

In the survey mentioned above, three main reasons were given for fostering children: need, custom and divorce (Einarsdóttir, 2004). In nearly 50 percent of cases, mothers stated that



they needed help due to temporary economic crises; and in approximately 40 percent of cases they had given a child to their own mother because it was the custom to do so. Mother's mothers claim they have the right to take one of their grandchildren, and should a woman refuse to give a child to her own mother, death, illness, or bad luck may befall the woman. Mother's mothers also often take care of their grandchildren in order to allow their daughters to continue breastfeeding, or because of work or other difficulties. Divorce was the third most common reason for children not staying with their mothers. The first husband or the husband who has paid the bride price has formal rights over all the children of his wife. Nevertheless, a mother is usually unwilling to leave her children with him, especially if she is on bad terms with her co-wives. Most men are neither willing to have their children brought up with another man, nor are they willing to live with children their new wife brought from a former husband. Therefore, in situations of divorce, children may end up with somebody else, most likely an aunt or a paternal uncle of the children, not a maternal one.

Papel mothers participating in the above mentioned survey stress that fosterage has some positive aspects, such as better social or economic conditions for the child, as well as their own opportunities to "look for a living" or "make a living" (Kriol: *buska bida* or *fasi bida*). The negative aspects of fosterage are related to the mothers' worries about the health and well-being of their fostered children. It is recognized that foster children may be subject to more discipline and hard work than birth children, but this is claimed to not necessarily be a bad thing. Discipline and hard work will prepare children for the challenges of life and contribute to appropriate behaviour. At the same time, too much corporal punishment is recognized to destroy children. Many adults praised their foster parents for having treated them with love and estimation; nevertheless, individual differences are acknowledged and some people are acknowledged as being unkind to children.

Similar to other ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau, girls belonging to the Papel, Mancanha and Manjaco may become victims of forced marriage and/or early marriage. Opinions on forced marriage vary, however, and girls increasingly reject such marriages, and in particular girls who attend school (Einarsdóttir, 2004).

Balobas, sacred places for religious practices, are widely found in Biombo region (Einarsdóttir, 2006). These are attended by *katandeiras*, young girls who are "given" by their matrilineage to serve at religious ceremonies. They have a lifelong obligation to "fetch water" or *kata iagu* (hence the name "katandeira") and cook rice to offer at the *baloba*. The religious specialist (*balobeiru*) who collaborates with or "owns" the ancestral spirit residing in the *baloba* has the right to wed the girl or arrange her marriage.

The Papel are recognized for their skills in weaving textiles (Kriol: *panos*). The *panos* play an important role in the cultural life of the Papel, and are also a popular product for other ethnic groups, within and out-of-country. From an early age, many Papel boys are engaged as assistants to weavers, who traditionally are most often male. Many weavers migrate to the Gambia, Guinea and Senegal, and take their assistant boys with them. Most of them stay there during the dry season (October-May) and return in the rainy season to cultivate rice, maize, peanuts and other agricultural produce. One of our interviewees, who had started weaving at the age of twelve years, told us that in the 1980s a lot of young boys wanted to go with him, but that today it is more difficult to find assistants because they want to attend school. He used to pay his assistants with food and housing, and when they returned home he would buy clothes and pay the father a small amount of money as an expression of appreciation of his son's work.

A considerable number of Papel boys live in larger cities in the Gambia and Senegal, assisting the weavers in their demanding work. At times they also assist with selling the products. Every weaver has at least one or two young boys as assistants. The more boys the weaver has, and the better their skills, the more products he can sell. The boys are most often relatives of the weaver, for example, sons of his sisters or brothers, and most are aged between 10 and 15 years. Nevertheless, we met a boy as young as six years old who had recently come to Dakar, and he told us: "I miss my village because there I can play and move around.

Here, when I leave the house, I sit down in the same place from early morning to late in the afternoon."

A weaver we met in Medina, Dakar, argued that he preferred to take children from his own family. "I bring them here and teach them at least one professional skill. The schools are not good in Guinea-Bissau, and through weaving they learn a profession that can earn them money," he explained. He insisted that weavers are not the same as *marabouts* who force children to beg on the streets: "Begging is not good, especially not for a child. When you are used to getting money on the streets, you will never be able to support yourself through decent work."

In general, Papel boys do not beg; however, there are exceptions. An interviewee we met, a professional driver from Guinea-Bissau, told us he had met a group of Papel boys begging on the streets of Dakar in March 2009. They were assistants to weavers during the day, but complained that their master only gave them a small amount of food so they went out to beg during the evening. Another weaver told us that sometimes the boys are sent to beg for food in neighbouring houses. At times lunch is the only food guaranteed. One of the wives of the weaver or a girl he has brought with him from his village, cooks, and they bring the food to the place of work. Thus, the boys might beg for food in the evening. However, it was pointed out that they were not expected to give their master part of their money or food they receive, in contrast to the *almudus* who beg in great numbers for their teachers, the *marabouts*. Nevertheless, we have recent evidence that young Papel boys do beg for their master on the streets of Dakar, in particular when the demand for their product is low. In addition, some Papel boys do not attend any school and are living in precarious conditions. The same applies to Papel boys in the Gambia, although we have no reports of begging.

In Cacheu region, an NGO representative pointed out the precarious situation of Manjaco children whose fathers migrate and leave their family with little support. Girls, fourteen years or older, worked as prostitutes in the region, and there are male intermediaries. He argued these girls are engaged in prostitution because it is their only opportunity of earning money. Since colonial times, the Manjaco women from the Caio Sector in Cacheu region are known to work as prostitutes. According to Buckner (1999), today they are active in Bissau and Ziguinchor, as well as in towns in Guinea-Bissau and Casamance, and even in Banjul. The reasons stated are most often "a marriage-related problem" such as their refusal to accept an arranged marriage, but also the lack of such arrangement. Women from Caio make up almost a third of the prostitutes working in Ziguinchor, and probably more than half in Bissau. The average age of the prostitutes is approximately forty-one years and they are rarely under twenty-five years. Thus, many girls under eighteen years of age are unlikely to be engaged in this particular kind of prostitution.

Mandinga, Biafada and Balanta Mané

The Mandinga ethnic group lives in West Africa, primarily in the coastal countries of Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone, as well as in the Sahel countries of Burkina Faso and Mali. In Guinea-Bissau, the Mandinga live mainly in the regions of Bafatá and Oio, but also in Gabú. They are one of the larger Muslim groups in the country, with many *marabouts* and *almudus*. Biafada and Balanta Mané also adhere to Islam and are heavily influenced by the Mandinga.

The Mandinga have strong *marabout* families, and it is not easy for someone to become a *marabout* who does not belong to these families. He can, however, become a teacher in the village. This system is not only respected by the villagers but by the whole Mandinga community. This signifies that there are centres of religious influence for the Mandinga, within and out-of-country. Thus, *almudus* from the Gambia, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone come to Guinea-Bissau for religious studies. Because Mandinga have their own *marabouts*, most of their own children study in their villages of origin. Later, after completing the first level of education, at the age of ten years or older, they may be sent to the Gambia, Guinea or Senegal for further studies. In Senegal, they send *almudus* to the Kolda and Sedhiou regions

where many Mandinga *marabouts* live. In the Gambia there are Mandinga, Bafata and Balanta Mané *almudus* in all major towns.

When parents were questioned on how a child is selected to be sent abroad as an *almudu*, there were contradictory responses. All agreed that intelligent children should be sent. One villager responded: "I would send the youngest one." Another one responded: "It is not true that we send the youngest one." A third villager joined the discussion: "I would like to respond to the question. You send the youngest one because you can use the older ones for agricultural work." The village headman then responded: "You have to send the oldest one because if you send the youngest child he will come back and be the chief of his older brother. This would cause confusion in our community." In addition, villagers claimed that they did not want to send very young children away. When they came back, they would not feel at home or fit into the village life: "Children have to respect their elders. Therefore, we do not send young boys away."

A village leader in Bafatá region explained that some of the *marabouts* who taught their children abroad came from the village, while others had learned the Koran in the village or had relations with the village. He argued: "Our children do not beg where we send them. On the other hand, I have seen with my own eyes many Bissau-Guinean children begging on the streets." *Marabouts* and community members we met emphasized the importance of combining studies and agricultural work. One elderly *marabout* said he had more than thousand people under his authority, both men and women. He explained:

We have everything in the same place. We do agricultural work, and cultivate maize, millet, and rice for the household and peanuts, which we sell on the market. This we combine with reading the Koran. We have children from the age of three to ten years. They live in the village and they are educated in Islam. Later they return to their home village. Yet, some of the *almudus* even want to stay here and they establish their own family.

There is a general agreement among our interviewees that Mandinga children do not beg; rather they contribute to the agricultural work with their labour. In the Gambia we confirmed that they look for firewood and sell it on behalf of the *marabout*, and we did not identify any Bissau-Guinean *almudus* begging. In our interviews with people in Oio, we were told that Mandinga *almudus* take part in the seasonal cotton or peanut harvests in Senegal during the dry season.

Nalu

The Nalu are a small ethnic group (est. 13 000) that live mostly in Guinea and Guinea-Bissau (est. 9 000). They are closely related to the Susu ethnic group, most of whom reside Guinea, but also in the neighbouring countries of Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. In Guinea-Bissau, the Nalu reside mainly in the southern regions of Tombali and Quinara. We were told that Tchernio Racide in Quebo had introduced Islam to the Nalu community during the war of liberation, and the first to convert was Yanrick Camara, who took the name Ibraima Camara. This recent conversion to Islam is claimed to be the reason why there are few Nalu *marabouts* in the area.

On arrival in Tombali we were quickly informed that child trafficking did not occur in the region. When we asked a teenage boy if he had ever heard about child trafficking, he responded: "No, there is no such problem here." The respondent was Nalu and Muslim, and attends the public school. He confirmed that young people, even younger than eighteen years of age often leave the village to look for work in Bissau, the Gambia or Guinea. When asked if someone from the area would go abroad for Koranic studies, he answered: "Yes, here in a neighbouring village there are many boys who go to read (Kriol: *lei*), and a woman over there has a son in the Gambia." In discussions with a group of male adolescents and some children, we were told that the Gambians would come and offer education in a Koranic school in the Gambia, where many boys from Nalu villages are studying. "There is not enough place for

everyone who wants to study there,” one of them pointed out. Thus there is some form of selection, and the younger boys are among those selected, about 8-10 years old. They confirmed that they would all like to leave for the Gambia to study the Koran, except a boy about 10-12 years old who said he would prefer to go to Portugal and become rich.



In a Nalu village that has sent many boys and some girls study the Koran in the Gambia, we were informed that the most important reason to send children away is the lack of schools in the villages, especially after the first four years. Our interviewees underlined the importance of having *madrassa* schools in the villages – a combination of public school (often referred to as the white man’s school or the Portuguese school) as well as a religious school (Kriol: *escola di lei*). It should be similar to what they have in the Gambia. A respected villager told us:

It is important to give children religious education. It helps them to become good people. However, there are no good Koranic schools in the area and the public school is not good. All parents have to give their children good religious education and they are responsible to God. By sending a child away, God can relieve the parents of their sins.

When asked about the suffering related to Koranic studies, he responded: “Suffering that gives you better opportunities in life and makes you a good person is a positive suffering.”

We interviewed two *almudus* who had finished their studies in the Gambia and returned to their village. They said the *almudus* study under optimal conditions.

There are several classes of children depending on how advanced they are in their studies, and the teachers get their salaries. It works like a school run by the state. The teachers have their houses and the students have their houses, and guards look after everything. There is food in the morning, midday and evening. There is no begging and the children only study.

According to Nalu mothers we spoke to, those who do not already have a child studying in the Gambia are allowed to send their child for studies. They choose to send the most intelligent child from the group (Kriol: *el ki i mas giro*). A young mother stressed that she would send her child away if the opportunity arose. Most of those who study the Koran abroad are boys, but girls have also been sent to the Gambia. Two of the mothers claimed they would give their children to any person they knew for sure would give them better conditions of life. Yet, before taking such a decision they would have to know that person. According to one of the mothers, parents do not pay for the children's studies in the Gambia: "We give them clothes and some money to buy food on their way to the Gambia."

In our interviews it was claimed that in cases where Nalu mothers objected to sending their child away, the child would stay. The most important reason for not sending a child away is the young age of the child. A mother of seven children whose oldest son is in The Gambia is not worried:

Two men have recently come back after their studies, and they say everything is fine. My son will come back. It takes three years and then it is over. I have heard about bad treatment of *talibé* children but that does not apply to my son. I also have two girls who are studying in Bissau and now I want to send my youngest fourteen-year-old girl to the Gambia but there is no place for her yet.

Another mother of six children, of whom two sons are in the Gambia, told us her son went to the Gambia when he was eight years old, and that he has now been there for four years: "I know the man who takes the children to the Gambia and I am not worried about my son. His uncle visited him recently and says he is fine. He will finish his studies and come back home." An elderly man was also confident about the well-being of the children staying in the Gambia: "He [the *marabout*] is rich and does not exploit the children. In addition, he comes to visit us and many of his students also come on a visit to their families."

Our Nalu respondents repeatedly informed us that the *almudus* in the Gambia would come back to their home village and become teachers. In this way people would not need to send their children away for studies. There were no reasons to worry except about the recently increased border control and difficulties in crossing the borders to the Gambia. While some Nalu children study the Koran in their home community, all Nalu villages reported to send children to the Gambia for religious studies. Our informants claimed such practices should not be considered as child trafficking.

During visit to the Gambia, one of the research team (HB) verified that the situation of the Nalu *almudus* was as described by our interviewees.

Fula

The Fula (Fula: *Pulaar*) are the most populous Muslim group in Guinea-Bissau, and they live mainly in the eastern regions, principally Gabú and Bafatá. Fula, or related groups, reside in many other countries, such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Togo.

When asked about child trafficking in the regions of Cacheu, Tombali, Quinara, Oio and Biombo, our local informants tended to point out that this was the problem of other groups, in the eastern regions Gabú and Bafatá. When we met Fula villagers in these two regions, it was easy to feel their outrage. They felt criminalized and humiliated by the anti-trafficking activities carried out in the regions. How was it possible to use such a word (trafficking) to describe their efforts to educate their children?

