Independent Migrant?
Unaccompanied Minor?
Street Child?

Informal Worker?
Victim of Trafficking?
Runaway?

Remittance Provider?
Drug addict?
Sexual worker?

Orphan?
Separated Child?
Deportee?
Victim?
Delinquent?

CHILD MIGRATION IN DJIBOUTI
Navigating Labels and Liminal Living

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Abstract

Child Migration in developing countries represents a rapidly growing yet under researched phenomenon of our century. While most researches focus on adult migrants directed to developed countries, little attention has being paid to independent young movers, who mostly characterise South-to-South migratory paths; It is estimated that children's migration, usually aimed at better supporting one's household or independent future, could now account for a third of the overall migration in developing countries.

In their migratory experience, children are faced with a variety of risk factors, which both migration studies and international legal tools have tried to address, among which human trafficking, slavery and human rights abuses. Nevertheless, no studies have so far assessed the impact that social attitudes on child migration could have on them; Particularly, while a wide literature is available on migration's perception in developed countries, data on migrant children's treatment in the developing countries of destination are hard to find.

In this work, we will try to fill this gap by providing an overview of attitudes, ideas and behaviours surrounding children migrants in an African country increasingly reached by underage migrants, Djibouti, which connects the Horn of Africa's mixed-migration fluxes with the Arabic Peninsula. Consistently with global estimates, it is calculated that at least 30 to 40% of all migrants who reach Djibouti are children; among them, many dwell in the streets of the capital city, Djibouti-ville, and try to earn a living through informal jobs. This research focuses on the visions that different actors, at the individual, organisational and legal level, held on this pool of young people; Particularly, the aim is to investigate how others' perceptions relate with young migrants' experience: how they depict it, and the practical consequences that this can have on children's life.

Materials have been collected among the literature on child migration and social perceptions, and through a 2-months-field work in Djibouti, where an ethnographical approach has guided the data generation period. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted among 15 migrant children, both boys and girls, among 7 and 16 years old. Other relevant actors, including organisations dealing with their protection and UN Agencies, have provided information mainly through unstructured interviews. The generation of data has

focussed on children's daily life, in an attempt to get their relationship with other social actors in Djibouti, and how this shapes resilience and constraints in the country of destination. Additionally, legal tools and mainstream ideas on childhood have been reviewed to offer a reflection on which factors can influence the children's moving at a broader level.

At the international level, the research found that main definitions on child migration fail to take into account the children's contexts and peculiar experiences, and therefore contribute to forge conceptions which do not effectively describe their moving. Legal tools and aid programs further tend to pathologies young movers by focussing almost exclusively on exploitative situations, and set uncritical ideas on children's access to work and education. At the national level, in Djibouti, attitudes towards immigrant children mostly follow a victim - delinquent continuum; both conceptions, and the treatments they originate, impact negatively on children's life, by degrading their individualities and limiting their active choices. Nevertheless, the research also found that migrant children can use labels imposed upon them strategically, enhancing some features to attain specific aims. Generally, the field work showed that young movers heading to Djibouti try to navigate the multiple constraints created by social perceptions on them through a variety of strategies. Both constraints and strategies seem to vary according to children's age, nationality and gender.

This work aims to contribute to the literature on child migration by providing a detailed account on its dynamics among young migrants moving to Djibouti, focussing on the ways their experience is perceived and impacted by actors at the international and national level. These results connect and contribute to multiple areas of research in migration studies, among which child migration, South to South migration and attitudes perceptions towards migrants; the hope is to provide meaningful materials and foster further reflections in this direction.

SUMMARY

1. Introduction

Attitudes towards immigration are one of the most researched areas of public policy, both in opinion polls and academic studies (Duffy & Frere-Smith, 2014).

In Europe particularly, a large number of studies have investigated immigration perceptions and their relation with a wide number of factors, such as cross-country variations (Card et al., 2005), majority groups' ideas (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014) and the implementation of policies (Facchini & Mayda, 2008).

Nevertheless, much of the research in this area has tended to focus on rather similar issues - such as the threat feelings perceived in the countries of destination - and focussed on peculiar categories of migrants, mostly EU-directed adults, labour or asylum seekers (Duffy & Frere-Smith, 2014: 72).

Other significant trends, despite being increasingly significant for migration studies, have been far less investigated; it is the case of immigration's attitudes concerning south-to-south flows and child migration.

The former, indicated as the migratory movement from developing to other developing countries[1], has been generally disregarded by the literature (Phelps, 2014), despite some sources suggest that it could have reached if not surpassed South to North flows in magnitude (Leighton , 2013). This could be explained by the reduced financial, social and cultural costs that migrating to nearby countries allows, as well as by the legal restrictions that often hamper overland migration; in this regard, Ratha and Shaw has found that 80 per cent of South-South migration happens between countries with a common border (Ratha & Shaw, 2007);

These percentages also includes the migration of children, whose movement appears to be the most rapidly growing in developing countries (UNDESA, 2013), where they now account for a third of the whole migrant population (ibid. Fig.1.). Despite this extremely sig-

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[1] The terms "South" and "developing" refer to the UNDP distinction in developed (Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, Japan) and the remaining developing countries (UN, 2014), and is here used only for statistical convenience. The use of these terms is extracted from the literature, and is not indicative of the author's ideas on what "development" means, or her judgement about the "development stage" reached by particular countries or areas.

nificant presence, child mobility and attitudes towards it have remained a largely under researched topic, both in childhood and migration studies (Ni Laoire et al., 2010).

This research will try to address the outlined gap and include both Sout-to-South and Children's movements, by looking at which perceptions surround child migration in an African context; Particularly, migration of Ethiopian and Somali children towards Djibouti will represent the case study used to deepen this topic.

Given its strategical position on the Gulf of Aden and the Arabic Peninsula, Djibouti represents the primary migration hub of the Horn of Africa, and is home of growing and complex migration dynamics (IMI, 2012). Reports suggest that up to ten thousands people enter Djibouti every year (IOM, 2014), to try embarking for Yemen or attempt earning a living in the country and sustain future migration plans. Among the migrants that enter Djibouti every day, IOM staff interviewed in Djibouti stated that up to 40% are underage, and arrive from the neighbouring Ethiopia and Somalia, but no research has studied this flux so far.

Combining the literature on diverse areas of research with a two-months field work in the country, this study will deepen child migration in Djibouti and the attitudes, labels and ideas that surround it. Particularly, the analysis will investigate both actors in Djibouti and at the international level, to see how their perceptions conceive the children's movement. This will be done by taking into account concepts as childhood, mobility and child agency, as bore by diverse actors, to see how they relate with migrant children's reality at home and in the country of destination. The attempt is to investigate the impact that relevant actors' assumptions can have on migrant children, and if and how this can shape their migration. The following research questions will constitute the basis of this research:

1) **Which views and definitions surround the phenomenon of child migration in Djibouti?**

From which actors and ideas do they originate?

2) **How do these labels relate with the children's migratory plans and lives?**

What are their consequences on children's lives?

Following the Introduction, a dedicated chapter (2. Methodology) will deepen the analytical tools on which the research is built, and the methodological strategies used to answer the research questions. Particularly, the chapter's subsections will introduce the theoretical approach chosen to investigate the subject, the data generation methods used during the field work in Djibouti and the main areas of research at the basis of the desk review. The last subsection will address the research main limitations.

A following chapter (3. Context) will briefly introduce the geographical setting where the research took place; Background information on the migratory flux through Djibouti and dynamics of child migration in the country will be provided for the reader.