Parents' point of view

Of all those we met, the parents were probably the most offended by anti-trafficking activities carried out in their area. They gave multiple reasons for sending their sons to Senegal to study the Koran, including religious, educational and socio-economic.

According to the Koran it is the obligation of parents to educate their children. The Almighty wants people to study, and by sending their child to study the Koran, God will reward them. The studies guarantee the perpetuation of the religion, and later, when the parents die and go to the other world, prayers will help God to forgive the parents' sins. During our interviews we were repeatedly told that before God, parents are responsible for the ignorance of their children, and parents do not want their own ignorance to be transferred to their children. A parent of a repatriated child told us: "We love all our children. If we send them far away from us it is because we have no choice." If the children come back healthy and have finished learning the Koran, the parents are delighted and proud. On the other hand, we were told that "if the child dies while being *almudu*, he will go to Paradise. It is his destiny." Through religious studies far from home, the *almudu* learns to be alone with himself and closer to God. He learns about life and the importance of being humble. It was repeatedly pointed out that the period in their life as *bayda*, a Fula word for the young *almudu* who has not yet finished his studies in reciting the Koran, plays an important role in the development of his personality.

Some interviewees called attention to the fact that if the child was studying close to home they would not dedicate enough time to their studies, which is in line with the teaching of Koran on the importance of studying far away: "The Prophet Mohammed said: look for knowledge as far as China." Some parents claimed they prefer to send their child to Dakar. The city is an attractive place for them and Bissau-Guinean *marabouts* live there and teach their children. A Fula man in his thirties, argued differently: "Some think Dakar is attractive (Kriol: *terra sabi*), but they do not know how badly at times the children are treated." He believed people are starting little by little to learn about the situation. He explained: "On television programmes about Dakar, people can see how these children live their lives and you feel sorry for them. You can see small children begging and they are so tired that they fall asleep." He himself had studied the Koran in Senegal some years ago, and he maintained that teaching is better there than in Guinea-Bissau, and there is more food, partly because of support from the Senegalese government, but also from ordinary people. He was twenty years old at that time and had already finished reciting the Koran (Fula: *sanda*); while he stayed there he never begged. A Senegalese woman took care of him and gave him rice every day.

Many community members felt the government was ignoring their interests. In a community meeting in Bafatá, many were concerned that the government had forgotten their community. As an example, it was stated that children in their village who have attended the public school and learned Portuguese are never given scholarships to study abroad. "They [the government] want to keep us in our village without learning Portuguese or Arabic." Many parents claimed that if the schools in their village were good, there would be no need to send their children away. In reality many villages do not have schools because the teachers are not paid their salaries. Parents were keen to stress that if conditions in the village were better, there would be no reason to send children abroad for studies. One of the *marabouts* interviewed pointed out that the parents are poor, yet they still want their children to study. For this reason, in the current situation they are obliged to send their children away.

Fula village mothers argued they were not happy to send their boys far away to study the Koran, but there were no alternatives. One of them argued:

You want to see the child you have given birth to – you love your child and want to have your child close to you. You do not want to send your sons far away because you do not even know when they are healthy or sick, but here we do not have other alternatives. It is only the children of the Christian people who get scholarships to study abroad. Our children get nothing.

One of the mothers explained that two of her sons had been studying in Dakar for the last four or five years, and that they would return next year. They had phoned their father the same morning we met, just to wish him a good day: "We talk with them every day – they say they eat well and have a place to sleep. They study well and when they return they will read for all the old people in the village to show what they have learnt." One of her sons has his own phone and he phones regularly to talk with his parents, and at times he even talks to his younger siblings and the other children, she explained. When asked if her sons begged, she responded that she had not asked them, but added: "The most important thing is that they study properly, and that they have a good place to sleep." She also said she did not know if the *marabout* beat her sons, but pointed out that the teacher at the public school beats children, and recalled "When I attended school I was beaten too, so I should know."

The mothers were angry about the fact that some children were taken back home from Senegal. They said they were curious to know more about the way Fula children were repatriated and what organizations were involved in this work. One of them complained: "The children studying in Brazil, Europe or Russia are never returned home, even though they do not get their scholarships paid. Only our children are repatriated." In addition, it was claimed that the children of Christian people in Bissau got all the scholarships and all the work opportunities. Although many of the village children had completed school, we were told that only two of them had got jobs as government employees.

Another group of Fula mothers said they were not so worried about their sons. They talked to them by phone whenever they had some money. One of them showed a picture she had received the day before of three boys, 10-13 years old, one of whom was her son. She was happy to see the picture of her son who had been in Dakar for three years. She said she had not wanted to send him at that time but his father had insisted.⁷ She felt he was too young at that time. Another young mother said her children were all too young now, but if the opportunity arose at a later time she would send them all to Dakar.

Fula fathers agreed, as did the mothers, that you only send those sons who are intelligent. In general, parents agreed that they would send the smartest son for studies in Senegal, or as one mother explained: "If you have more than one son, and you are allowed to send one you will choose the one you consider to be the most intelligent. If you have only one son you send him." One mother argued that if her son was to be sent abroad for studies she would like him to be strong enough to endure the suffering; while another argued she would send the oldest son. In a Gabú village, we were told that two groups of children are sent away as *almudus*: a boy who has shown the capacity to learn, but also a boy who is impatient and active. A Fula teacher argued you should send your favourite son, and tell the others that their turn would come next. He maintained that most parents who send their sons to Senegal are poor "because most people are poor," but at the same time sending children to religious studies in Senegal is not a question of poverty. We were told that fathers with hundreds of cattle would be no less eager to send their sons to study the Koran in Senegal than those who were poor. Nevertheless, parental poverty was frequently mentioned in our interviews, and claimed to facilitate the process of sending their children away. An informant in Quinara stated: "We have to find a way out of our difficulties ourselves." Thus, the children contribute through their work in the fields, or they beg. As begging is not a tradition in Guinea-Bissau, but accepted in Senegal, the *almudus* go there for subsistence and studies.

According to our information, most often parents take the initiative and ask a particular *marabout* to educate their children. This *marabout* is someone they know or originates from their village or neighbouring villages. One *marabout* we met emphasized that he did not demand any children from the parents. However, if they approached and requested him to teach their son, he would accept. In some cases, one of former *almudus* who have come back home and proven their knowledge of the Koran during the ceremonial welcome festivities

7 It is commonly stated that among the Fula, "the mother cannot say no." However, there are some exceptions. An elderly Fula man told us about his experience as an *almudu*. He was the first child of his father, who sent him to study the Koran. His body was too weak for agricultural work, and he was not good at memorizing, so he was beaten a lot. His mother did not want him to go to Koranic school anymore, and proposed he should attend the state school, which his father finally accepted.



(Fula: *dua alouwal*), encourage other parents to request help from the *marabout*. The *marabout* does not always come in person to the village. Instead, he may send another disciple to represent him, and this person transports the children over the borders. According to our information, in some cases, boys may decide to leave without their parents' permission. They leave voluntarily with another disciple they know from the village or the neighbourhood, and together with other boys. A Fula *almudu* we met in the Gambia told us about his trip:

The night before we left we had a party (Fula: *topinéde*) in our village. In the morning we all left with food package from our mothers. Thereafter we assembled in front of the house of the great *marabout*, and he blessed us. We then walked all the way from Gabú to the Gambia.

Occasionally, non-Muslim boys would join their Muslim friends who are leaving abroad for religious studies without their parents' permission. These boys enter the world of boys outside the village. The boys are eager to get to know the world and look for opportunities in life.

The marabouts' point of view

We interviewed a large number of *marabouts* who were more than willing to share with us their opinions on the trafficking issue. They often referred to earlier times when Fula religious places in Guinea-Bissau enjoyed more respect than today. These places have gradually been closed down.

In earlier times, the *marabout* had agricultural fields with rice, maize, millet, cotton and peanuts, for example. The whole community supported the *marabout* through their work. At that time they could sell the cotton and peanuts, and in this way they were able to give their *almudus* food and teach them in the village. We were told that now this is not possible because the government does not buy these products any more, and intermediaries drive down the

price of the peanuts in Bissau. This situation has forced many of the *marabouts* to try their luck in Senegal. "You cannot have *almudus* if you do not give them food, and you cannot be a real *marabout* without students," one of the *marabouts* explained. In Senegal, people are generous with charity, in contrast to Guinea-Bissau. In this way the *marabouts* managed to get students – and respect – while at the same time making some kind of profit.

The *marabouts* explained that parents claimed that if they had more income, they would pay for the studies and the children would stop working in the fields. In the end, however, they said the parents had promised to pay for the school but failed to keep their promise, and the *marabouts* did not receive anything for their efforts. They were thus forced to leave for Senegal with their students. One villager told us: "It is important that people stop blaming the *marabouts* when in fact it is the parents who are to blame for the situation." Many agreed that the problem of the Koranic schools is that the parents do not pay anything for the education of their children. A *marabout* in Quinara claimed he preferred to be given basic teaching conditions through government support. However, the government does not pay their own teachers, who are always on strike, so the government can obviously not help the *marabouts* to feed their *almudus*. Therefore, he argued: "We expect help from the international community."

In line with the above, one of the *marabouts* with whom we talked, told us he had been living in his village for eight years, teaching the Koran. However, the conditions of life in the village made it very difficult for him to exercise his function properly. The *almudus* were too young to contribute to agricultural work, and they ate everything he had. When they grew older and stronger the parents took them back home to help them with the fields. Consequently, he was forced to take them to Senegal where he could at least support them through begging. In this way, he now manages to teach them the Koran. "The importance of a Koranic teacher is measured through the number of *almudus* he gets," he stressed. Many of his students go back home to their villages where they are received with the *dua alouwal* ceremony. Others go to St Louis for further studies. Now he has *almudus* in different places in Senegal where he gets help from his son and nephew, and in his own village where he resides.

Teaching Koran gives dignity. One *marabout* told us: "I teach the Koran to contribute to the combat against exploitation and hostility towards my ethnic group." In interviews it was clear that some *marabouts* consider they are on a mission to expand the religion and that no one can stop them: "We are born with Islam, and we die with Islam." Interviewees also said people need to have knowledge of Islam as well as the resources to be respected by the villagers where you are born and live. This is particularly important for people who feel they are already in a disadvantaged position: "This is part of a liberation process that is engaging many people and nobody can stop it." The parents say they wish their children to study to become someone important in their community. Their knowledge gives them an advantage over others, thanks to Islam. A Fula Imam in Guinea-Bissau explained:



I shall give you an example. When I attend the prayer on Fridays all the people wait for me, even though I am not the oldest one. It is my knowledge of Islam that gives me this position and privilege. This is one of the advantages of having been *almudu*.

While some *marabouts* have transferred their Koranic schools to Senegal, some migrate only during the dry season. In conversations with Futa-Fula *marabouts*, it was explained that *marabouts* moved with their *almudus* to Senegal or the Gambia, before begging was prohibited. They stay in the outskirts of towns where they study and beg, and then they return to Guinea-Bissau at the beginning of the rainy season. In this way they have access to food all year round during their studies. Yet, this seasonal migration is currently being hampered

through stricter border control. These days, border guards and police force them by to return to Gabú, and the *almudus* go home to their parents.

Suffering, begging and knowledge

Begging by *almudus* in Senegal is a hotly debated issue and is for many of our interviewees' children the main source of suffering. In addition, begging is for some the main reason for classifying the transfer of *almudus* to Senegal as trafficking.

In our interviews it was often pointed out that it is and will always be impossible to stop children leaving their country for religious studies and begging for their subsistence. The *marabouts* say they themselves have been beggars in Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. A *marabout* in Kolda claimed: "Begging cannot be considered exploitation or suffering of children as so often is claimed by those who combat it. It does not belittle a child to beg; rather it makes you humble and resistant." Begging does not only exist in Senegal. A citizen in Gabú town informed us there were some *almudus* who regularly beg in the suburban area where he lives. "The same number and same children come, and you start to support some of them on a more regular basis. They become your children," he said. We have a couple of stories told by former *ex-almudus* in Senegal who explained how Senegalese families supported them.



A Bissau-Guinean *marabout* told us that conscious and humble *almudus* accept their suffering. They know that when they return to their village, their parents will respect them for their knowledge. They are the pride of their community. A parent of a boy going to Senegal advised him to endure the suffering awaiting him: "One day he will be happy." Another parent said: "If you do not suffer, you cannot be happy. A child has to know all kinds of suffering while young to be resistant when he gets older." Still another parent told us: "You can have money without suffering, for example by winning in a lottery. However, you cannot have

knowledge without suffering. Knowledge does not come for free." In the public school, children go early in the morning when it is cold, and in the afternoon when it is hot. Suffering is an indispensable part of acquiring knowledge. A father in Bafatá argued that to stop villagers sending children abroad for studies, there was an urgent need for education in the villages. At the same time, he maintained that a child that suffers has the possibility of having great pleasure and success (Fula: *barké*) later in life. "When you are old it is too late to fight back and gain knowledge," he argued.

While suffering was discussed, many made comparisons between earlier and current times. Villagers in Bafatá told us: "*Almudus* today suffer more today than before because at that time they lived with their parents. Today they are begging all day in the towns and if they have no money they are punished." Another villager did not agree: "*Almudus* suffered more before because they did not have any food in the village. They went to the forest in search of fruits and other edible vegetables. They were also given the rice, maize or millet straw to eat with *jambo* (a kind of vegetable soup). Today *almudus* get good food, even though they beg."

We confronted our interviewees with the question of how an *almudu* could experience suffering in situations where his conditions would be improved, for example, by building good schools in the villages. "Times are changing," a senior government employee and a former *almudu* pointed out: "In earlier times Muslims used to walk to Mekka, but nowadays we take the airplane." Studying hard is suffering enough to acquire knowledge, one *marabout* argued. Opinions varied on begging. Most Bissau-Guineans do not accept begging, and a Fula Imam argued that when children beg they learn bad habits. Others maintained that, for want of alternatives, begging was acceptable as a means to sustain a child while studying the Koran. One informant argued: "Begging is not indispensable for suffering; it is just part of it. It does not bring with it hope for a better future because begging is not a profession." Suffering can be meaningless and it is only acceptable if it results in something good, such as acquiring knowledge.

Sources of conflict

During our fieldwork several underlying conflicts were revealed. An important source of conflict can be traced to the division among the Fula. The Fula residing in Guinea-Bissau can be divided in two main groups. The first group, the Fula of Guinea-Bissau, can in turn be divided into the Fula Furos and the Fula Pretos. The second group is the Futa-Fula, who entered the area from Guinea, and whose members traditionally belong to the religious elite. In our discussions with many people, suspicion and mistrust between these different groups emerged over the issue of religious studies. Recently an increasing number of the Fula of Guinea-Bissau, who have completed studies in the FutaTooro area in Senegal, have begun to act as religious leaders and *marabouts* in their communities in Guinea-Bissau. Because their community members are not accustomed to begging, the *marabouts* take their *almudus* to Senegal where they maintain their schools through begging. As an expression of cultural resistance, they ignore existing religious Koranic schools as respected educational centres.

In our discussions with *madrassa* teachers in Bafatá and Kolda (Senegal), a conflict unfolded between *madrassa* and *madilis* teachers.⁸ The *madrassa* teachers claimed that the *marabouts* think they exposed their system of exploitation of children. One interviewee maintained that it was important to understand there was a cultural conflict between the authentic *marabouts* and *madrassa* teachers. For *marabouts*, the *madrassa* teachers are professionals with salaries and consequently they do not need to have students. If the *almudu* system disappears, the *marabouts* lose their social and economic power. An interviewee in Kolda said that at times he had received threats after talking on the radio about the situation of the *almudus*. He claimed that the *marabouts* continued to transport Bissau-Guinean children il-

⁸ See Jao, Camará and Indjai (2006) for a discussion on these forms of religious education in Guinea-Bissau. *Madilis* is a system of traditional Koranic teaching where the *marabouts* are the teachers and sessions are conducted in the open air with Koranic tablets. On the other hand, *madrassa* is a school where children learn the Koran, Arabic and other subjects, for example, calculus and history.

legally across the borders to Senegal to send them to Dakar. Others argued that the *madilis* and *madrassas* had to collaborate in the best interests of the children. Many respondents of diverse categories repeatedly argued that support to the *madrassa* schools in Guinea-Bissau was crucial to stopping the outflow of children to Senegal.



Another important source of conflict concerns relations between Islam and Western countries, represented by international organizations and NGOs. Community members and *marabouts* are concerned religious discrimination. A Bissau-Guinean *marabout* in Kolda region in Senegal argued that Western countries wanted people to leave Islam: "They will never be able to stop us adults practising our religion but they can try to prevent children from learning the Koran. In that way there will be no Muslims in the future." We repeatedly heard similar viewpoints during our fieldwork in Guinea-Bissau.

Several interviewees claimed that there was an elaborate policy that guides those who repatriate *almudus* back to Guinea-Bissau. "They seek to enter our system where they see weakness and try to destroy it from within," we were told. In addition, we were told that nobody talks about the churches, the Catholic schools or others engaged in the education of children. To implement their policy, they fund associations to destroy Islam: "Do you think they are paying money to combat what they call trafficking without having other motives?" All good Muslims should avoid such people. A community member worried that in the long term this interference in their religious education system will make their children Catholics. "To change society you have to change the children," he argued.

Conflict between the community and *marabouts* on one side and the NGOs on the other was obvious. For instance, in a focus group discussion in Bafatá, it was pointed out that, although the *marabouts* in the area had more than 40 Koranic teachers and each had more than 50

almudus, they never got any support. UNICEF, they say, prefers to fund SOS Talibé in Bafatá, “an NGO that always talks badly about *marabouts*.”⁹ The majority of people in the Bafatá area are Fula, as is the majority of the *almudus*. Thus, many individuals with whom we talked had difficulties in accepting that their repatriated children were taken care of by SOS Talibé, which they claimed was administrated by a Mandinga. One argued: “It means Fula *almudus* are repatriated, while Mandinga *almudus* can continue with their studies.”

A man in his forties in Oio, who himself had been an *almudu* for four years in Guinea, told us that when he first heard UNICEF and the NGOs talking about bad treatment of *almudus*, he thought they were against his religion. However, today he said he understood that this was not the case. He himself had worked hard as an *almudu* by taking care of banana trees, and when he returned after his father’s death, he could not read the Koran. Instead of studying, he had worked all day for the *marabout*. He pointed at a teenage girl passing by and said she was better at reading the Koran than he was after four years of supposed studies. “Here we are now much more careful when people send their children away to study the Koran,” he said.

It was claimed in different regions of Guinea-Bissau that sending boys to study in neighbouring countries could not be considered to be trafficking. The boys are sent to someone people known or someone within the family. They even speak the same language. A poor father who has many children would not give away his boy to someone he does not know. And there is no threat, or as a parent in Quinara explained: “If you want your child to come back home, he can leave and come home.” Nevertheless, that does not mean that everybody was happy with the situation of *almudus*.

In a community meeting, a *marabout* who has *almudus* staying with him in his village in Bafatá recognized that some *marabouts* had become more like businessmen than religious teachers. He knew children are begging in Senegal: “If nobody in Senegal gives charity to beggars, no one will beg.” He told us that these kinds of *marabouts* use the money earned through begging in Senegal to build their own houses in Guinea-Bissau and it will be difficult to stop them in their activities. Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that all *marabouts* act thus, he argued. A parent claimed:

I will not send my children to Senegal to learn the Koran. I can accept that when they are older they may decide themselves to leave to gain more knowledge of Islam. To stop trafficking, it is necessary to improve the conditions of the *marabouts* who are teaching in Guinea-Bissau.

Others argued that, in order to get rid of the current situation in which children suffer, it is necessary to mobilize the parents. They have to understand that some *marabouts* do not have the knowledge to teach their children the Koran. One interviewee in Kolda, well trained in Islam and active in community work, claimed that many Bissau-Guinean *marabouts* are not properly trained to exercise their function. “We have scholarships to give to *almudus*, but because of their lack of knowledge we have not selected their students for further studies in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.”

Former *almudus* and repatriation

The *almudus* from Guinea-Bissau who are sent to study in Senegal end up in various situations. It appears that the majority of students return home when they have finished their studies. A second group of students run away from their teachers and return to their communities of origin, an outcome that has long existed, according to our sources. The custom that religious teachers run Koranic schools has existed for hundreds of years in the West African region, and students running away is an old problem.¹⁰ A third group of students returns to

⁹ We were informed that UNICEF’s support to Koranic schools and NGOs is based on an agreement between the government of Guinea-Bissau and the UN Agency. UNICEF cannot support the Koranic schools if the Ministry of Education has agreed on other priorities within the co-operation agreement.

¹⁰ In Senegal, the Koranic schools increased in numbers and influence during the colonial era. Based on interviews with elderly and adult

their home communities through repatriation, an activity financed by the international community and NGOs. A fourth group comprises boys who become *fakhman* when they end up on the streets of Dakar and other towns in Senegal, cut off from family or their *marabout*. Finally, there is reason to believe that some continue to reside in Senegal after their studies, without ending on the streets. We interviewed former *almudus* belonging to all the groups except those who now reside in Senegal and are not *marabouts*.

Our interviewees had varied opinions on the usefulness of the Koranic studies. The experience of religious studies in Senegal is claimed to have both positive and negative aspects. Religious education is considered important for the parents practising Islam, and they expressed pride in having their sons complete this important education. They send their children away with their best interest in mind, wanting them to return and become respected members of the community. Suffering is accepted as part of acquiring knowledge, while begging is a means of financing studies. Former students reported that the exposure to other languages and culture was beneficial later in life. In contrast, some interviewees maintained that children who beg extensively during their time as *almudu* may return without the religious knowledge they were expected to acquire and without any professional training or knowledge of agricultural work. They may risk ending up unemployed in towns or in Bissau.

Several former *almudus* of different ages told us about their experiences of having run away; it appeared that a number of them returned to their *marabout* or to a new one, at the request of their parents. There is some evidence that there is a recent surge of *almudus* who have run away from their *marabouts*. Bissau-Guineans travelling in Senegal said they had met destitute *almudus* and helped them run away, either by giving them money or a ride in their car. However, most seem make their own decision to run away, particularly from Ziguinchor. A police officer in São Domingo argued that nowadays children were clever, knew about their rights and refused to accept all kinds of treatment.

We have reports from boys returning through Oio, Bafatá and Gabú. For instance, in a border town in Oio region, a man in his forties told us that last year four boys came to his village. They were running away from their *marabout* in Senegal. One of them, the youngest one, was left in his village because he could not walk anymore while the older boys continued their journey back home, an additional 100 km. The man took the boy to his house where he stayed with his family for almost six months, or long enough for the family to get attached to him. The boy could not explain where he came from and the other boys he knew had left. One day a woman came and said she recognized the boy and contacted his family. The father and the mother came to the police station in the area and confirmed that the boy was their son. They had heard that he had left the *marabout* but did not know about his whereabouts.

So-called repatriation, referred to in Kriol as *ribantadu* is the most controversial issue for our interviewees, in particular the Fula parents. We were told many times that parents whose sons were repatriated, and thereby had their studies terminated, felt ashamed. They had been expected to perform the *dua alouwal* in their community but the repatriation destroyed that expectation. For community members, this meant that the boy did not live up to the challenge of being an *almudu*, because other boys stayed. For parents it was particularly shameful that their child's name was broadcasted on the radio. The announcement suggests that the parents had not been responsible with regard to their child. One community member said: "It is not good for parents to have this type of broadcasting. They will be stigmatized in their village." It was also claimed to be difficult for the boy himself to be the only one repatriated but not the other village children who had left with him. We were told of several cases of boys, who after repatriation had returned to Senegal, either by their own choice or because their parents wanted them to return. The same applied to boys who had run away from their *marabout*; after coming back, they might go or be sent back to Senegal.

males, Perry (2004: 56-58) states that previously the older students were engaged in the agricultural work and they were recognized as being "more inclined to leave if not fed well. As a result, older talibés always received a meal," while those aged 5-15 years old begged from villagers who "considered the food given to talibés to be askaka, or the charity that all Muslims are expected to bestow on the needy." Perry maintains that the memories of "hunger and thirst were central in men's narratives of their talibé years."

Interviews with families of repatriated children and boys who had been repatriated indicate that they were sent back home against their will. For instance, in a village in Gabú we met a family of a boy who was repatriated from Dakar by aeroplane.¹¹ He stayed with his grandmother and other family members because his father had died recently. The family members told us that *marabouts* in the area did not have conditions to sustain the students in the village because of lack of food; therefore, they take students to Senegal. In addition, we were told, when children stay away from home they study better than they would do otherwise. Thus the boy and others from the village were sent to Dakar. In February 2008, the boy was staying with his teacher who came from the area. According to what the boy said, some Senegalese people approached the boy when he was begging and fooled him. These people said they were going to give the boys money but then locked them up in a room together with many other boys like him. All the boys were then put into an aeroplane and sent to Bissau. Finally, they were taken by car to Gabú. Their names were announced on the radio and the family members asked to come and pick them up. In the case of this particular family, the AMIC representative took the boy back to the family.

Having their child repatriated was very embarrassing for the family members and they argued they were not at all happy with the situation. The boy himself wanted to go back to Dakar and complete his studies there. However, his father's brother said he did not want to send more boys to Dakar because the Senegalese government apparently did not want to have them there. There are more than twenty children from the area with the same *marabout* in Dakar, we were informed, and now he makes efforts to hide the children because he is afraid that they will also be fooled and sent back home. The father's brother of the repatriated boy explained he did not accept that the boy is punished and beaten. Nevertheless, he said he was aware that, according to the Koran, begging was allowed. Another man, in his forties who had had nine years of Koranic studies in Senegal, argued that suffering was part of the acquirement of knowledge. There were families who sent their children back to Senegal if they ran away from their *marabout*, and they might even beat them and tell them that they had to suffer.

While it is a source of shame for the families and their children to be repatriated and return by aeroplane, we heard stories about those who were said to have been curious to get to know Dakar but they had no interest in studying the Koran. When they wanted to return to Guinea-Bissau, it was claimed that they had contacted some organizations working with repatriation with the aim of getting a free ride back home by aeroplane. Still, several interviewees argued it was far too expensive to send the boys back by aeroplane and that it would be wiser to use some of that money to support the Koranic schools in Guinea-Bissau, thereby preventing an outflux of children to Senegal.

A government officer, who is well informed about the routines for repatriation of boys from Senegal to their families, asked himself the question why some of the boys returned to Senegal. He was Fula and had attended Koranic studies in Guinea-Bissau when he was a child. He explained that in the villages people do not always get three meals a day, i.e., breakfast, lunch and dinner. They got more to eat in Senegal and while begging they get both money and food, he said. The boys may have had better lives there than they were at home because in Senegal they did not go hungry. The *almudus* may also have felt some freedom when spending their time on the streets with other boys, where they could sometimes play. In the streets they also learn to steal. In contrast, in the village everything is more closed and they are ordered by their fathers to work hard in the agriculture, he argued.

The government officer explained that when boys were repatriated they are given 25 000 CFA by AMIC to give their fathers, which is enough for two weeks' rice. There are no opportunities waiting for these boys and they do not go to school. After repatriation the boys have no further opportunities for schooling, and they run away from their families and become criminals: "There

¹¹ Another boy, who now resides in Bissau with his mother, told us a similar story about how he was "lured" with a promise of money and locked in a room with other Bissau-Guinean boys in Dakar before being repatriated.

must be another way of repatriating these boys – this is not good enough,” he argued: “What we are doing is taking a child from one punishment to another.” The families that had children in Senegal had varied forms of contacts with their sons, he explained. There are children who lose all contact with the family while in Senegal, while others go there to check on their child’s living conditions. He believed that generally the parents will not phone their children in Senegal because they are afraid that it might encourage the child the return: “If children know their mother is worried they might want to run home.”

A social worker likewise believed that parents would not talk to their children by phone, due to the unlikelihood of the children having a phone: “The father may talk to the *marabout*, who tells him that everything is fine. Sometimes parents do not want the child to know they still are alive because they are afraid the child will know they are worried and thinking about them, and then they will run away,” he explained.

As mentioned earlier, it is important for a *marabout* to have many *almudus*. Through them he is respected and acquires power. In all the Muslim communities, the *marabouts* are moral and religious authorities. “A repatriated *almudu* causes disorder in our Fula communities,” one of our informants said. Yet, there has always been a tradition of *almudus* running away. In such cases, the parents used to bring their boys back to the *marabouts*. Now when the *almudus* are repatriated, their parents are requested to sign a paper that states that if the child returns to Senegal they will be locked up.