The fourth and main section of this work (4. Analysis) is dedicated to present and analyse the materials collected, to try to answer the research questions; This will be done through a combination of first-hand data generated in Djibouti, relevant literature and scholars' reflections, following the approach outlined in the Methodology. To facilitate the analysis, the chapter will be divided into two main sections, of four subsections each; the first part will be aimed at analysing attitudes towards Djibouti's' migrant children identified at the international level, among which legal tools, definitions and ideas on childhood and mobility trough which the movement of children is framed. These factors will be critically assessed in the light of the children situations at home and their decision to move.

The second part of the analysis will shift the focus to attitudes towards child migration in the country of destination, to see how different actors in Djibouti perceive immigrant children. Contrasting ideas on vulnerability and irregular status will be taken into consideration, together with their resulting actions. The relations between those attitudes and variables such as children's age, nationality and gender will also be investigated, in an attempt to unveil which factors shape children's life at destination and how they can individually navigate them.

A last chapter (5. Conclusion) will finally summarise the findings of the study, to see if and how they could have answered the research questions. Potential developments in this area of research will be addressed.

2. Methodology

It has been noted that ethnographic research works more like a spiral than a straight line (Berg, 2004, chapter 8). Instead of proceeding regularly and in a neat and already planned sequence, the researcher often find him- or herself going round in circles, starting somewhere and ending somewhere else, in a cyclical and narrowing-down motion, where the design is modified continuously (Ezzy, 2002: 10; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). According to O' Reilly, this feature constitutes the crucial difference between quantitative and qualitative research (O'Reilly, 2012).

I approached the phenomenon of migrant street children in Djibouti while working with Unhcr Protection Section, during my mandatory internship in Spring 2014. Being in charge of assessing vulnerable cases in the refugee camps and among urban refugees, I entered into contact with a pool of independent children living in the streets of the capital city. None of them was a refugee, yet in most cases their pattern of migration and life conditions in Djibouti suggested the need of a dedicated child protection program. Nevertheless, no organisation was involved in the phenomenon and that only a small faith-based organisation, Caritas, provided them with limited and irregular handouts. The paradoxical lack of support for a category that incarnated some top vulnerabilities (unaccompanied children, migrants, living in the streets) represented the first driver of my research.

Nevertheless, I deliberately left my research design open, at the beginning of the research process, in order to allow it to be more exploratory, flexible and data-driven as possible (Mason, 2002). This resulted in a shift of my research focus during the data generation period.

After the conclusion of my internship, I decided to come back to Djibouti to conduct a first exploration of the issue and possibly write my Master Thesis on it. At the beginning of this period, I conduct what Thompson calls the "general gathering" stage of the research, meaning an initial phase where the researcher widen his or her knowledge of the topic, to learn from different perspectives and sources and shape the research design (Thompson, 1998). I therefore started approaching the phenomenon of child migration through articles and papers, developed potential contacts with relevant organisations and key informants

in Djibouti and in Europe, and shared my ideas with them. While providing me with a great number of accounts and data on child migration, this period pushed me to challenge my preconceptions on the topic of my choice and the angle of my research. As a result, the focus of the study started to shift towards the multiplicity of identities and stories that characterises children migrants in Djibouti. In a following phase, while conducting the first interviews, this focus was reinforced by learning about the variety of definitions that different actors and sources seemed to use to describe child migration and related phenomena, and how, in my perception, these impacted the children's life in Djibouti. This perspective finally constituted the main intellectual puzzle behind my research.

2.1 Theoretical Approach

After forming my research questions, I tried to answer them through a combination of field work and desk review, relying on different researching methodologies as well as written sources. This idea partly originated from the concept of triangulation, used in social science to indicate the grounding on more sources to increase the credibility of the results (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). This was also coherent with my intention of leaving the research design more open as possible, at least in the first phase of the research, not to limit my analysis behind a unique school of thought, and to allow me to think "*as creatively and fully as possible about methods*" (Mason, 2002). Eventually, I decided to analyse the topic of child migration's attitudes through two main approaches; The first, and primary, is the literature on child migration and related phenomena, which I used to build the data generation among children migrants in Djibouti and reflect on its results. Particularly, I used current debates on child migrations practices as contained in Hashim and Thorsen (2011), and grounded on diverse reflections on concepts as migration, childhood and push and pull factors. These are used in different parts of my analysis, together with relevant studies and reflections, to deepen the data I generated in Djibouti.

The second approach, which is more broadly at the basis of my research, is social constructionism; This generally refers to the idea that social objects and beliefs are not to be treated as naturally existing, as they are actively created thorough social relationships and interac-

tions, therefore representing the artefacts of a particular culture and society (i.a., see Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Fiske and Taylor, 1984). This idea is clearly at the basis of my research, which looks at how conceptualisations of migrant children are created by tools and beliefs in the international sphere (through conventions, treaties, ideas on childhood) and by social actors in Djibouti.

The theoretical core of this research is therefore dual: from one side it is constituted by current studies on child migration's dynamics and fundamental trends, and it aims at contributing to this area of work; on another level, it uses theories on labelling and social categorisation as tools to analyse perceptions surrounding children migrants. This is done by drawing on the reflections of different scholars - among which Nyers, Malkki, Foucault, Zetter - and use them to analyse how social actors' perceptions can impact the life and experiences of migrant children. What all these perspectives have in common is to see social reality as *produced* by social perception, rather than simply being reflected by it. I deliberately decided to ground on these multiple reflections rather than a unique theory on social constructionism, in order not to risk to frame the materials before their analysis, or limit my reflections on them. This is also coherent with my understanding of qualitative research, which, as Mason noted, is already grounded in an "interpretivist" position *per se*, meaning that is it naturally concerned with "*how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted*" (Mason, 2012, p.3).

Of course, the use of this rather variegated approach could be seen as a limit the stability, or unity, of my research, as eventually this does not base on a unique school of thought. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the topic of this thesis would have suffered from being analysed through a unique theory; to cite an example, the use of discourse theory could have been relevant for this research, but, in my view, it would have also involved selective viewing and interpretation of the materials. By using it, I would have probably been forced to left out some factors, as children's everyday life in Djibouti, which I nevertheless thought to be fundamental in analysing my topic. On the contrary, a combination of multiple fields of studies and more open theoretical approach allowed me to treat more materials as relevant and let the data guide the exploration of the research questions. As O'-

Reilly (2012) has argued, ethnography is a practice that "*respects the complexity of the social world and therefore tells rich, sensitive and credible stories*". Grounding on this, I believe that my methodological choice helped me to address the phenomenon of my interest strategically yet contextually, unveiling how deeply migrant children's life can be affected by labels, and connecting this with diverse and equally prolific scholars' reflections.

This, of course, does not mean that I believe my data to be total, or objective; Every decision in this study is personal and accountable for its quality and claims - or, to use Seale's term "fallibilistc" (1999, p.6) - and ultimately reflects the researcher's, my, ideas on the social world, the way of conducting research and my implicit understandings on this topic.

2.2 Field Work

The data generation was carried out in September and October 2014 in Djibouti-ville. My field work's approach has been primarily ethnographic, grounding on first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social group trough participant observation (Mason, 2002, chapter 3), drawing on additional research techniques, as interviews and analysis of narratives. Agreeing with Mason that all researchers carry with them ontological and epistemological positions that influence their study, I do not believe that my exploration was neutral or that it represented a mere collection of existing data. On the contrary, I am aware that my views and ideas on the topic of child migration could have influenced this phase, which I therefore indicate to as "data generation".