As already noted, the repatriated boys are frequently perceived as a source of shame for their parents and they often return to Senegal. However, when they go back, they are no longer received by their *marabouts*. They stay on their own on the streets of Dakar or other towns, and become part of a group of children called *fakhman*, children who live on the streets.

Fakhman

Fakhman is a name given to a group of children who live on the streets in Senegal. The origin of the term is from the Wolof word *fakh*, which means break or rupture, and describes their situation very clearly. The children who belong to this group have cut themselves off from their families, the *marabout*, schools and society in general. The children are of the age of seven years or older while the majority are adolescents. They live in a precarious and dangerous situation and at risk of criminality. They tend to go around in small groups.

We found indications that many Bissau-Guinean children belong to this group. On the streets of Dakar it is difficult to distinguish them from *almudus* who beg. One of them, a boy around nine years who lives on the streets in Dakar, told us:

I was living with a *marabout*, but I ran away. I was sent back to Guinea-Bissau, but I did not want to stay there, so I returned to Dakar ... The night is the most complicated time of the day for us – it is dangerous. We look for a place to sleep on the street, in empty houses, or find a place in the gardens. We are permanently afraid of the older *fakhman* who abuse us or steal from us what we have earned during the day. They also sexually abuse us.

Clin-clin

In recent years, boys called *clin-clin* can be found on the streets of Bissau and larger towns in Guinea-Bissau. They are Fula boys who come from Guinea, generally about 10-18 years of age. According to interviews with the boys, they leave their homes with the knowledge of their parents, who bless them when they leave and wish them good luck in their struggle for a better life. Without such a blessing, life would be more difficult, they argued. When the boys reach their destination, they will seek a relative who will support them. While they get food from their relatives, they stay with other *clin-clin* children in a room they rent together.

In interviews the boys claimed that they have come to Guinea-Bissau to earn money. They do

so by going around and offering to polish and repair shoes. The name *clin-clin* (or *cirage*) has its origin in the sound the boys use to call attention to their services, produced by tapping the metal piece they use to facilitate polishing shoes. *Clin-clin* boys we talked to claimed they generally did not encounter any problems with the population where they reside. They were usually paid as agreed, and the most difficult thing for them was having to walk around everywhere, many kilometres every day.

The *clin-clin* boys said they earned about 1 000-3 000 CFA a day. All the money is handed over to the head of the household of their relatives, who will register what he received and the boy keeps a copy. Part of the money is taken as a contribution to the family household for food. As money accumulates the possibility opens up for them to start small business on the streets, selling products like cigarettes, matches, soap, oil and other common household items. Their wealth will increase little by little, or as a *clin-clin* boy told us: "Many rich Futa-Fula businessmen started as *clin-clin*."



A policeman we talked to in Cacheu region told us that when *clin-clin* boys arrived in town, the police would check where they came from and help them to find relatives to take care of them. "They behave well and earn some money. Some of the boys stay for a long time and establish a family here," he explained. All our informants agreed that these boys were honest and earned their living through decent work.

Regional authorities

During our tour of the regions, we visited the police, courts, health institutions and the social services. Personnel were interviewed and questioned about cases of possible trafficking in their area and about cases of child mistreatment.

Trafficking

There were differences between regions regarding the extent to which the government institutions had become involved in activities they classified as trafficking. In Tombali, Quinara, Biombo and Oio, no trafficking was reported to have occurred. In Cacheu region, government officials claimed that there had been no cases of trafficking of children in the area. The police in São Domingo had never arrested traffickers, but officials believed that the families often took their boys themselves to Ziguinchor, or that the traffickers avoided crossing at the border points. In contrast, it had been involved in assisting boys who had run away from *marabouts*, residing mainly in Ziguinchor, but also elsewhere in Senegal. No child was reported to have run away from the Gambia. The runaway boys were registered at the police station and then handed over to AMIC. One official showed us a poster with the CRC. "We read this for the boys when they come from Ziguinchor," he said, and explained that he had attended a seminar on child trafficking and the CRC. The police were therefore aware about this problem.

The police in Farim town in Oio region had, like his colleague in São Domingo, attended a seminar on child trafficking. He had become involved with a child from Bafatá who had run away from Senegal. He informed us about a *marabout* who had been stopped two months ago when he was crossing the border with 5-6 children. The police called the parents, who stated their children were going to study in Senegal and gave written permission for them to cross the border.

The police in Gabú reported there were *almudus* who had run away and come to the police. They had also arrested *marabouts* who had attempted to cross the borders with children: "At times they had 30-50 children they had collected." The children were registered and given to AMIC, which took care of returning them to their families. Such cases should be sent to the tribunal, but parents always asked not to go further with the case. According to our information, there were some cases in Gabú that ended in the tribunal, but there were no final verdicts. Arrests of persons involved in child trafficking should be sent to the court for prosecution, but in most cases the parents requested that no legal action be taken. It was claimed that the police lacked resources to deal with trafficking issues properly, and at times officials felt they were working against their own religion. Another government employee argued the parents did not bother so much about the suffering of their children because they thought that "a person who wants to have a good life tomorrow must work hard today." Another maintained that the consequences of trafficking to Senegal could be noted in the area, where many *almudus* can now be found begging when people come out of the mosques, and some have even started stealing.

A policeman in Bafatá reported he had arrested some traffickers and groups of children at the border. He had taken them to Bafatá where the children were identified, and SOS Talibé helped to bring them back to their families. Since he had started work, the police authorities had picked up more than 200 children at the border. In each group there were 15-20 children, and one day a group with about 60 children was stopped from crossing the border. Another day they took 27 children and the same day still one more group of children attempted to cross the borders. The number of groups stopped had declined in recent months because of increased border controls, it was claimed. In response, the traffickers now attempt to bypass the border checkpoints, but the border officials try to cover those areas as well. All the "traffickers" come from Guinea-Bissau, he said; they are Fula and all the children are Fula children.

A judge in Bafatá did not know about any trafficker who had been found guilty of crime. He explained that before they became involved, the police had to send the case to the court but they did not do so: "The witnesses do not dare, they are afraid." He confirmed that three cases of trafficking had appeared before his court. In 2008, he had been expecting charges to be filed against a trafficker but these never materialized. In another case, a judicial process was initiated but was later withdrawn. The third case was now in process, he said: "We will start interviews with the accused on Monday." It is a case against a *marabout* who resides in the St Louis area in Senegal. That case was based on a written accusation. Because it is a

civil case it came to the court without any prior contact with the police. SOSTalibé made the charges against the *marabout*, who claimed to have impregnated seven young girls, including one who was 14 years old and only 44 kg in weight. The *marabout* was taken to the police and put in prison, but by the force and intervention of religious leaders, he was released. Parliament has adopted laws against trafficking; thus there is no problem with the law, the judge said, although resources were badly lacking. The next step is to carry out an investigation, and they had to interrogate the accused. The judge said he had no means of transport and no way of continuing the investigation: "How can I travel to St Louis to follow up this case?"

Health authorities indicated that they are not involved in the reception of repatriated children, adding: "If they asked for support, we would give it." They do not have any data regarding child trafficking in their respective regions. A health professional explained:

We have heard about this. It seems to me that there is an NGO that is working on this issue, but they have not had any contact with us. There are no [health] examinations [of the repatriated children] to our knowledge, and I find it strange. The children are in a difficult situation and you can ask yourself why we are not contacted ... On the other hand, I have not tried to find out any information. It seems to me that when there are funds, no one wants to allow others to get close to these funds ... This seems to be a closed circle.

Abuse

In all the regions, some cases of sexual abuse were reported and some of the cases had ended in the courts.¹² Some of the cases concerned adolescents, for instance a fifteen-year-old boy who had attempted, without success, to rape a four-year-old girl within the family. Often the girls involved had been 12-14 years old, and the accused boys 14-16 years old; boys that age are too young for prosecution, so the case is left with the social services. In 2006, one of the regional courts had a case of sexual abuse of a nine-year-old girl who was abused by a man in his fifties. He was accused but as they had no prison he used to stay in a house behind the police station. Later he was sent to a nearby town that had a prison. There, he got sick and died in the prison before he had completed his penal term of a little less than one year. In one of the courts, five cases of sexual abuse had been brought to court. In 2007, there were two cases. In Bafatá, sexual abuse was stated to be rare, but some 4-6 cases of sexual abuse of minors had been reported in recent years. In Farim town, there were reports of a few cases of sexual abuse, with claims made by parents. The victims were aged ten years or older. On occasion, charges are made for physical violence against children.

Health personnel stated that there were few cases of sexual abuse reported. They generally concerned attempted rape and adults. The cases would be reported to the police. However, it was admitted that such cases are often kept within the family and not made public.

The police were rarely involved in cases of suspected maltreatment of young children, and these cases were rarely brought to court. Cases involving older children (7-12 years old) were more common, and at times occurred during adolescent fighting while drunk. Others maltreated children were most often hurt through playing, or they got hurt in a fight with an older child. It is possible that parents may hide such incidents.

One physician did not recall any recent cases of maltreated children, although he could remember one case from 2005: A mother had cut her child's arm several times because he had stolen 1 000 CFA. The mother was put in prison for one night. In Gabú region, a health professional recalled a similar case a few years back of a father who had burned his child's hands for stealing. The case was reported to the police and the father was taken to prison. Another case was reported about a child who had been hospitalized after having been badly beaten by his mother. The staff could not understand how a mother who had given birth to the child could beat him so badly.

¹² See Butiam, Ribeiro and Mendes (2006).

There were examples reported of cases when children had been harshly disciplined. One case involved a child sent to sell mangos and who returned with too little money. There were no reports of children with broken bones after being disciplined. Respondents reported that it was usually the mother who disciplined the children while the father was working. In addition, there were also reports of teachers beating schoolchildren. We discussed the issue with three Bissau-Guinean girls aged 8-10 years old, who explained that one of their teachers used to beat the children a lot if they did not study properly; one of the girls exclaimed: "What a hand!" (Kriol: *kil mao*).

Fosterage, or lending children, was said to be common practice among all ethnic groups. The situation of foster children was said to vary between families. "Some families treat their foster children very well, while others treat them badly." There was no custom of disciplining foster children more than birth children – it varied from family to family.

Court cases

The most common court cases involving children were related to divorce, especially cases of fathers applying for custody of his children, or fathers sued for failing to pay child support to the mother. Drug abuse and dealing were also identified as problems in all regions, often involving adolescents. In Bafatá, the police explained that they had a lot of problems with drugs, particularly adolescents smoking cannabis, and these cases were sent to the tribunal.

Violence against children was rarely brought to court, and nobody recalled a single case of infanticide. Children employed in heavy labour was at times a problem, mainly involving their own children, but also foster children. One such case, for instance, involved a father who filed a complaint against his child's mother because she made the child do work he did not like. Some respondents raised the issue of children who work to earn extra money for their families. Although some children who work in the markets skip school on occasion, others manage to attend school and continue their work.

There were some reports of homicides. The cases mainly involved men killing other men, but women were also reported to use witchcraft to kill other people. Infanticide or abandonment was not recognized as a problem (Kriol: *bota menino*). In one case, an adult son with a history of mental problems and drug abuse had killed his mother. Finally, it was acknowledged that there was a certain reluctance to raise twins, in addition to the *iran* children, i.e., believed to be born without a human soul (see Einarsdóttir, 2004).

A number of cases of forced and early marriage were reported, with girls aged as young as twelve. According to the law, forced marriage is not allowed but people, even in Bissau, claimed to be unaware of it. Public officials highlighted the custom among the Balanta of the first wife raising their brother's daughter to later become their co-wife. Since November 2008, three young girls (14, 16 and 18 years of age) had run away from such marriages in Tombali region. They had sought the help of the police, who in turn had referred the cases to the social services. "All compounds have young girls who are destined to marry the husband," a judge confirmed.

Early marriage was stated to be common practice in Gabú. Few girls refuse such marriages but some may run away. No one can be forced to marry without consent. One girl, 14 years old, was reported to have run away to Senegal but her family brought her back. Some respondents said fathers arranged marriage to avoid pregnancy when their daughters started to mix with boys: "Not to have a wolf in the house" (Kriol: *pa ka na tene lobo na casa*).

In the regions, prostitution was reported to be rare. One respondent argued: "It is something that comes with development." Some said they were not aware of any prostitution in the area, and if it existed, it was a clandestine activity.

Finally, it should be pointed out that legal investigations often have limited effectiveness. Personnel at the courts and the police normally had no access to transport vehicles. At one

of the courts, the judges said they could not accept any offers of help with transport because then they would be asked to return the favour at a later date. One judge said that he had bought his own motorcycle to travel around for his services.



Institutions and NGOs

Institute for Women and Children

The Institute of Women and Children (IMC) is a governmental organization established in 2 000. Its objective is to defend and protect children and promote women's rights and economic and social conditions. IMC has created a commission that coordinates and monitors activities of NGOs and others regarding trafficking of human beings, e.g., SOS Talibé, and AMIC. The commission meets on a monthly basis, and more often if the need arises.

Amigos de Criança

Amigos de Criança (AMIC) was established on 30 October 1984 as a subdivision within the youth organization of PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independencia da Guiné e Cabo Verde). In 1991, with the introduction of a multiparty system, it was transformed into an NGO independent of political parties. At that time Save the Children Sweden supported AMIC. When Save the Children Sweden moved its headquarters from Bissau to Abidjan, AMIC inherited most of their office furniture and materials. Save the Children Sweden supported a project on child labour in Guinea-Bissau until 2004-05. Since this time there are occasional contacts and most concern the implementation of the CRC.

Interviewees in the regions we visited recognized AMIC as the most important national NGO working for the children's rights in Guinea-Bissau. AMIC is responsible for taking care of children who are repatriated or who have run away from Senegal. An AMIC representative pointed

out that despite there being good Koranic schools in Guinea-Bissau, children are sent to Senegal for religious studies. Many of them may be orphans, it was suggested.

The Bissau-Guinean *almudus* in Senegal are reported to be in a critical situation. One interviewee explained:

They are not learning anything in Senegal, and do not learn the Koran. They only beg on the streets. Some even return sick to Guinea-Bissau. A lot of children just crash out on the street. One child was sent to hospital in Dakar and stayed there for a long time, but he's back in his village now.