Essentially, I had to generate first-hand data because information on children migrants in Djibouti did not exist at the time of my research, and therefore I could not find them in any other form. Grounding on Schatzman and Strauss, I mainly interpreted my field work through the lens of a *methodological pragmatism*, seeing "*any method of inquiry as a system of strategies and operations designed - at any time - for getting answers to certain questions about events*" which interested me (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, p. 7). My aim was to get as much information as possible, while in Djibouti, and I therefore decided to carry out interviews with diverse actors, as well as participant observation of a large number of contexts.

I used interviews as I was primarily interested in analysing children's stories and experiences, as well as their and other actors' views, understandings and knowledge of the migrant children's reality. I decided to use semi- and in some cases unstructured interviews to allow wider opportunities of construction to my interviewees (Mason, 2002: 66). This also resulted to be more indicated in approaching actors with complete discording ideas on the matter, and given the sensitivity of the migrant children's issue in certain contexts.

The participant observation was aimed at spending a prolonged period of time with migrant children in Djibouti, and was therefore conducted mainly at Caritas, to observe their practices and behaviours.

My previous field research in the country - among which a study on WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) in December 2013 and a research on refugee's agency and coping mechanisms between February and June 2014 - contributed to the study by putting me in contact with relevant institutions and by constituting a previous knowledge of the displaced population's features.

2.2.1 Interviews

I carried out semi-structured interviews with 19 children, 9 boys and 10 girls, mainly at Caritas and its surroundings. Of these, 15 interviews are used in this paper, 8 boys and 7 girls[2]; While children's nationalities and ages are indicated in the paper, all their names have been changed to grant them anonymity.

During my field work I entered in contact with many more children, at least 70 daily at Caritas, but my interviews depended on the availability of an interpreter and of children themselves, which I decided not to interview during their play times, daily work in the street, and activities' attendance at Caritas.

Clearly, my sampling was rather small, and did not aim at representing the whole pool of migrant children living in Djibouti. This is consistent with ethnographic methods, which

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[2] Five interviews were excluded for the following reasons: in three cases children showed signs of distress (e.g. cry, silence) and I decided not to continue their interviews; the other two interviews were excluded as I had the impression that the children were pushed into it by my facilitator, and answered what they thought I wanted to hear as Caritas's affiliate. See, *Limitations*.

tend not to focus on sampling for representativeness (O'Reilly, 2012). I nevertheless tried to take into consideration different categories of migrant children, namely children of different nationalities (in my case bot Ethiopians and Somalilanders), ages (from 8 to 17 years old) and gender (both boys and girls). This reflects a *purposive* sampling criteria (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), which I used to ensure diversity and make sure I could understand if and how the labelling impacted those different variables.

I decided to base my interviews at Caritas as it represented a meeting point for many of the migrant children of the city, who knew its opening hours, activities and staff. Also, Caritas acted as a protected place to conduct my research, as migrant children represented a sensitive issue in the country and the few times I tried to interview them around the city with an interpreter, this raised hostility and questioning from national adults. By doing so, however, I partly based my research on a *convenience* sample, meaning I used a sample easier to access (Bryman, 2008). Nevertheless, I tried to balance this attitude by taking into account different variables among my interviewees and by actively looking for them outside Caritas when not present, as in the case of female migrant children, as will be deepened in the Analysis' second part.

Interviews were semi-structured and facilitated by Amina (N/A, *not her real name*), who helped me approaching the children and acted as interpreter. My choice fell on Amina, a half-Somali half-Djiboutian national of 39 years old, firstly because as a former street kid herself she managed to easily approach migrant children living in the street and could offer details on the their situation; additionally, at that time she was supporting Caritas' staff in their activities, and demonstrated interest in the research. For these features, Amina represented what Spradley (1979) called an "*encultured informant*", indicating a person who hold and can provide an explanation of things to outsiders, being familiar with their culture, knowledge and settings.

All kids interviewed were explained about the research, generally presented as a study on children migrated to Djibouti that I had to carry out for my University. All were asked if they wanted to answer questions about their migration and their life in Djibouti, and were told that participation was not mandatory nor was answering to all questions. Most of the

interviews were individual, but in two cases I preferred to conduct focus groups between 3-4 children. I used a focus group to assess the issue of security in the street for girls, with the idea that this could have facilitated them to speak about general threats and concerns, without referring to personal or painful events. After this, however, some of them started to disclose the abuses they faced individually to me and Amina.

The other focus group was used with a pool of smaller children, as I had the impression that individual interviews intimidated them.

I conducted my interviews in French with Amina translating in Somali, the language spoken by the majority of children, coming from Somaliland and Ethiopia's Somali Region. In one case, with Amharic-speaking smaller kids, the focus group itself helped with the translation.

Finally, I conducted four (4) un-structured interviews with the staff, and particularly with Amina, Caritas' volunteers, and the Manager. These helped me to get an overview of the migrant children life conditions and protection risks in Djibouti, as well as inform me about Caritas relationship with the Government and UN Agencies.

Other information were collected among Unicef and Unhcr's staff, and generally aimed at understanding the organisations' view on the phenomenon of migrant children and their programs in this regard. Some Unhcr's Senior Officers were barely aware of the existence of migrant children in Djibouti; others were more interested in understanding the facts and figures on this group but no further action was taken in this line. Unicef's staff was aware of the existence of street children and involved in supporting Caritas financially, but had no data on the extension or features of the phenomenon. Unicef's Child Protection Officer had reportedly conducted a research among street children in Djibouti, but didn't manage to meet me, despite several calls and email exchanges to arrange an interview. Iom staff was also generally unresponsive to my attempts to approach them, but their Child Protection Officer managed to pass me current figures on the number of migrant children reaching Obock. Two (2) additional unstructured interviews were conducted with the staff of LIA, an Ngo dealing with destitute families in Djibouti, and with the Protection Officer of Danish Refugee Council in the country.

2.2.2 Participant Observation

Spradley has argued that: "*The participant observer comes to a social situation with two purposes: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation, and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation*" (1980, p.54).

While Fetterman noticed that this ethnographic method is usually practised from 6 months to a year (1989, p.45), I nevertheless decided to take advantage of my prolonged stay in Djibouti to spend 3 weeks, prior to the start of the interviews, working at Caritas as a volunteer, to carry out a participant observation of the context, and build relationship with the staff and particularly the children.

While Bernard (1994, p.137) noticed that participant observation involves "*removing yourself every day from cultural immersion so you can intellectualize what you've learned, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly*", part of my decision to carry out participant observation of the migrant children context also originated from the desire to build an emotional empathy with the people I was going to interview and research on. This, in my view, could have helped to "normalise" my presence around, as well as to record as much as possible about the children's life and relationship with Caritas before starting my interviews.

Their office opened 6 mornings a week and provided street children with breakfast, lunch, a quiet room for those who want to sleep and sometimes activities (alphabetisation, sport, clothes making, art laboratories..) conducted by irregular volunteers. During the 3 weeks, I mainly helped with the workshops and the kitchen, played with the kids outdoor, and conducted participant observation during those activities.

Additionally, I decided to carry out a participant observation of other settings in Djibouti, not only to check the data generated but also to get multiple dimensions on the phenomenon I was investigating, including behaviours and daily routines among migrant kids outside Caritas, conversations between aid organisations' staff, law enforcement officials' procedures and different actors' treatment of migrant children. Beyond my 3 initial weeks at Caritas, participant observation was therefore conducted during several evenings at Rue d'Ethiopie, one of Djibouti-ville more central and lively streets, where many kids reported

to work, and in a 2-hours tour around the city's poorest neighbourhoods at night, facilitated by Amina and aimed at getting a glimpse of the children's habitual places of residence, livelihoods and leisure activities. The tour did indeed represent a rich source of information for my research and my understanding, but was not replicated due to security concerns.