Interviewees argued that children who studied under good conditions in Guinea-Bissau would learn more than those who study in Senegal. There they live in precarious situations and beg on the streets. If they do not reach their daily quota of contributions to the *marabout*, they are punished harshly, including being beaten. This does not give much space for religious studies.

A study conducted by AMIC came to the conclusion that poverty was the main reason for child trafficking to Senegal and the Gambia. Parents had many children, there was no work, and farming do not produce enough to feed everyone. Children who had lost a parent, or whose step-mother did not like looking after another woman's child are most likely to be sent abroad. In addition, there are no schools in the villages. On the other hand, one AMIC voluntary explained: "Most of the parents are poor because most people are poor – but sending children to school in Senegal is not a question of poverty." It is more a question of tradition, and parents want their children to study the Koran.

AMIC is responsible for identifying and reuniting the families of repatriated children. According to their information, obtained during our fieldwork in July 2009, there were 224 children reported to have been repatriated with the assistance of AMIC in Bissau.¹³ Of those, 95 percent come from Gabú and Bafatá regions. More than 90 percent of them are Fula and a small number of them are Mandinga. No children have been repatriated from the Gambia; the explanation given is that *almudus* do not beg on the streets in the Gambia. In addition, a small number of foreign children staying in Guinea-Bissau have been sent by AMIC to their homes, i.e., to Senegal and Guinea.

An AMIC representative explained that the repatriation of children has to be voluntary. The international non-profit organization Environment and Development Action in the Third World (ENDA-TM), based in Dakar, is working on this issue in Senegal, and there are many other NGOs involved. In Senegal, social workers monitor the streets in shifts throughout the day and night. We did not get detailed information about how the children to be repatriated to Guinea-Bissau are identified on the streets of Senegal. Some children were said to be sick or living in a precarious situation when they were taken to the shelters.

In Gabú, there is an AMIC transit centre responsible for reuniting children and their families in the region. The centre has two motorbikes, but no car. Five people work on a voluntary basis, receiving subsidies of 2 000 CFA a month. The centre has also been supported with other materials, including a DVD player. We had intended to inspect the centre but the keys to the premises could not be found. A representative explained that the children are expected to stay there for a maximum of seven days. A small number may stay longer, up to two months, because the families refuse to accept the return of their children. We were told about a four-year-old *almudu* who had come to the centre, but now lives with a policeman. As a young boy, the policeman had also run away from his *marabout* in Senegal because of maltreatment, and still had the scars to prove it. Some children from Guinea, aged about 10-15, had recently passed through Gabú. They were taken care of in the transit centre, went to school, and AMIC looked after them. Four of them were said to have returned to Guinea.

¹³ According to information from AMIC from 14 January 2010, the NGO had received 185 children by aeroplane and an additional 14 children were expected to arrive the very same day. Approximately 20 children had arrived by car, and they had assisted an unknown number of runaway children.

AMIC started its work against child trafficking in 2005. In addition to the transit centre in Gabú, AMIC representatives in São Domingo and Ngoré have been involved in assisting many dozens of runaway boys. Some of them have been very young, and they have been reunited with their families. One volunteer explained:

They walk all the way from Ziguinchor to the borders with Guinea-Bissau. This is a dangerous route, at times covered with mines. When the children arrive at the border, they are very tired. The Senegalese police inform their Bissau-Guinean colleagues ... Transport is arranged for them by car to Bissau. Thereafter, the children are sent to the regional AMIC centres that make contact with their family.

All these runaway boys had been sent abroad to study the Koran, but they are only a small proportion of all such children. An AMIC volunteer who assists them explained their situation:

They only beg and do not study at all. They do not even know how to pray. They are dirty and badly dressed. They have to come up with 500 CFA each day and give it to the *marabout*, otherwise they are beaten, and some had scars on their back. They sleep on the floor. These *marabouts* are Guineans who collect the children and offer them education – then they sit with arms crossed and live from the begging of these children. Some boys [we have received] had stayed 3-4 years begging and the smallest ones did not remember the name of their family. The boys behave rather badly. They are used to living on the streets and they fight when they see food.

The AMIC interviewees pointed out that the problem of trafficking is transnational and international help is needed. In Guinea-Bissau, organizations such as UNICEF, PLAN International, and Ministry of Women and Children collaborate to resolve the problem. In addition, there are seven West African countries working together, and they attempt to monitor how children move in the region and how the traffickers are organized. The aim is to identify these children and help them to return home.

SOSTalibé

The Bissau-Guinean NGO SOS Talibé runs one transit centre in Bafatá town for repatriated children from families resident in the region. We met the head of the organization and were informed about their activities. We also visited their centre in Bafatá.

SOSTalibé began its activity by sending medicines to the regional hospital in Bafatá. At the same time, it strived to establish *madrassa* schools as an alternative to religious studies in Senegal, resulting in a total of fifty-one such schools in the Bafatá region. The NGO has actively sought support from donors within and out-of-country, e.g., from Mavegro and other commercial traders in Bissau and Bafatá, PLAN International, UNICEF and supporters in Switzerland. Despite limited funds, SOSTalibé expanded its activities to include child protection issues with the aim of stopping the emigration of children to Senegal. Governmental authorities were contacted and in 2003-04 they gave the NGO access to an empty building in Bafatá that had been constructed before the military uprising in 1998/99. The NGO also established contacts with the police and initiated radio programmes that denounced the movement of *almudus* to Senegal. It is one of the national NGOs currently implementing child protection/child trafficking prevention activities, and has since 2007 received assistance from UNICEF.

Since 2006/07, SOS Talibé in Bafatá has received 304 children who have arrived in groups. Most of the children do not stay more than a few days in the transit centre but some children have stayed there for more than four months after being suddenly repatriated from Dakar, without returning to their family. For instance, there is a boy whose father is dead; his mother has married another man and does not want him to return.

In addition to the activities mentioned above, SOS Talibé has initiated the Pilot Committee for Talibé Children in Guinea-Bissau (Portuguese: *Comitê de Pilotagem para Meninos Talibés na Guiné-Bissau*). It included, among others, representatives for the IMC, leaders for the Advisory Council for Islamic Issues (Portuguese: *Conselho do Assuntos Islâmicos*), the police, border police, immigration authorities, the National Council of Islamic Youth (Portuguese: *Conselho Nacional da Juventude Islâmica*), AMIC, and other voluntary groups. SOS Talibé also works with Al Anzar, a national NGO, and was instrumental in creating a Committee for Integration of the Public School and Koranic Schools (Portuguese: *Comitê de Integração de Escola Pública e Corânica (madrassa)*) that combines a public school and an Islamic school.

The main difficulty SOSTalibé faces is limited collaboration with Imams who suspect them of fighting Islam. This attitude has been alleviated somewhat through information in films and meetings. Support from UNICEF and PLAN has also been a problem because it has created some jealousy over the distribution of funds. Another difficulty is the nutrition of the children who stay in the transit centre in Bafatá. Initially, the community gave rice and food for the children. However, after receiving support in the form of a house and funds from UNICEF, the local community is not willing to contribute anymore: "Since you have money, we do not want to contribute." The children also have severe health problems, e.g., skin problems and diarrhoea. There are also problems with children who have become accustomed to another lifestyle in Dakar, compared with that found in the villages. One day they are in Dakar, and then they are put into a transit centre and suddenly repatriated back home by car. However, they may stay for about ten days in Kolda in the Centre La Luminière, a centre that collaborates with SOSTalibé.

SOS Talibé has been accused of being dominated by Mandingas saving Fula children. For instance, an Imam told us that SOS Talibé was not an appropriate association to work with the repatriated *almudus*, because the children are almost exclusively Fula: "People look at who is in charge of the activity. It should be the population, but this is not the case. You say: this is the director - only the government can do that. Such a person should be chosen by the population." The director of SOSTalibé maintains that this accusation is not fair: "It is not true that we are only Mandinga," he argued: "Originally, there were three from Mauritania, now they are four; there were three Fula and are now six; and one Mandinga."

Islamic Youth

We interviewed two representatives, one male and one female, from Islamic Youth (Portuguese: *Juventude Islâmica*), which is a subassociation of the National Committee of Islam (Portuguese: *Conselho Superior Islâmico*). The members are young women and men.

Our male interviewee argued that trafficking is a "heavy word" that refers to something illegal and clandestine:

We need to examine what is trafficking and what is not. Parents send their children to Senegal and they know about their movement; therefore, this is not trafficking. Children go for studies and their parents agree. At the same time there is violation of their rights because they are forced to beg. And if they do not get enough money they are beaten. They are deprived of clothes and food, and do not attend school.

Parents believe their children will learn more in Senegal than in their home community, our interviewee maintained: "Poverty is not the explanation for all conditions; it is also a matter of tradition. Learning to read is a matter of becoming someone who will be respected.

Our respondents argued it was not necessarily wrong to repatriate children from Senegal; however, it is crucial to think about the position of the parents and the future opportunities for the children, who might otherwise return to Senegal. They lamented that there are some *almudus* in Guinea-Bissau who beg, and there is an urgent need to assist them. All children

need food, health and education – and children should live with their parents, both of our interviewees agreed. There are children here who beg in Bissau and some end up in the hands of the police. The members of the association are trying to help. Each member walks around in their suburban area and collects material for the schools and divides what they get between them.

Islamic Youth investigates Koranic schools in Guinea-Bissau. “Our system of religious education is not in accordance with the current times,” one of them said and added: “If everything we hear is right – there are scoundrels who have infiltrated our educational system.” They agreed that this is the problem of the Fula and they should work on this issue, but it is also a problem of the Islamic community. They pointed out that in Mansoa it is prohibited to beg and the *almudus* are not expected to work in the fields. The respected Imam in Mansoa receives a lot of support from former students, some of whom reside in Europe. In contrast, some *marabouts* take in more students than they can feed and simply say, “We have faith in God (Kriol: *no na pega na Deus*).”

Rede Ajuda

Rede Ajuda (RA) is a Bissau-Guinean NGO that is active in Buba, in Quinara region, and works with mothers and children. A representative for the NGO explained: “We noticed that everything was happening in Bissau, Gabú, and Bafatá, and we knew that not everyone should be there.”

RA initiated its activities in 2002 through the efforts of individuals who were interested in the development of the area. Since 2005, RA has received support from the Portuguese government under its programme Rede Integrado, but this is due to end by December 2010. RA started with literacy programmes for people who worked in agriculture and cultivated vegetables. Most of them were women who complained that many children were going to Senegal to study religion. These children were said to be living in miserable conditions and begging on the streets; and if they did not return with 1 000-2 000 CFA per day, they were left alone on the streets.

RA is now giving support to eight schools: two in Buba (Bairro Alto and Bairro Nema I) and six schools in the villages of Balanta, Mandinga and Biafada (Grampara, Tite, Nova Sintra, Brandao, Dáru and Grundjatra). The schools offer a public school curriculum in the morning and Koranic education in the afternoon. The children get breakfast in the morning and a snack in the afternoon. They go home for lunch. The RA-supported schools offer the first four years of elementary education. Each student pays 250 CFA per semester, in total 500 CFA per year. Previously, the World Food Programme (WFP) supported the schools but this is no longer the case. There is a waterhole at every school, and in other places as well, making a total of twenty-four waterholes within easy access.

Children from Catholic families go to the Catholic mission in the afternoon or during weekends. Parents appreciate RA schools, we were told, as the children get public education from RA while the parents take care of the religious education themselves. Everybody wants to go to school, and respondents state that “our school is not a religious school.” Teachers come from Quinara region: four are government-trained civil servants; and four have had a Koranic education. The government teachers get subsidies from RA; in contrast, the Koranic teachers receive salaries from RA. As a result of this initiative, people no longer like sending their children to Senegal: “What can they learn in Senegal that they cannot learn here with us? That’s why we have no *talibé* children in Senegal.”

In addition to their educational work, RA distributes rice seeds that take about 90 days to mature. RA also provides credit to 32 villages, but only to women. Each village can get about 500 000 to 1M CFA in credit, with a maximum of 50 000 CFA per woman every six months. They use the money to buy oil, which they then sell, and in this way they improve conditions for many households.

NGOs in Senegal

There are several NGOs based in Senegal that operate for the benefit of children, in particular children in vulnerable situations. There are reports of an increasing number of centres that provide food for children during the day, although they do not provide night shelter. It is not within the scope of the present study to analyze in detail the activities of these NGOs, but a number of them were visited during the research trip in Senegal. Below are a few of the organizations, with a brief description of their activities.

Empire des Enfants

Empire des Enfants¹⁴ is a centre that is well known among street children, who come on their own initiative to seek help. It can accommodate 25 children, but during the cold period (winter), they take care of about 50 children. In contrast to some of the other organizations, their staff do not go out on the streets to look for children to take care of. In addition to Senegalese children and children of other nationalities, many Bissau-Guinean children seek their services. When the children come to the centre, they are put in contact with the social services. There they are assigned to an adult who becomes their reference person, and who in turn takes care of a small group of other children. They strive to establish contact with their families and provide health care. While formalities are being worked out, the children take lessons in Portuguese, and engage in artwork, pottery and other tasks aimed to stimulate their development.

For Bissau-Guinean children, the procedure is the same, staff told us. They ask the child if he wants to go back to his *marabout*. If the child refuses, the International Office of Migration (IOM) in Dakar and the Embassy of Guinea-Bissau intervene. IOM contacts AMIC in Bissau, which tries to find the child's family on the basis of the information they have. If the family is identified, AMIC seeks to mediate to get the family to accept the repatriation of the child. There are, however, cases when the family refuses to receive the child. In this case, the child is taken care of by AMIC and SOS Talibé, who also continue mediation to reunite the family. IOM places great emphasis on ensuring the child accepts repatriation before initiating repatriation procedures, and uses specially trained staff for the interviews. When the child has agreed, a contract is signed and sent to the Embassy of Guinea-Bissau. Thereafter, IOM reserves seats on a plane and the children leave under the supervision of an adult reference person from the Empire des Enfants centre and one member of the IOM staff.

Centre Keur Yalla de Fanock

Centre Keur Yalla de Fanock, which is situated in the suburban area of Fanock in Dakar, was set up to help street children. It is open until about 2 pm for children to come and have some food and play. They also receive health care, when needed. The children can come and go as they want, and nobody looks for them if they do not show up.