Participant observation was additionally carried out in events and meetings concerning migrant street children in Djibouti, among which a conference on mixed migration held by Unhcr, Unicef, Iom and Drc, and a fundraising event run by Caritas to present its activities with migrant and street children to UN Agencies and potential donors.

During my research period I finally got to know the existence of Daryel, the orphanage run by the country's First Lady, which reportedly hosted many migrant children. I contacted the staff and managed to have a guided visit of the place, during which I could ask questions about the project. Due to the sensitivity of the migrant street children issue among the ruling party, and the ideas behind Daryel which will be explained later, I had the impression that revealing the purposes of my work could have impeded the access to the structure, and I therefore decided not to introduce myself as a researcher to the staff. The information provided during my visit were therefore identical to those provided to any other person willing to have a tour at Daryel, and therefore public. Though, as I did not have their informed consent to participate to the research, I did not include any name or reference to the staff I met that day.

As previously anticipated, child migration and its treatment represents a sensitive issue in Djibouti, whose Government is known for expelling unaligned expats and diplomats. For this reason, I did not have the opportunity to interview any law enforcement official or member of the Government about the topic of my research.

2.2 Desk Review

Initially, I directed my desk review at collecting broader information on my target population. To attain a deeper and multifaceted understanding of them, as well as to serve the

data I was starting to generate, I decided to use two different research areas, and compare their findings.

To study the phenomenon of child migration in Africa and worldwide I used Hashim and Thorsen's "*Child Migration in Africa*", and Yaqub's "*Independent Child Migrants in Developing Countries: Unexplored Links in Migration and Development*".

Hashim and Thorsen represent probably the main literature resource behind this study; their book on child migration in Ghana and Burkina Faso has guided and shaped in my research, by providing a state of the art reference on origins, dynamics and circumstances of children's movement in Africa. The data they generated through children's interviews, as well as the reflections they developed on concepts as childhood, agency and push and pull factors for child migration, were checked in my study of East Africa's young movers, and greatly referred to in my analysis.

Yaqub's report, a review of quantitative and qualitative studies on child migration in developing countries, further supported the analysis as a reference on trends and issues of child migration worldwide, and by summarising the main frameworks and definitions used to approach it.

I decided to combine these sources with the literature on street children, whose features and life style seemed to relate greatly to my interviewees' experiences.

I grounded my review on the report "*State of the World's Street Children: Research*", compiled for the Consortium for Street Children by Sarah Thomas de Benitez in 2011. This represents a comprehensive overview of the literature on street children worldwide, and provided me with data, gaps and current theoretical developments that were used to study Djibouti's migrant children lives in the street, and Djibouti's actors' perceptions on them.

Previous researches and reports related to children migrants in Djibouti and neighbouring countries were hard to find, due to a severe lack of data on this issue; Nevertheless, some relevant documents as the US Trafficking in Persons Report (US Department of State, 2013) on Djibouti acted as departing point to investigate the context and to check my results at a later stage.

Following the problem statement, my analysis deals with perceptions and conceptions on children migrants, to look at how they relate with their lives and possibly impact them. In doing this, and as stated in the Theory chapter, it mainly draws on theories which propose a social constructionist approach to reality, and particularly related to social perceptions and understandings. Among them, I used Malkki's studies on how issues as displacement (1992) and children's features are conceived (2010), Nyers' ideas on the emergency discourse of humanitarian intervention (2006), as well as Agamben's reflection on the labelling of life forms (1996).

Other scholars' reflections, such as Foucalt's bio-power (1977), and Mai's study on migrant's perceptions (2010) contributed to this approach. Nevertheless, I didn't limit my analysis to academic tools; reports, legal documents and newspapers' as well as online articles were used to unpack perceptions on child migration from different perspectives. Among them, I grounded on a very prolific article on the impact of gender on street children's treatment in Cairo, wrote by Amira El Feky for the Daily News Egypt (2013), and Unicef's fundraising website for out-of-school children (2013).

Additionally, I reviewed international conventions and guidelines to investigate the agreed understanding of issues like child migration, trafficking and children's rights. Among them, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNGA, 1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (OAU, 1990), the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO, 1999), and the Palermo Protocols supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNGA, 2000).

The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat's (RMMS) website was largely used to get information on migration trends and dynamics in the Horn of Africa; despite largely based on the experiences of adult migrants, the booklets and articles provided helped me to deepen and check the migration's push and pull factors in the children's areas of origin; in this sense I mainly draw from "Desperate Choices" the report on conditions and protection risks of Ethiopian migrants heading to Yemen (RMMS, 2012). During my research period, I also had the opportunity to collaborate with RMMS by authoring an article on *"Djibouti's Child Migrants: Destitution, Deportation and Exploitation"* for their Featured Articles'

section (RMMS 2014). Finally, the graphic work used as a front page for this study has been influenced by RMMS' posters on mixed migration, available at the organisation's website[3].

2.3 Limitations

The limitations of this research are multiple.

Firstly, my work assignments with DRC Djibouti, for whom I've been worked as research/protection assistant in the last 5 months, greatly impacted the time I could dedicate to my data generation and writing, and my analysis would have certainly benefited of more dedicated moments. I started a collaboration with DRC with the idea of benefitting my research and possibly using the Ngo's means and entitlements to reach other parts of the country, namely Obock and Tadjoura, where to interview migrant children on the move to Yemen. However, due to a difficult registration process, this resulted to be impossible during my research period, and I had to take this obstacle into consideration in framing my study.

A further major obstacle has been represented by the difficulty to access children's everyday experiences on the street: as Gigengack has noted (2008), these often emerge from long-lasting trusting relationship with the researcher, and are not readily available to capture. This conception pushed me to spend my initial 3 weeks at Caritas only as a volunteer, and to keep visiting the structure weekly after that. Nevertheless, while granting me the opportunity of collecting extremely interesting data, my two months of field work with migrant children surely represented a very limited period to fully understand their experiences in Djibouti. While allowing me to better access kids' environment and stories, my work at Caritas could have also hampered my research by making children look at me as part of the Caritas' staff. This was particularly clear at the beginning, and when asking about specific topics, such as drug use, as kids seemed to answer what they think I was expecting to hear as a representative of Caritas. After a while, and by keep talking about

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[3] See, www.regionalmms.org

my research, I managed to obtain more trust from some of them. Generally, while some children showed interest in the interviews and the purposes of the research, other seemed to take it as something they were expected to do by the Ngo's staff, and probably disclosed their views only partially.

An additional problem consisted in the fact that in some cases interviews elicited painful memories to children, despite my efforts to remain on the surface of negative events. In some cases kids started crying while interviewed, and this arouse ethical issues which I did not anticipate, about the power relations of the interview interaction and my responsibilities towards the interviewees. Generally, the power relations of interviewing represented a limitation not only concerning my power over the interviewees and data, but also in reverse, as I was prevented to interview "powerful people" and control the agenda with some actors I tried to approach. Despite having the possibility to access many UN agencies and speak to their staff about the purposes of my research due to my previous work in the country, I suffered a diffused unwillingness to cooperate, due to the topic's sensitivity and the Government's retaliation attitude and history of expulsion of diplomatic representatives.

This also forced me to generally exclude the authorities' and law enforcement officials' view from the study, which could have been enriched by their perspectives.

3. Context

Preceding the Analysis, this Context Chapter aims at providing a brief overview of the case study, namely Djibouti and its child migration's trends and dynamics. The information here introduced represent a necessary, even if short, background to the reflection which will follow.

Migration in Djibouti has been severely under-researched and the country is consistently little studied in related academic fields; This lack of information could be seen as paradoxical, as the country represents the key transit point between the Horn of Africa and the Arabic Peninsula, used by an average of 100,000 migrants a year (IOM, 2014), and hosts the 6th largest refugee community per inhabitant worldwide (UNHCR 2013, Fig.9).

By investigating the dynamics of social perception on child migration in Djibouti, this research unveils part of the peculiar migration's pattern which characterise the area, and contributes to the still limited literature on it. The following pages will therefore provide information on migrants' fluxes and trends in Djibouti; Specifically, the first chapter will introduce the migratory dynamics in the area and explain how, despite Djibouti being primarily a country of transit, migrants and migrant children can end up settling there, and the national legislation in this regard. The second chapter will deepen these information by focussing on children migrants, and introduce their origin, arrival and life in Djibouti, before proceeding with the analysis of the data generated among them.

3.1. The Migratory Flux Through Djibouti

Lying at the confluence of Africa and the Arabic Peninsula, Djibouti represents the main route for migratory movements towards Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries (Fig. 1 - Appendix); reports suggest that more than 200 persons may be crossing the country on a daily basis (IOM, 2013), with statistics counting between 80,000 and 100,000 migrants a year (IOM, 2014). The flux - indicated as "Estern" to distinguish it from the Western one towards Libya and Italy - involves thousands of people from Ethiopia, Somalia and in minor part Eritrea, who try to reach the embarking point of Obock, in the North of Djibouti, and undertake a hazardous boat tourney across the Gulf of Aden.

The movement is essentially mixed, and includes: (i) irregular migrants moving to look for economic or education opportunities or desire to reunite with family members, (ii) refugees and asylum seekers fleeing from conflict or persecution in their countries, (iii) victims of trafficking, or (iiii) stateless persons living in the Horn of Africa's countries without recognised citizenship (RMMS 2013). As the causes behind migration are often multiple and interconnected, a clear distinction among different categories of migrants do not truly represent the variety of push and pull factors impacting the individual decision to move, which can include persecution, political instability, poverty, resource scarcity, natural disasters, and social expectations (ibid.).

In the last years the route through Djibouti has attracted increasing numbers of migrants previously directed towards the port town of Bosaso, Somalia, because reportedly faster and safer (ibid: 36). This has translated in higher costs requested from the smuggling networks, but has not improved the security situation faced by migrants before, during and after the boat journey. Organisations monitoring the passage in the Gulf of Aden continue to register severe human rights abuses among which torture, kidnap, sexual violence, extortion, deprivation of food and water during the trip and on arrival in Yemen (RMMS, 2012).

The great majority of migrants is usually not able to pay the smugglers' fee, and many are the cases in which a previously accorded price is increased by the criminal networks, who may kidnap and hold migrants for ransom or to create situations of debt bondage prior to their arrival in Yemen (US Department of State, 2014). Less resourceful migrants are therefore forced to work en route to save for the fee and sustain their prolonged stay in he country of transit; many dwell in Djibouti for several months, trying to enter the informal and irregular labor market, and earn a living (RMMS, 2014).

This phenomenon is highly opposed by national authorities, which consider irregular immigration a crime and persecute it through Act No. 201/AN/07/5éme, setting the conditions for entry and residence in Djibouti. According to the document, law enforcement officials are empowered to arrest any foreigner in violation of the provisions of the Act, among which those not in possess of a valid document of travel issued by consular autho-

rities or immigration police (Art.3) and those failing to display sufficient resources to live (Art.4). Sanctions include imprisonment up to a year and a fine of a maximum of 1,000,000 Djiboutian Francs, DJF, around 33511.96 DKK. (Art.50).

The police regularly patrols urban areas to arrest migrants, but limited resources and detention facilities make imprisonment non systematic, and reinforce the use of deportation for foreign detainees (US Department of State, 2013b).

Despite the harsh environment, the country's relative stability have also attracted a continuous flux of refugees from the Horn region, and more than 20,000 persons (Unhcr, 2014) reside in the two refugee camps of Ali Addeh and Holl Holl, located 130km south of the capital Djibouti-ville.

Djibouti grants asylum to Somali nationals coming from Central and South Somali on a *prima facie* basis, while Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somali form the North have to submit their cases to the Government appointed National Eligibility Committee (NEC). The NEC reportedly meets with extreme discontinuity, and has a backlog of applications pending for several years (TCH, 2012). This, coupled to the still existing practice of expulsion of Ethiopian nationals, which the Government categorically identifies as economic migrants (US Department of State, 2013), might contribute to hamper the access to a reliable refugee status determination and possibly push migrants to try their luck as irregular residents in Djibouti or the Arabic Peninsula.

3.2 Child Migration and Conditions in Djibouti

According to IOM staff interviewed in Djibouti, up to 40% of the great flux of migrants described above is constituted by underage individuals, whose means and routes of migration vary according to individual stories and possibilities. Some children arrive with migrant families, or born in Djibouti from them, while others migrate alone by foot, bus, or train, pursuing independent migration plans. While some children follow the main route towards the Arabian Peninsula, trying to embark from Obock to cross the Gulf of Aden, the majority cannot afford such trip and remain stuck in the urban and peri-urban areas of the capital city, Djibouti-ville. This heterogeneous group of children consists of Ethiopian

nationals, mainly from the Oromo and Somali Region, and in minor part   Somalia and Somalilanders.

In line with the overall mixed migration's context characterising the country, the causes behind child migration are multiple and not mutually exclusive, and include humanitarian crisis, droughts and economic difficulties. The interviews conducted among children migrant for this research showed that they arrived from villages in rural areas, where they lack secondary and higher education as well as employment opportunities.

At the time of this study, the majority of Ethiopian children leaving their households reportedly gathered in the chartered city of Dire Dawa, developed in the Eastern part of the country after the construction of the Ethiopia-Djibouti's railway. Children reported to travel with the train which used to connect Dire Dawa to Djibouti twice a week, on which they jumped and hided to avoid paying the ticket's fare. Interestingly, this method was not exclusively used by children with long term plans of migration, but also by others, usually smaller, simply looking for adventure with peers, who used to reach Djibouti and come back to Ethiopia after a few days with the following train. This second category of children could develop prolonged stay abroad, and even decide to look for income in Djibouti, following the peers' example. While writing this research, however, the rail connection to Ethiopia was suddenly interrupted due to renovation works, and many children found themselves stuck in Djibouti-ville, with no previous intention to stay there. Eventually, they merged with other children migrants and started living and looking for income in the streets.

Some children from Somaliland and others from Ethiopia arrived to Djibouti by bus, paying the regular fare. These children usually had more structured migration plans, which the family knew and helped to sustain.

Despite their routes and initial means, the majority of children migrants reaching Djibouti face hard times. In this small country with the unemployment rate at 60% (CIA World Fact-book, 2014) finding work, even an irregular on informal one, represents a challenge for both foreigners and nationals. Additionally, migrant children often lack connections and expertise that can favour their hiring. Forced to be self-reliant, they earn erratic inco-

mes from begging, peddling, washing cars or shoes and from petty crimes; as the street becomes their habitual residence and source of livelihoods, they are known as "*enfants de la rue*" (the French term for street children) by local actors.