Centre Social des Maristes

This centre¹⁵ is run by the Christian Maristes of Senegal, and is situated in the suburban area of Léona in Grand Yoff, Dakar. It was recently established in response to the increase in the number of street children in the area. The centre is open to children on Wednesdays, and they can stay all day. The children receive food, as well as medical and psychological care; they can also take a bath. The children can watch films on the history of the Christianity. In the evening they leave the centre to look for a place to sleep. On other days, staff members from the centre go out and meet the children on the streets.

¹⁴ See <http://www.empiredesenfants.com/> and <http://www.causeandaffectedfoundation.org/reports/africa9.htm>

¹⁵ See http://www.fondazionefabriziomeoni.it/documenti/progetto_padri_maristi.pdf

The Ginndi Transit Centre

The Ginndi Transit Centre¹⁶ in Dakar, established in May 2003, is run by the Senegalese Government (Ministère de la Famille, de la Sécurité Alimentaire, de l'Entreprenariat Féminin, de la Micro Finance et de la Petite Enfance). It is a reception centre for children in difficult situations where they can get help and guidance. Staff go out on the streets where the children stay and the centre has a 24-hour telephone service for those in need of help. It collaborates with volunteers and neighbourhood watch committees in suburban areas, promotes and informs people about children's rights. The objective of the transit centre is to improve the physical and psychological health of abused children, including those who have been sexually abused. The children stay at the centre temporarily and get help as needed to facilitate their recovery.¹⁷

According to one of our Ginndi informants, the plight of street children in Dakar is becoming increasingly difficult, in spite of the efforts of the government and its partners. Worst off are the Bissau-Guinean *almudus* in Dakar. The neighbourhood watch committees have representatives from the Mayor of Dakar, the *marabouts*, governmental authorities in the area, women, youth and all those involved in work to protect children. However, Bissau-Guinean *marabouts* are not part of these committees. This has serious implications, it was claimed, because they can therefore continue to operate in impunity, exploiting marginalized children for their own benefit.

Another informant who monitors the streets told us that the situation of the *almudus* could be resolved if there was the political will to do so. To satisfy the international community, Bissau-Guinean *almudus* became the scapegoats of the government. Now certain *marabouts* have realized it is better for them if the children say they are from Casamance rather than Guinea-Bissau. This claim is difficult to deny since Casamance and Guinea-Bissau share borders and culture. In addition, many Bissau-Guineans came to Casamance as refugees during the liberation war, particularly to the Kolda area.

La Casa di Ibrahima

La Casa di Ibrahima is run by an Italian association and is situated in Keur Massar in the outskirts of Dakar.¹⁸ The main mission is to help children in difficult situations, including *almudus*. Frequently children who are to be repatriated to Guinea-Bissau stay there before departure. The centre offers food, sanitary facilities, medical care and an educational environment for the children.

ABC Children's Aid

An Icelandic Christian NGO founded ABC Children's Aid in 1988.¹⁹ According to its website, its work is "based upon enthusiastic people with a heart and vision for children. [It is] an interdenominational organization where all Christians can have a place for their effort and is based upon the commandment of Jesus Christ to love your neighbour as oneself." ABC Children's Aid recently established a centre in Dakar (2007) and aims to support children who live on the streets of Dakar. In the centre the children are given food and they get access to sanitary facilities and a place to sleep.

¹⁶ Spelling varies, for instance Guindi, Ginndi, Gindy, Gindi Centre Dakar Senegal. No homepage was found.

¹⁷ According to the Trafficking in Persons Report 2009, "with international organization and NGO assistance, 807 children were reunited with their families and 69 were trained in vocational centers located in the Ginndi center" (U.S. Department of State, 2009a: 253).

¹⁸ See http://www.lacasadiibrahima.org/un_po_di_senegal.php

¹⁹ See <http://english.abc.is/ABCEnglish/ABCInternational/Whoarewe/> and <http://www.abc.is/ABChjalparstarf/VerkefniABC/Senegal/>

La Lumière

La Lumière is a recently established centre in Kolda, Senegal.²⁰ It receives children who are on their way back to Guinea-Bissau, and other children who are facing difficulties in Senegal. They have agents, called *moniteurs*, who go out on the streets to identify children with difficulties and propose to help them. La Lumière looks for ways to facilitate the reintegration of the children with their families. It collaborates with SOS Talibé and, to lesser extent, with AMIC in Guinea-Bissau to identify the families of the children before they are sent back.

World Vision

The main objective of World Vision is to ensure that the rights of children are respected. According to the homepage:

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender. [...] World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.²¹

The project Vitalis (Vie des talibés au Senegal), supported by the Irish branch of World Vision, was established to contribute to the eradication of begging by *almudus* on the streets in Senegal.²²

ENDA Youth in Action

Environment and Development Action in the Third World (ENDA-TM) is an international organization based in Dakar, Senegal. The organization was founded in 1972 and supports the African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY).²³ The Youth in Action International team at ENDA-TM has many grassroots partners and collaborates with government institutions, international organizations and NGOs with particular focus on children separated from their families.²⁴ ENDA is one of the organizations in Dakar that identify Bissau-Guinean children to be repatriated.

Identifying children for repatriation

There are two, contradictory versions regarding the identification of children on the streets of Dakar. According to the NGOs and centres for children, they follow certain standards that respect the fundamental rights of the child, i.e., no *almudu* is repatriated to Guinea-Bissau against his will.

In general, monitors or centre workers patrol public places both day and night in order to identify children in need. One of our informants told us:

Each day the monitors travel to places likely to house children in a difficult situation, for example, markets, bus stations, etc. The first criterion is subjective because it depends on the assessment of the monitor. When he judges that the child is not healthy, the monitor approaches him and offers to help. He has a preliminary interview to find out the child's identity, his origin, the name of his

²⁰ See <http://onglalumiere.org/presentation.html>

²¹ See <http://www.wvi.org/wvi/wviweb.nsf/maindocs/3F50B250D66B76298825736400663F21?opendocument>

²² See <http://www.worldvision.ca/ContentArchives/content-stories/Pages/questions-and-answers-talibes-of-senegal.aspx>

²³ <http://www.enda.sn/english/equipes.htm> and <http://eja.enda.sn/>

²⁴ See Nimbona and Lieten (2007) and ENDA Jeuda (2008). For general information on ENDA, see <http://www.enda.sn/english/org.htm>

marabout, etc. When the child comes to the centre, the identification process is continued. If the child does not want to return to his *marabout*, the research centre looks for his family. When we find the family we organize a meeting of both parties, the boy and his family. The children never stay at the centre more than six months. After six months, the child returns to his parents or to the *marabout*. The signs of a child in distress include solitude, their clothes are dirtier than other children's on the streets, smelly odours, poor health, etc. When a child returns to his village, the NGO supports transportation costs.

Another viewpoint emerged in an interview with a representative from a Senegalese NGO engaged in work with *almudus*. It was claimed that the monitors working for the shelters deceived children by promising them access to charity. When the *almudu* got into the car, he was taken to a centre where he was locked up until the day the aeroplane left for Guinea-Bissau.

An eight-year-old *almudu* who was repatriated to Guinea-Bissau told us:

Those who repatriated me to Bissau caught me on the street. They deceived me by telling me that they would take me to a centre where they would give me money. They put me in a car full of other *talibés*. They brought us to a centre where we were trapped. We stayed at the centre until the end of the month. Then we were given new clothes and shoes. The car dropped us at the airport where we boarded the plane at one hour after midnight. On arrival in Bissau they took me back to my mother.

During our fieldwork, it was pointed out that many children who had been repatriated to Guinea-Bissau had criticized this approach. Some of them are reported to have already returned to Senegal.

Concept of trafficking

The first informant we met started his speech by saying, "trafficking is a heavy word"; something we heard repeatedly. Many of our interviewees did not like the expression "child trafficking" to be used when referring to the custom of sending children to Senegal to study the Koran. They argued that this emigration is the decision of the parents, who want their children to study and become respected in the community. That did not, however, mean that there were no problems with this custom. One NGO representative proposed that the term "foster child" (Kriol: *menino di criason*) would be a better word than "trafficked child" as it explained better what was going on: "In fact the child is not living with own family." He argued that we should remember that "not everything is trafficking", and he gave examples of practices that were detrimental for children's lives, pointing out that these should be addressed independently of them being related to trafficking or not.

It is problematic to speak about trafficking of drugs and trafficking of children at the same time. It was proposed that another Kriol word should be found to better describe what was really happening. Another informant explained that if the parents wanted their child to get a religious education, they would place the child under the responsibility of a *marabout*, and this could certainly not be called trafficking. To be an *almudu* meant to be a student of the Koran; however, he was concerned about the related problems that were not discussed openly. Everything depended on the circumstances. *Almudus* sometimes became ill through diseases, and there were often problems of clothing, food and having a place to sleep.

Some respondents were concerned that emigration and trafficking should not be treated as the same phenomenon. One interviewee explained:

There is a difference between child trafficking and parents sending their children to study in Koranic schools in Senegal, which is more like emigration. It is child trafficking if you take a child without the approval of the parents, and you take the child to another country, and there the child might be sold and become a slave.

A health professional argued:

The families take the decision together to send a child away. For that they may sell a cow. You may go to Portugal at the age of 3-4 years, sent to members of your family, where you have better schools, standards of living, etc. This is not such a serious matter (Kriol: *kusa fatal*). Trafficking is stealing. This does not exist, but emigration, yes. People who migrate to neighbouring countries, they are looking for a better life.

Some interviewees underlined that the custom had changed over time, from being a form of respected education to becoming criminal exploitation with children forced to beg. Others argued that it had always amounted to exploitation of children, if not slavery, and the habit should be eradicated. The time was ripe for a change and adapting to current times. Still, some believed being an *almudu* was not such a tough life in earlier times. Then there was no or limited begging on the streets, and the children only did some agricultural work. Nowadays this custom had deteriorated, and scoundrels had infiltrated the system. For some interviewees, the begging of *almudus* in Senegal was the turning point that changed the classification to “child trafficking.” Many *marabouts* looked for children and sent them out to beg. This was worrisome. Some had seen Bissau-Guinean children begging in Senegal. An interviewee in Bafatá tended to see begging as a manifestation of trafficking. “I know that child trafficking occurs. I was in Senegal in 2007 and I saw with my own eyes Guinean children begging,” he explained. Another interviewee had given boys in Dakar money to return home. He had asked about their village and they told him where they came from. Later he found out that they had returned.

Many of the respondents made no distinction between being an *almudu* and trafficking. One interviewee explained that child trafficking referred to an act when someone would illegally transfer a child from his family with the aim of exploiting the child and using him as a slave, or forcing the child to work. The child would be maltreated and maybe exploited sexually. *Almudus* in Senegal was the only case of trafficking that he could think of. In a similar vein, an administrator explained that *almudus* were the key problem when it came to trafficking. In his community, there was some migration of children, as they tended to move from one place to another within their families. “This is not trafficking,” he argued. A policeman, for whom *almudu* was synonymous with trafficking, explained how in 2005, while working in another region, he had registered all cases of maltreatment of children in a special book given by UNICEF. He had attended several seminars that UNICEF organized in Bissau, Mansoa and Buba.

Several of the policemen interviewed had participated in seminars on trafficking, and for them crossing borders was crucial to define the act as trafficking. The same applied to some judges. One policeman in the south said he first heard of child trafficking in 2004 when they had a seminar in Bissau during which they learned about the issue. Afterwards, the police educated the people in the villages about the problem. For him, trafficking had to do with Muslim students who beg abroad. “But now we have Islamic schools here and the children will not go abroad,” he argued. A judge in the same region claimed that child trafficking was almost non-existent in his region. It was more of a problem in areas bordering Guinea, such as in Cacine. “This region is closed,” he claimed.

Health professionals in Tombali understood child trafficking as the “illegal transport of children across borders” to Senegal and the Gambia to study in Koranic schools. They had heard about trafficking on the radio and suggested it was happening in the eastern part of the country. They said they knew of the Balanta custom of brothers’ daughters being given away to grow up with their aunts, and later become their co-wives. This was not considered trafficking.

Representatives of NGOs concerned with child protection discussed trafficking in terms of the Palermo Protocol. They argued that child trafficking was a violation of the human rights of the child. All were concerned about the children who were taken from Guinea-Bissau to Senegal to study the Koran with *marabouts* who said they were going to teach them. “It is

deception and fraud because in reality they [the *marabouts*] are not teaching anything." The children only went to beg on the streets and some returned to Guinea-Bissau.

One NGO representative pointed out that there are different ideas about the word "trafficking." His opinion was that the transfer of *almudus* to Senegal and the Gambia is trafficking, in line with the Palermo Protocol:

There are intermediaries who come to the villages in Guinea-Bissau and ask for children, and their aim is exploitation. The recruitment is not by threats or cheating, rather it is a kind of deception. The *marabouts* demonstrate how well the *almudus* can learn with their help and the parents want their children to benefit from their teaching. The *marabouts* do not get money for the children but instead they send them to the streets to beg. It is nothing new that *marabouts* teach students to read the Koran, but today this is a serious situation that should be classified as trafficking.

Another NGO representative argued: "You as consultants have to know the international definition of child trafficking to understand that it is occurring in Guinea-Bissau." He said children were taken away from their families "by lies, taken with force and given to other people in another place for exploitation. This is trafficking." Furthermore, he claimed that some people who need a seasonal workforce pay the *marabout* 100 000 CFA beforehand in the dry season so as to guarantee the work of their *almudus* for forty days in the harvest period. "After seminars people understand that this is trafficking of children."

According to the representatives of the child protection NGOs, "traffickers look for children." They make contact with the families and tell them that they want to educate their children. The families do not know what happens afterwards. Then the traffickers and their children are picked up at the borders and returned to Bafatá where the children are identified and SOS Talibé helps return them to their families. One interviewee told us:

"Since I came we have taken more than 200 children back from the borders. There can be 15-20 or even sixty in each group that is taken. One day we took 27 children and the same day another group. The numbers of groups taken have reduced lately but they also try to bypass the border checkpoint."

One NGO representative considered that the current scale of child trafficking is a problem for Islam and its leaders in Senegal. "The information we have does not reach the inner circles of the *marabouts*." It is not written in the Koran that you should go on to the street to beg for money. "Some of the *marabouts* are criminals." In Guinea-Bissau, the government could do something about this situation, he claimed.

Prevention

Respondents were systematically asked for ideas as to how to improve the situation of Bissau-Guinean children, including preventive action that would free them from begging in Senegal. The following solutions were proposed:

- 1. Educate the population about situations that harm children:** Groups of people could for instance go to the villages, sit down with people and inform them about important issues regarding children, such as the importance of school in general, female genital mutilation (FGM; Kriol: *fanado*) and the realities of *almudu* life. Information could also be given through radio/TV, news items, etc. "We should give information, most importantly to the parents," a Fula teacher argued. However, he believed that it was not easy to convince the parents that they are doing something wrong, and he compared the fight against the exploitation of *talibé* with FGM. A policeman in Gabú argued: "If you explain to the parents the situation of the *talibé*, how badly they are treated, some will stop sending more. It may not be sufficient but it helps some to understand. The fathers are those who decide among the Fula and they have to understand."

2. **Educate the police and border guards:** The policemen and border guards should learn about children's rights and child trafficking, and afterwards they could educate the people in the villages about these issues.
3. **Educate children and parents about the CRC:** Children should be informed in school about the CRC and other laws that concern them. One informant argued: "We also have to educate the parents because they will not learn from their children."
4. **Improve the public education system:** Respondents argue that there is a lack of educational policy in Guinea-Bissau, and the schools needed to be improved, and teachers should be paid their salaries. Without functioning schools there would be little hope that youngsters would stop seeking opportunities abroad or away from their villages.
5. **Support and build madrassa schools:** It is good to have mixed schools where children can learn the official curriculum but also have religious education. These schools need to be supported with food. Currently, this type of support is not given to Koranic schools. The Ministry of Education should collaborate with the Koranic schools. Rede Ajuda, which has built eight such "mixed" schools in Quinara is an example of such support. AMIC has also been involved in the establishment of Arabic schools in Canchungo town.
6. **Establish an Islamic Institute:** No such institute exists in Guinea-Bissau; thus students go abroad for further Arabic studies.
7. **Adoption of relevant laws:** The government should formally approve a law on child trafficking and other issues important for children's well-being.
8. **Implement laws:** Laws against early marriage and forced marriage should be implemented, and the population informed about them. Preventive measures against sexual abuse need to be elaborated. A judge in Catio argued that there was a need to stop forced marriages, and pointed out: "It is a problem that the parliamentarians approve legislation when they are in Bissau, but defend traditions when they are here."
9. **Action plan at regional level and resources:** The Planning Cabinet has to work on a concerted approach at a regional level. Due to the hidden nature of trafficking, there is a need to create strategies; however, achievement could be hampered because of a lack of resources. The policemen interviewed underlined the importance of good screening at border checkpoints and minimal security. However, it was not easy because the traffickers even passed the borders during the night in the forest. The judges also argued they needed strengthening of the courts with minimal conditions, and transport to do the work. One of the judges had for instance bought his own motorcycle to travel around for his services.
10. **Social policy needed:** The state has to put private interests aside and the government must develop a social policy. Poverty reduction would reduce some problems related to emigration. Girls in prostitution (mainly 14 years or older) with male intermediaries had to have other alternatives to earn money. NGOs and others wanting to help could only be complementary. The government and NGOs had to collaborate on urgent social problems.
11. **Strengthening of AMIC:** Several respondents from the general public wanted AMIC to be more active and visible. A policeman mentioned for instance how he had been working together with AMIC in his former place of work but where he was placed today, AMIC was not really active.
12. **A professional centre for repatriated children:** Repatriated children often have been abused and are in need of good and appropriate education and specialized health care.

- 13. Registration of children:** Many children are not registered and thus have problems when they go to school, because they will not get their schooling confirmed without registration. It costs 2 500 CFA to register a child and some parents refuse to pay. For instance when men emigrate, their wives wait for them with children without much support. These children are often not registered.
- 14. Reconsider the use of the concept trafficking:** Several individuals maintained that the concept trafficking was a difficult one and far “too heavy” a word. This is due in part to the ongoing discussion on drugs trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, but also because its use embraces culturally accepted practices, such as giving children religious education considered to be the obligation of parents and good for children. It was also pointed out that too much emphasis on trafficking might contribute to less attention given to other situations that harm children, such as child labour in general, and in particular domestic work and trade.
- 15. Work for political stability:** Some government officers argued that political instability makes planning difficult and contributes to the fact that ongoing activities often fail.
- 16. Diversification of the agricultural sector:** Some respondents meant that development of the agricultural sector was crucial for a better life in rural areas.



Discussion

The study on child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau presented in this report was conducted at the request of UNICEF Iceland and UNICEF Guinea-Bissau. In line with the Terms of Reference, the research team addressed issues that relate to determinants and consequences of child trafficking. We were also requested to address issues of repatriation and reunification of children with their families and to propose preventive measures. During the fieldwork, we visited all of the regions in Guinea-Bissau, except the Bijagós Islands, as well as certain areas in Senegal and the Gambia.

Determinants

Difficult socio-economic conditions and the political instability in Guinea-Bissau emerged as an important crosscutting theme. All interviewees pointed out the lack of resources within the family and in the community. There is little support from the government and many felt as if they had been forgotten and left alone to resolve their problems. However, it was also underlined that not only the poorest families send their children to stay with others within the country or abroad. Another crosscutting theme is the perceived failure of the educational system in Guinea-Bissau, closely related to poverty and political instability.²⁵ Irrespective of ethnic group or region, people complained that there were few or no functioning schools in their villages or in the neighbourhood. Thus, in order to give their children some education, be it in public or private schools, vocational training, religious studies, etc., they are forced to seek it elsewhere. For the Islamic communities, the most accessible schools for them are those offered by religious teachers and *marabouts*, within and out-of-country. In addition, those who, despite the difficulties, manage to complete 12 years of public schooling are not given opportunities to continue with their studies or get decent jobs.

In our study many different practices unfolded that may risk the health and well-being of children, irrespective of ethnic background. Practices such as early and/or forced marriage, certain fosterage customs, domestic work of very young girls, heavy labour, and religious studies and services are not always consistent with the CRC and/or the legal framework of Guinea-Bissau. Papel boys are engaged in the textile industry from an early age, most often assisting someone within the family. The weavers migrate with their assistants in search of better prices and conditions, mostly on a seasonal basis. There are accounts of young Papel boys in Dakar who beg because their masters do not take care of them properly. We are not aware whether Papel boys in such situations have been repatriated to their families in Guinea-Bissau. Their present situation is at times perilous, yet these boys may, through their work, get an opportunity to enter a respectable profession.

Fosterage, temporary or long-term, is widely practised among all groups, although with some differences in customs and rules of tracing descent. While respondents of all categories are aware of the fact that foster children may be badly treated and discriminated against, they also recognize individual differences when it concerns the treatment of children. Interestingly, Masmas *et al.* (2004) have found few indications of particularly bad treatment among motherless children in Guinea-Bissau. In a case-control study, there were not many differences found between motherless children and control children in terms of nutrition, use of health care services, school attendance, quality of housing, and clothing.

Fosterage is most often likely to be a response to an unfavourable situation; the decision to foster will be considered the least bad choice given the circumstances (see Einarsdóttir, 2004). However, at times fosterage practices are more a question of custom than a response to difficulties. According to our information, there is a tradition for Felupe girls to be employed in domestic work from a young age, most of the time within the family. They

²⁵ World Bank (2006).



frequently move to Senegal and the Gambia, but also to Bissau. Through their work, the girls earn money for their future marriage, and to help their families in the village. Likewise, the practice of Balanta women to foster their brother's daughters to later become their co-wives rests on a custom with roots in the kinship structure of the Balanta. Many of these girls stay with Balanta families living in the Gambia, Guinea and Senegal. They are at risk of sexual abuse from an early age, heavy work and maltreatment. This is a problematic tradition that

violates the rights of the girls and the legal framework of marriage. We found evidence that girls of all ethnic backgrounds who had been forced to marry against their will increasingly rejected such marriages, ran away and sought help from the judicial system and religious missions, for example.

Adolescents among different ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau have some liberty to leave their homes to seek new opportunities. Adolescent Balanta and Nalu boys were reported to leave their villages and look for work in nearby towns or in Bissau or elsewhere. Felupe, Mandinga, and Manjaco adolescent girls may also move to Senegal or the Gambia to look for work. Children and adolescents in West Africa are frequently engaged in work far away from their homes in bars, domestic work, industry, fishing, trade, and agriculture. Boys aged ten or older from Burkina Faso frequently work in cotton farming within their country and in Benin. Classifying these boys as victims of trafficking is common practice and activities are carried out to put an end to the practice. De Lange (2007) argues that, given the socio-economic situation and needs of the families, such efforts are unlikely to be effective and will not benefit the children and their families.

Children and adolescents who migrate are at times treated as trafficked victims and this has contributed to creating obstacles for them in their efforts to look for a better life abroad (Castle and Diarra, 2003; Whitehead and Hashim, 2006). In this respect, it is critical to make a distinction between trafficking and migration, even an illegal migration or human smuggling, as highlighted in a recent training manual to combat child trafficking (Training Manual, 2009: 15).

In our explorative study among Islamic ethnic groups, the importance of giving their children a religious education should be considered the determining factor for parents to send children away. Mandinga, Nalu, and Fula parents all claim that they have to ensure their children's religious education, especially for their sons. Most families send at least one boy, and some send more, if they can and the opportunity arises. Girls are also sent for studies, although much less frequently than boys. It is clear from parents' accounts that they do so with the best interests of the child in mind and choose carefully who to send. Intelligence is the prime criterion, while some also consider the birth order and the strength and courage of the child to endure suffering, which is accepted as indispensable in the acquisition of knowledge.²⁶ Upon returning home, the children are received with the *dua alouwal* ceremony where they read the Koran for the villagers. The child's success is a great source of pride for the parents, and at death they will be relieved of their sins through their son's prayers.

Based on their study of Islamic education in Guinea-Bissau, Jao, Camará and Indjai (2006: 25) suggest that the Koranic schools function partly as an orphanage. Considering the eagerness of parents to send their children to Senegal and the Gambia to study the Koran, as well as the claimed shortage of places, we find it unlikely that orphans would be prioritized in great numbers for such studies abroad. Nevertheless, it may be reasonable that orphans are frequently sent to stay with local *marabouts*.

NGO representatives and the mass media most often describe the recruitment of *almudus* as a dishonest practice, with *marabouts* or their representatives deceiving poor parents to send away their children abroad with false promises of education.²⁷ In contrast, according to community members, parents initiate the recruitment and ask the *marabout* to educate their children. In some cases, one of the *almudus* who has returned home and shown their knowledge in the Koran during the ceremonial *dua alouwal* festivities may encourage other parents to ask the *marabout* to educate their sons. The *marabout* also often sends another disciple to the village to represent him, and this person transports the children over the borders. The boys leave voluntarily with the disciple they know from the village or the neighbourhood. In some cases, boys decide to leave without their parents' permission, and occasionally, non-Muslim boys may join their friends who are leaving to Senegal for religious studies.

26 According to Perry (2004: 78), the Senegalese Wolof farmers "explain the talibé's pain and physical deprivation as a conscientious child-rearing strategy, implying agency within a different value system." See also Niang and Boiro (2007) on the importance for males in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal to show courage during the circumcision ceremony.

27 See Perry (2004) on the misrepresentations of parents in Senegal who send their sons to live with marabouts.

There are differences between the Islamic groups concerning the practice of sending children abroad for Koranic studies. Firstly, in contrast with Fula children, Mandinga and Nalu children generally do not beg during their studies. They send their children mostly to the Gambia where begging is forbidden and the ban enforced. Similarly, Mandinga children in the Kolda and Sedhiou regions in Senegal do not beg. Rather than begging, the children are engaged in agricultural work for the *marabout*, and to provide their own sustenance during their studies. Secondly, Mandinga *almudus* are older than Fula children when they leave their village. One reason for this is that Mandinga have preserved their traditional religious sites in the form of *madilis*. This gives parents the opportunity to give the youngest children a religious education in the local area. Finally, among the Mandinga it is not easy to become a *marabout*, despite having studied the Koran. Consequently, the power of the Bissau-Guinean Mandinga *marabouts* is concentrated on small number of families that have control over the situation. These families have in turn working relations with other Mandinga *marabout* families within the subregion who accept the older Bissau-Guinean children as disciples.

Because of the secular competition between the Fula and Mandinga, the Fula parents feel more comfortable sending their children to Fula *marabouts* rather than to Mandinga ones. Previously, the Futa Fula, who comprised the religious elite within the Fula, run most of the Koranic schools. At the same time, the other subgroup of the Fula, the Fula of Guinea-Bissau, have been concerned about their lack of opportunities to continue their Islamic studies. Gradually, an increasing number of them sought further religious education in Futa Tooro in northern Senegal, widely recognized for its knowledge in religious matters. There the young *almudus*, named *bayda*, beg. After studying abroad, the Bissau-Guineans establish their own schools in their home village. However, villagers are not accustomed to giving charity to beggars. Consequently, the religious teacher often moves to Senegal with their students, where the custom of begging is highly prevalent. Although Senegal has approved a law that prohibits begging, it has not been enforced, in contrast with the Gambia.²⁸ Through this process, the religious teachers of the Fula of Guinea-Bissau have taken on the role of *marabouts*. This is possible for them because the number of *marabouts* among the Fula is not restricted to certain families. The Fula *marabouts* have found out that begging is a financial resource that gives them money as well as a social position. Even the Futa-Fula *marabouts* residing in Guinea-Bissau migrate at times with their *almudus* to Senegal during the dry season, and there the students are sent out to beg.

Consequences

The cultural practices described in this study may have both positive and negative impacts on children. We confirmed the importance people place on religious education. Children learn discipline, and that wisdom is not acquired without effort and sacrifice. They have to suffer to gain knowledge, and through religious education they advance in social position in their community. Likewise, research indicates that they also improve their capacity to learn through repetition, which facilitates later studies. They also learn about other cultures and languages, which can help them in their life. Similarly, assistants to Papel weavers learn a profession that people respect, and through which they can later earn a living. On the negative side, children in Guinea-Bissau are denied their right to a proper education. This reality has to be taken into consideration in the discussion that follows.