The pool of street children in Djibouti is not limited to independent children migrants, but includes also a minority of children living with destitute migrant families or Djiboutian nationals. Despite having different features, all these categories of children live independently "of or on" the street[4], lack birth certificate or any other identity document and are therefore considered as "irregular migrants" by the national authorities.

Due to strict immigration policies, children falling in this categorisation are constantly rounded up and imprisoned by the law enforcement officials who patrol the urban areas. When in prison, migrant children face the same conditions of other detainees, with whom they have to share overcrowded cell, irregular and meagre meals and the absence of sanitary services. Both migrant street children and the staff of the organisation involved in their protection, Caritas, reported abusive behaviours by the law enforcement officials during the detention of children, including sexual abuses by the guards. Children were also used to clean the officers' offices, car and clothes, and to sell contraband goods among detainees. As other migrants, they faced deportation at the border with Ethiopia, 3 hours away from Djibouti-ville, where they were usually brought and left. Despite the lack of resources and harsh climatic conditions, according to the interviewed children it was common for deportees to come back by foot or hiding on the trucks directed to town.

As anticipated, at the time of this study, the only Ngo assisting migrant street children in Djibouti was Caritas, a Unicef-supported Christian organisation residing in the country to assist vulnerable population. A part from a basic medical service run by two nuns, Caritas offered food and irregular activities to street children. Their structure opened 4 mornings a week for all, one day a week for girls only, which constituted less than 10% of Caritas' assisted population.

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4 See Thomas de Benitez: "…children as "of" or "on" the streets: the former term generally meaning children who live on the streets or 'street-living' children, the latter meaning children who work on the streets during the daytime and return home to their families at night." (2011: 7).

4. Analysis

Following the problem statement of this study, the analysis will look into the multiple labels that surround the concept of child migration and try to understand how these relate with children's experience of migration and their life in Djibouti.

The aim is to take into consideration two main factors: firstly, definitions and conceptions arising from tools and Western-based ideas on child migration, to see how they relate with migrant children's stories of my case study; Secondly, the labels used by social actors surrounding the children in their country of destination, Djibouti, and their impact on children's lives. These two topics will be deepened through the analysis' distinction in two parts: "*Universal Ideas and Situations at Home*" and "*Life at Destination: Labels and Living in Djibouti*".

More specifically, the first part will focus on conceptions surrounding the phenomenon of child migration, looking into the most common definitions used by agencies and the literature to identify children migrants; These will be critically assessed in the first chapter (*Defining Children Migrant*).

This reflection will be broadened in the second chapter (*Ideas on Childhood*) by taking into account Western views on Childhood, to see how they relate with Horn of Africa's children migratory experiences; The focus will be here on concepts as age development, obligation towards the family and mobility, which will be investigated among children's contexts of origin and individual stories. In a following subchapter (*Children at Work, Children in School*), ideas on work and education will be deepened, by bringing into the analysis how legal tools and international agencies' programs conceive those aspects for children.

The last chapter (*Choosing to Move*) will conclude this reflection by focusing on child agency and the factors which contribute to make child migration a "normality" in this area of the world; different reasons behind the choice to migrate, as well as specific means and ways of migration towards Djibouti will be explored.

The second part of the analysis will shift the focus to children's life once at destination. We will try to analyse labels and visions through which diverse actors in Djibouti conceive young migrants, and the consequences of this labelling. The first two subchapters will primarily refer to "non-migrant" labels, and follow a distinction into victimising categories (in *Victims, Vulnerable, Poor*) and negative perceptions on children (in *Criminals, Animals, Immigrants*) to explore the often paradoxical diversity that surrounds children's perception; among them, the views of aid organisations, Djiboutian nationals and law enforcement officials will be taken into consideration, together with variables that seem to influence them, such as nationality and age of the children. A reflection on gender-specific perceptions will be deepened in a subchapter (*Girls in the Street*).

As for the previous part, also this latter will conclude with a reflection on migrant children's agency (*Agency and Strategy*), specifically focusing on their individual choices and coping strategies while in Djibouti, and on how to they relate with and try to navigate among labels impose upon them.

4.1 First Part - Universal Ideas And Situations at Home

Hashim and Thorsen suggest that it is fundamental, in studying young movers, to take into account a variety of factors that can contribute to shape their experience, among which peculiar perceptions, constraints and events (2012: 109). Children migrants in Djibouti indeed face multiple and often opposing experiences during their migratory process; many of these originate directly from the way they are perceived among diverse actors once at destination, as the second chapter will analyse. Nevertheless, specific conceptions which contribute to shape their migration are relevant even before their departure. It is the case of definitions used by international agencies to describe and understand children's movement, or common ideas on what is "normal" or appropriated for their childhood; in the following chapters we will try to critically assess these conceptions, to look at their efficacy in describing migrant children's features. At the same time young movers' experien-

ces and reasons to depart, as emerging from their interviews, will be deepened and contextualised.

4.1.1 Defining Migrant Children

One of the first challenges to arise while approaching the study of migrant children in Djibouti was identifying the research's target population; From the very first interviews I carried out, clearly different features of migration could be observed, among which peculiar origin, motivation, agency, that hampered if not impeded the study of child migration as a unique phenomenon.

These multiple stories and features emerging from children's accounts, which defied the use of a unique idea on child migration, were contrasted by the strict labels and definitions that international agencies and tools dedicated to their protection seemed to provide. One of the clearest example in this regard is the common definition of "Independent Children Migrants", who, according to UNICEF, represent people "*below 18 years old, who choose to move from home and live at destinations without a parent or adult guardian*" (Yakub, 2009). Despite being commonly used in the literature to indicate the independent movement of children, the definition seemed not so useful to describe my interviewees' experiences.

As anticipated in the Context chapter, child migrants in Djibouti found themselves there for a variety of reasons, that included looking for income or for reunification with family members, separation from a previously migrated household, desire of adventure or even getting lost; It is the case of Khalid, arrived in Djibouti from Ethiopia at end of the Ramadan, in July 2014. At just 7 years old, he left his house because of his mother's new husband, who "did not like him". As he couldn't approach the house when the step-father was in, ee started wandering around: "*I stayed outside all day and the nights. I was always walking around, alone or with some friends. One day I arrived in the city of Dire Dawa.*" There, Khalid met other Ethiopian kids, gathering at the train station:

"*The first time I jumped on the train with my friends and then we jumped down and walked back.*

The second time we stayed on the train until Ali Sabieh [A/N, the first train stop in Djibouti], *and my friends descended, and we walked until Djibouti-ville (…)Now I'm here since three months, but I don't want to stay, I just want to go back. I'm not looking for job, didn't come here for this. I just want to go back to my mother, and I don't know how to do, so I'm asking Caritas every day to send me back to my village".*

Similarly, Abel, 16, recounts:

"My village is very far from Diredawa, which is where I took the train. I don't have anyone in Diredawa…I just ended up there walking. There I saw the boys jumping on the train and I did the same with some friends and arrived here (…) I can't go back because my village is far and I don't even know how to go from Diredawa to my house (…) Since that day my family doesn't know if I'm dead or alive."

Khalid's and Abel's accounts on migration differ from a prototypical one; Their moving to Djibouti results to be more linked to casual wandering and having fun with peers than to a planned decision to migrate. Nevertheless, they respect all the conditions to meet the ICMs definition: both below 18 years old, they did indeed choose to leave their houses and later jumped on the train to reach Djibouti; also, both were leaving at destination alone, without a relative or an adult guardian. Nevertheless, it was clear that their needs in this regard were completely different from their migrated peers; While some of the children interviewed desired to remain in Djibouti to earn a living and possibly help their families, Khalid's only desire was to go back to Ethiopia, something he could not do because of the railway interruption and his lack of knowledge and resources to use the bus connection to Ethiopia. In his case, despite being applicable, the ICMs definition misleads the analysis of his movement, as well as the practical provision of protection that this could have required.