In our study we have confirmed what many others have reported, i.e., there are many children on the streets of Dakar and other main towns of Senegal, and this group is composed of children from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including large numbers from Guinea-Bissau. It is beyond the scope of this study to estimate their number.²⁹

²⁸ The Senegalese government, pushed by powerful *marabouts*, changed the penal code by defining "alms-seeking for religious purposes" as not begging (Perry, 2004: 68).

²⁹ In a recent report from Human Rights Watch (2010), the number of children attending Koranic schools in Senegal is estimated to be at least 50 000; they are said to be "subjected to conditions akin to slavery."

These children live in a vulnerable situation abroad and their current situation risks their physical health, as well as their psychological and mental well-being. Among these children, the situation of Bissau-Guinean *fakhman* is the worst. They have in principle cut their ties with their families and the *marabouts* who initially brought them to Senegal, and they live on their own with other street children. They are at risk of criminality, exposure to drugs and sexual violence with the associated risk of HIV/AIDS. It is of particular concern that children who are repatriated to Guinea-Bissau and have returned to Senegal run a high risk of ending up in this group, together with Bissau-Guinean *almudus* who have run away from their *marabout* and choose to continue begging for themselves, living on the streets as *fakhman*. Research on street-children indicates that they are not always willing to leave the life on the street, and that they selectively take advantage of assistance offered by NGOs and child protection projects.³⁰

Another potential consequence of the current situation is that many of the ex-*almudus* may end up without any professional training. We were told that they did not even know how to do agricultural work. They may later leave their villages and end up in urban areas in Guinea-Bissau and abroad without the means to sustain themselves.

We found evidence that Muslims in Guinea-Bissau, in particular the Fula, feel stigmatized in the ongoing discussion of child trafficking. People deny they are involved in any illegal activity. They want their children to become respected citizens in the future, and during their studies they are taken care of by relatives or people who are known in the village.³¹ Some parents communicate regularly with their children through mobile phones, and get pictures of them. The Fula parents send their children to another Fula, even though he may live in Senegal or the Gambia. They are still within the cultural influence of their ethnic group, so the notion of national borders is more of an obstacle, not a threat.

The current practice of repatriating children from Senegal to Guinea-Bissau was strongly criticized during many of our interviews. We heard stories from the children themselves, as well as others, that they were deceived by “soul savers” in Dakar and other larger towns, locked up and sent to their home country against their will, by car or aeroplane. When their repatriation is announced on the radio, the parents feel ashamed and their dream of a better future for themselves and their children is shattered. They are also forced to sign a contract that criminalizes them in case their children return abroad. In this context it is interesting that many villagers complained that they never heard about any children being repatriated from countries in Europe – only their children were being forcibly repatriated. This was taken by many as still one more example of their discrimination *vis-à-vis* the government and the international community.

This stigmatization and criminalization of cultural practice is an obstacle to creating an open dialogue to find solutions. On one hand, we have the parents and *marabouts*, who feel they are discriminated against. On the other hand, we have NGOs that want to save children from the situation their parents have put them in with their children’s best interests in mind. Many claimed that the NGOs are using their children as a pretext to earn money from the international community. The proliferation of transit centres in major cities in Senegal, e.g. Dakar and Kolda, may be one part of the problem. A transit centre that has no children cannot be called a transit centre. Finding children to be repatriated thus becomes essential in order to continue their activities and gain financial support.³² Indeed, Schober (2007: 125) remarks that trafficking is not only “enriching large numbers of criminals worldwide, ranging from recruiters, smugglers, and pimps all the way up to organized crime leaders; it has also turned out to be a highly lucrative industry for hordes of politicians, NGO workers, and academics alike.” Apparently, the Senegalese Government and NGOs in Senegal receive a considerable amount of money to combat trafficking and the worst forms of child labour. The United States Department of Labor’s 2008 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, states:

30 See Hecht (1998), Schimmel (2006) and Davies (2008).

31 See Castle and Diarra (2003).

32 See Loff and Sanghera (2004).

The Government of Senegal is participating in a 3 year, French-funded USD 4.83 million regional ILO-IPEC anti-child labor project that ends on December 31, 2009. The Government also participated in one 5-year and one 2-year ILO-IPEC regional project combating trafficking in children for labor exploitation in West Africa, respectively funded by Denmark at USD 6.19 million and 2.64 million through April 30, 2008 and December 31, 2009. The Government of Senegal also participated in the USD 3.46 million ILO-IPEC, 9-year Global Campaign to Raise Awareness and Understanding on Child Labor funded by Italy that ended on March 31, 2009. (United States Department of Labor, 2009: 328)

For several reasons there is a lack of trust between local populations and the children's rights NGOs when it comes to trafficking of children. The local populations argued that they themselves should be given the opportunity to resolve the issue. At the same time, many disapproved of the current situation and claimed that begging is not and should not be part of a religious education. Some were also worried that unscrupulous individuals might have infiltrated their religious educational system, with the intention of earning money rather than educating their children.

Concept of trafficking

The Palermo Protocol tends to be the point of reference when trafficking of human beings is on the agenda, and the representatives of NGOs refer to the definition of the declaration to prove their point of view. Public servants who have participated in seminars on trafficking tend to classify the custom of sending children for religious studies in Senegal as trafficking; the crossing of borders and begging are the crucial factors in determining the classification.³³ In contrast, many claim that children sent by their parents to seek a better future for them and the family cannot be considered as victims of trafficking. At the same time, they do not deny the difficult situation many Bissau-Guinean children face in Senegal.



³³ According to the Sufi World Book (2006), the Koran confirms that it is obligatory to give alms to a person begging. However, only persons in urgent need should beg and that person should not accept more alms than necessary. It may even be better to survive from dubious income than to beg. Begging for others is, however, considered to be praiseworthy.

Access to a legal framework on trafficking throws light on the vulnerable situation in which many people find themselves and gives the opportunity to act accordingly. On the negative side are the ensuing criminalization and conflicts with the communities involved and those who aim to stop trafficking. Loff and Sanghera (2004: 566) maintain that “discussions about trafficking should be considered against a background of global inequity in which people may make rational decisions to act in ways that might be illegal, socially unacceptable, or self harming.” Based on our interviews, there are reasons to believe that current practices to stop and prevent child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau are partly detrimental to those who really need support. All Muslim children attending religious education abroad are implicated as victims of trafficking, and their parents are left with the bitter feeling of being criminalized and discriminated against. The current situation provides fertile soil for conflicts that counteract the best interests of the children involved.³⁴

Preventive measures

Dottridge (2004: 11) maintains that effective anti-trafficking activities must rest on an understanding of the factors that contribute to children leaving their families, and he argues that “top-down prevention campaigns, which simply impose a message that ‘migration is dangerous because of the risk of falling into the hands of traffickers’, seem much less likely to be effective.” With this in mind, we propose the following preventive measures, many of which were also proposed by our interviewees. These measures should be discussed and further developed in collaboration with local stakeholders. The involvement of parents in the design of preventive actions, together with *marabouts* who have *almudus* in Guinea-Bissau, is crucial. Administrative authorities, young people and former *almudus* should also be involved. As discussed in this report, we recognize that UNICEF and local NGOs are already engaged in anti-trafficking activities, and we recommend that some of that work should be strengthened, while other activities are in need of revision.

We divide our proposed measures into three categories: prevention, early intervention and response.³⁵

Prevention

Prevention aims to stop the trafficking or transfer of children before they are recruited for religious studies abroad or for whatever other activities that endanger their health and well-being and threaten their rights. Activities of this kind can include but are not limited to the following proposed actions.

There is an urgent need to reframe the definition of child trafficking to take into account the local context. It is clear that the current application of the concept is controversial for parents and local communities. Our respondents repeatedly complained that their efforts to send their children abroad for an education were put on a par with drugs trafficking. Consequently, its use should be moderated as it risks blaming parents and victims. Such a change of approach might contribute to reducing the stigmatization and criminalization perceived, in particular, by the communities sending their children for religious studies abroad. It is the understanding of the research team that parents do so with the best interests of the child in mind. In order to succeed with prevention, it is necessary to engage in respectful dialogue with the populations affected and to get them involved.

A revised communication strategy that targets communities and others has a higher potential for success if conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. Facilitative factors include the ongoing discussion in the communities about some of the dangers of sending young children abroad where they become involved in begging, and other activities

³⁴ According to Article 3 of the CRC, “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (Hodgkin and Newell, 2007: 35-45).

³⁵ Corresponding terms in health sciences are primary, secondary and tertiary prevention (Donaldson and Scally, 2009).

hazardous for their health and well-being. Some of the *marabouts* active in Guinea-Bissau do not accept begging as an acceptable way of financing the religious studies. Collaboration with them would facilitate effective communication efforts. Great care should be given to implement such efforts in a culturally sensitive way, so that the motives of those involved are beyond reproach.³⁶

Important preventive measures include improving awareness and enforcement of the legal framework already in place in Guinea-Bissau, work that is already being supported by UNICEF. Continued attention should be given to the CRC in educational activities. Based on our study, it is reasonable to believe that this could be effective in the prevention of early and/or forced marriage. It is important to involve the local communities in identifying an effective community-based mechanism that addresses a wide range of child protection issues. These may include better educational alternatives and local efforts to improve the developmental potential of the children.

Without improved educational alternatives in the villages, parents will continue to send their children abroad for education or work. UNICEF is already supporting educational activities in some communities. Nevertheless, public schools are either absent or underperforming throughout the country. All community members we spoke to complained about the current situation. The Bissau-Guinean government, together with their international partners, need to address this issue urgently. In this context, it is worth pointing out that, since the 1990s, the international donor community has selectively allocated more aid to so-called good performers. This has contributed to less aid per child for education in fragile states as compared with other low-income countries (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Turrent and Oketch, 2009; Turrent, 2009).

The promotion and revitalization of the traditional village *marabout* system is important if the transfer of children across borders for religious studies is to be curbed. The Bissau-Guinean *marabout* villages should be included in the anti-trafficking work. One suggestion is to give support to the local *marabouts* to develop income-generating activities through subsistence agriculture in order to strengthen their local religious educational system. However, care should be taken so that such support will not increase the pressure on children to contribute with their labour in return for access to education. Elaboration of this activity needs to be conducted locally with all stakeholders involved.

Early intervention

Tightening border controls is important, and an adult should not cross the borders with groups of children without the required documents. Ongoing initiatives on this issue, for example by UNICEF, are important and should be strengthened. Officials need training to screen the children at the border properly, and procedures should be defined regarding how to react in cases of suspected illegal trafficking. During the process, special attention should be given to those children who are in the most vulnerable situations. Furthermore, all such cross-border traffic should be properly registered, monitored and reported to the appropriate authorities.

Response

Children who run away from their studies in Senegal are likely to do so without any support, and their needs should be addressed appropriately. In line with policy adopted by IOM and UNICEF, repatriation of children to Guinea-Bissau should be based on a formal evaluation of the best interests of the child, and should as far as possible be voluntary.³⁷ Practices that contribute to shame and humiliation for children and parents should be revised, including

³⁶ Parents feel that counter-trafficking activity is only directed at their children who cross the borders to Senegal and the Gambia for religious studies, but not at children who are sent abroad elsewhere, e.g. to Europe or Brazil. This is a cause of frustration and a feeling of discrimination.

³⁷ See Guidelines on the Protection of Child Victims of Trafficking (UNICEF, 2006).

practices such as broadcasting their names and the criminalization of parents should their children return to Senegal.³⁸ Service providers should also develop programmes that not only focus on return, but also on effective community and family reintegration. Community-focused interventions should also be developed as part of a reintegration strategy, as many children come from the same community. This gives an opportunity to target the communities directly while at the same time gain better knowledge and understanding of the driving forces that fuel the cross-border trafficking.

Constructive approaches are sorely needed to discourage repatriated *almudus* returning abroad, with the risk of ending up on the streets. These initiatives could include concrete and individually adapted possibilities for studies in Guinea-Bissau and a follow-up review of their situation. We maintain that more research is needed on the current situation of children who have already been repatriated, with particular focus on how repatriation practices may, contrary to good intentions, make the situation worse for some of the children involved.

It is imperative to find ways to reintegrate these children once they return home, to involve them in constructive, sustainable activities to enable them to recover and earn a living. Rehabilitating street children who have lost contact with the rest of society is always a difficult task. In this situation, collaborating with former *almudus* or *fakhman* is important for success. A thorough understanding of the needs and experiences of street children is critical for the planning and implementation of activities to improve their situation.³⁹

Particular attention should be given to the psychological and mental health and well-being of the children affected. A specialized centre, preferably interdisciplinary, is needed for the worst affected repatriated children, children who have run away and possibly also for some of those who have finished their studies and returned.

Finally, an evaluation of the costs to reintegrate children compared with preventive actions and repatriation is needed in order to use the limited funds for maximal benefit. Given that resources are limited, the system from prevention through early intervention and response needs to be seen in the context of a comprehensive child protection system, not only services focused on trafficking. We also propose that IMC and AMIC should continue to receive support from UNICEF for their child protection activities, and that their capacity should be strengthened to address the full spectrum of child protection more effectively.



³⁸ See Castle and Diarra (2003) for similar humiliation experienced among repatriated children in Mali.

³⁹ See Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg, 2008.



Conclusions

In this study we have identified several issues that are important to consider in efforts to combat child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau:

1. irrespective of ethnic group, parents are generally acting with the best interests of their child in mind;
2. sending a child abroad for religious studies is important for the parents and is a source of pride for them;
3. the child sent for religious studies is considered to be the most intelligent and to have the qualities necessary to endure the difficult circumstances and suffering that studies abroad entail;
4. parents see begging as means during the study period and acceptable if the result is a child who knows the Koran;
5. knowledge does not come for free, and suffering is part of the experience of being an *almudu*;
6. current procedures to repatriate Bissau-Guinean children from Senegal need thorough revision and reorganization;
7. children repatriated from Senegal risk becoming street children when they leave their village again and return to Senegal;
8. cultural practices among other ethnic groups that may also put at risk the physical, psychological and mental well-being of children have not been given due attention; the consequence is that Muslim communities feel stigmatized and that their religion is being unfairly attacked;
9. too much emphasis on practices defined as trafficking may contribute to less attention to other situations that harm children.

There are a variety of possible preventive measures that, if properly analysed and implemented, could offer efficient and effective solutions. Improved communication among all those involved has been requested and is urgently needed. In any future actions, the use of the concept “child trafficking” has to be refined and put into an appropriate, culturally sensitive context.



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