The very common definition of "Independent Children Migrants" (ICMs) used by Unicef poses other challenges to researchers by assuming that "independent" children are those who migrated alone. If this undoubtedly serves to indicate a great number of children who leave their houses and travel on their own, it also excludes all those who migrated with

their families but are separated from them at a later stage. It is the case of Halina, 14, who came from Ethiopia with her uncle, after her parents' divorce:

"My uncle decided to go to Djibouti and take me with him, to help finding a job and earn money, and my family agreed (…) Once here we started having fights, he was always angry at me because he wanted me to bring more money, and one day he kicked me out of the house. Now it's 5 months that I live alone in the street, with the other girls. It's difficult to find money, because I'm little and anyone says I cannot work properly, so they don't want to hire me. (…) I cannot go back to Ethiopia now, because my parents are separated and I don't know where they are and if they want me to live with them."

Halina presents another account on migration: arrived with her uncle, she now finds herself alone in a foreign country, and has to provide for herself day and night. She is indeed an "independent" migrant child, yet the fact that she has arrived with an adult guardian, who still resides in the country of destination, could impede researchers and practitioners to treat her case as those of her fellow peers. The presence of a relative can serve as a protection or an obstacle depending on the circumstances, as Halina further explained:

"I worked with a woman for a while, she said I was on a test to see if I worked well. But after two months of working for free she refused to give me my money, so we argued and she called the police and said I was an illegal migrant. The police took me and wanted to deport me, but I said that I was not alone here, I was with my uncle, and brought them at his house. When he saw me he confirmed that I was with him, and the police left. He helped me with this. But after few days he started yelling at me again, and beat me up. I didn't have much, just 2000 francs, but he took them and kicked me out in the street again."

In cases like Halina's, the Refugee Status Determination process proposes a distinction to identify children separated from their parents or primary care-givers but not from other relatives (*Separated Children*), and children not cared for by any adult responsible to do so (*Unaccompanied Children*) (ICRC, 2004). While this approach could help nuancing the ICMs definition, it also seems to reinforce the idea that children's best interest is to be accompa-

nied by a member of the family, who can speak for the child, without assessing the child's willingness to be accompanied by that person, or the positivity of their relationship, or even the child's individual claims (Hopkins and Hills, 2008: 258). The use of this terms also overlooks children's agency and the possibility that some may have chosen to move independently.

An additional problem with the Unaccompanied / Separated definition is that it proposes an uncritical concept of family, which instead differs greatly among societies. Studies have indicated how the notion of family acquires a much wider meaning in rural African communities, where extended family nets can care as well as reclaim rights on children (See Pilon, 2003; Verhoef 2005). This can as well impact migration; Hashim and Thorsen report the cases of children moving to help relatives, as for Halina, as a common reason behind child migration. In their research, they show as adult migrants can request children - and especially girls - from their communities to move with them and help in periods of particular need (2011: 16). Parents' consent is in this case usually linked to a "collective or plural view on parenthood"; as one of their interviewees argued: "*if your brother asks for your child you can't refuse it because it's his child too*" (quoted in ibid: 53). Their data show that for many African rural communities, the concept of family differs form a single, nuclear family model with a sedentary position, and acts a more fluid structure, with different "parents" that can have the child moving to different places.

Following this reflection, efforts to understand if a child is accompanied by their parents could prove to be meaningless for the reality of their context, as well as disregard their own agency, desire and needs, and the individuality of their migration.

4.1.2 Ideas on Childhood

Indeed, the weak conceptualisation of children's movement is partly exacerbated by a theoretical confusion behind the idea of "childhood", and the tendency to treat it as a universal category, with its specific features.

Hashim and Thorsen have noted how the same plain definition that sees a child as an individual below the age of eighteen already needs to be differentiated, as the features of a

toddler and a teenager cannot be equalised, or their development, needs and abilities compared (2011: 7). According to them, a dominant Western notion of childhood is usually taken as point of reference in understanding and regulating children issues, and migration among them. The most widely recognised document in this regard is the Universal Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly in 1989 (UNGA, 1989). Despite being the most accepted human rights' document worldwide, the CRC has been criticised to promote and define a unifying model of children behaviour, predominantly Western-based (Stephen, 1995). It has been argued that its provisions reflect and normalise Western conceptions and moral values on childhood - generally seen as a period of innocence, leisure time, need for protection - ignoring cultural and social differences in this regard. Scholars have further noted how the non-homogenisation to this standards can produce judgement on the moral integrity of the foreign country, either perceived to be immoral or in need of salvation (Hart, 2006; Pupavac, 2001).

The Western model on childhood is mainly structured around Piaget's and Vygotsky's models of chronological age and cognitive development, which mark transitions as entering into formal education, gradually gaining independence, negotiating liberties and constraints, achieving the age to vote, drive, and so on (Ansell, 2005). In their study of child migrants in West Africa, Hashim and Thorsen have observed as these ideals of childhood differ greatly from those observed in the communities they worked in, where, for example, chronological age did not play a central role in conceiving the child's abilities. Instead, transitions seemed to be connected to variables as individual characteristics, gender, sibling order, urban or rural setting, the household's needs, and the willingness of the children to participate. Furthermore, other events, as education or work outside from home, having children and getting married greatly influenced the way a child was viewed by the community (Hashim & Thorsen, 2011:7).

Mostly important for migrant children, ideals on obligations towards the family in these contexts generally differ from a Western idea of childhood. As the authors argue, while the Western model conceive the family as mainly "*unidirectional (…), involving the provision of basic needs, protection, socialisation and adults' emotional attention to children*" with an "*empha-*

sis on children having needs and parents meeting them" (ibid: 9), fieldwork among African rural communities shows a clearly different structure. Their work in West Africa and interviews among migrant children in Djibouti reveal a similar account on the relationship between parent and child; Despite good parenting is indeed seen as the capacity to provide for one's children, also children are expected to provide for their significant adults, by helping with the household's work, care of most vulnerable relatives, engage in income generating activities, and generally support the family in a mutual relationship.

As Kadra 14, recounted:

"We are 6 in my family, my brothers are all older than me and they cannot find work in Hargheissa; there's a lot of poverty there and no jobs. They are trying to find something to do to help my parents, and I thought that maybe there were more opportunities for a girl in Djibouti. I had some money aside, so I decided to use them to buy a bus ticket to come here and look for a job, maybe as housemaid, so that I could help my family."

All the children interviewed in Djibouti were in some way trying to earn money to support their families, either by engaging in jobs (car cleaners, shoe shiners, housemaids..) or begging. The majority of them reported that these activities had not been forced by the family, rather represented their natural duty towards it, as it was their decision to migrate.

The role of children in household's support is officially recognised by the African Union's Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (OAU, 1990) which states, in Article 31:

"*Every child shall have responsibilities towards his family and society (…) The child, subject to his age and ability (…) shall have the duty to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need*".

This provision differs from other international legislation on children's rights, at the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as it sets respect for elders and their support as explicit duties of children. Additionally, the article recognises the presence of multiple guardians, or "superiors", to the child, which can equally demand support and, as previously mentioned, foster the child's movement.

The mobility of children constitutes another feature of African rural communities which differ from a Western conception of childhood. This is particularly relevant for the Horn of Africa, with its long-standing tradition of nomadic pastoralists and a pervasive presence of transnational networks (Horst, 2006). As Horst has noted, people move constantly to gain access to fertile areas for their crops or livestock, to urban areas to seek employment opportunities, to visit relatives in periods of needs. As in West Africa, these movements are fluid and can vary for duration and frequency, and children are naturally expected to participate by following relatives or undertake them autonomously (Hashim & Thorsen, 2011, p.11).

These dynamics not only differ with the Western-based notions on what is appropriated for children, but more generally contrast with the widespread idea of *sedentarism*, analysed by Malkki in 1992. According to her reflection, rootedness is one's territory is usually perceived as a "natural" feature of people; This is why common-sense conceptions on soils, territory and "having roots" are reflected into language and representation of nations, and usually directed to naturalising people's identity with a specific culture and spatially defined territory (ibid: 24 -27).

This assumption leads to perceive people who are root-less, as migrants, refugees and stateless people, as deviant from a natural order and therefore problematic, even pathological (ibid: 31). Seen through this reflection, migrant children easily appears as a disturbing phenomenon: not only they contrast with a normative idea of rootedness and permanence in one's territory, but they oppose this supposed identity at a deeper level; breaking their natural belonging to a place at a young age, and moving among different nations and cultures, they could be perceived as missing a basic socialisation in a single culture, with its norms, national soil and society. While uprooted adult people can be seen as damaged, weakened by their distance with their land, they nevertheless are thought to *hold* a *specific* nationality and culture. Children migrants, on the other hand, represent a far worse case; the majority of children I interviewed in Djibouti did not have any national documentation, spoke different languages and dialects of the diverse countries and region the have lived in, and in many cases had their family spread in at least two or three neighbouring

countries. When asked about their nationality, some of them had to recount the story of their family, as they did not have a simple adjective to answer with. Halina, for example, was born in Djibouti by an Ethiopian father and a Somali mother. After two years from her birth, the family moved to Ethiopia, where she stayed until 12, when she moved again to Djibouti with her Somali uncle after her parents divorce. When asked "Where are you from?" Halina could have given three different answers, depending on her birth in Djibouti, her life in Ethiopia, or her connection and life with the Somali part of her family.

Drawing on Malkki's reflection, we could argue that a much deeper uprootedness take place in the lives of the Horn of Africa's migrant children. Not only, as migrants, they find themselves outside of their supposed national territory and culture, but, in some cases, they seem to lack those very defined features at all. By showing a fuzzy mix of nationalities, soils, peoples, languages, and lacking any uniquely-defying national element, migrant children in Djibouti seem to take Malkki's reflection to a further level, and essentially be perceived not only as "uprooted", but as "un-rooted".

If the vision of displacement is pathological (ibid: 31), what for those who do not even seem to have a defined place of origin? The perception of un-rootedness, I suggest, further stigmatises migrant children as outcasts: firstly, because the lack of a supposed national identity worsen the treatment by national authorities and fellow residents wherever children find themselves - as, essentially, they don't belong anywhere. As no country claims them as their citizens and other residents do not recognise them as fellow ones, they are greatly exposed to human rights abuses and a lack of legal and social protection. Secondly, the conception of being unrooted further reinforces the image of migrant children as "lacking" .

Due to their moving, children often face the absence of a family, a house, an education path, a series of factors that the Western idea of childhood consider not only as "normal", but as unavoidable protective factors for the child's correct development and safety (Mai, 2010). Children who lack them are perceived as deviant from a natural norm, and irremediably exposed to abuse (ibid). This is not to say that children on the move do not face great risks during their journeys and life at destination; the point here is what assumption

on childhood lead to define not as a life event, situated in an individual's personal story and context, rather as a deviant and systematic condition of the migrant child.

4.1.3 Children at Work, Children in School

As anticipated, children on the move can miss, among other things, the opportunity of pursuing a formal education. Hashim and Thorsen reflect on how much this concept is intrinsic to the definition of a "normal childhood", and linked to ideas of economic and social development as well as self realisation (2001: 33). Several researches have indeed studied the impact of schooling on a variety of factors, as the proper functioning of the social and political process (Kabeer, 2000), higher wages (Card, 1999), and health (Pettifor et al. 2008) among others.

Ahmed, 13, provides his account on dropping out of school:

"In my village there was a primary school. My parents enrolled me and I stayed there for the first years (…) But then I wanted to look for job and I left it. My family is poor, and I wanted to get some money for them and for me, so I decided to come to Djibouti and look for a job. (…) Sometimes I think about my friends in the school and I'm envious because they'll all have finished it by now (…) but I can't go back, first I have to find a good job, to send something to my family, prove that I managed to earn. Then I'll go back and maybe start the school again."

As Ahmed, all the migrant children I entered in contact with while in Djibouti were working or looking for work, and justified their migration mainly with the desire to find a job, while none of them was enrolled in school at the time.

In international policies, fund-raising campaigns and legal instruments, the provision of education is often seen as opposing child labour, and a necessary measure to fight it (Hashim, 2004). This vision, as Stephen noted, "*maintains that children should be segregated from the harsh realities of the adult world (…)* [and instead] *inhabit a safe, protected world of play, fantasy and innocence. They should ideally be protected from the arduous tasks and instrumentalized relationships of the productive sphere*" (quoted in Malkki and Martin, 2003: 220). As a consequence, many international organisations' and Ngos' programs targeting children in deve-

loping countries aim at enabling them to enter or stay in school as the most appropriate choice for their present well-being and future opportunities; By looking at programs and fund-raising campaigns in this regard, it is easy to identify a focus on access to school as a fundamental right for children, and its absence as generally caused by the lack of proper infrastructures and services in the kids' communities[5]. Donations are requested to build classes, train teachers, provide learning materials, in a general description of the school as a safe and appropriate environment, opposed to the degrading work children out of school could undertake (as described in "Aklima's story", Unicef website, 2014). This tendency is partly based on the Western dichotomy between learning and work, which sees the first as an age-appropriate behaviour for children, and the latter definitely not (Harhism & Thorsen, 2011, p.104).

The dichotomy education - work, and the value judgement that it implies, is reinforced by many international documents, which focus on the most harmful forms of child labour, such as prostitution, slavery, service in armed conflict - among all, the widely ratified ILO *Convention No. 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour* (ILO, 1999). This view, however, does not reflect the contexts and behaviours found in rural African contexts, or the factors that hamper school's access. By focusing uniquely on exploitative work situations, and the need to provide measures to stop them, documents as the ILO Convention not only fail to take into account the variegated reality, features and needs of children worldwide, who may want or have to take a job, but also fail to address the rooted conditions that may push them towards exploitative ones.

Among the migrant children that I interviewed in Djibouti, working was universally seen as a good opportunity, as a way to sustain one's family and self-development. Education was as well seen as a positive opportunity to access, but not necessarily a priority, or an activity better related to their age. In most cases, education was not conceived as a value *per se*, but as an instrumental, added quality, that could have allowed children to access better wages or working opportunities; nevertheless, other life's factors, as individual and

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[5] See for example Unicef's fundraising website: http://www.supportunicef.org/site/c.d-vKUI9OWInJ6H/b.7651161/k.746F/Support_UNICEF__Getting_every_child_to_school.htm

social needs, constituted their priority. For the majority of children, clearly, meeting the family' basic standards of living and perceiving themselves as active contributors acquired precedence over school's enrolment. For others, the presence of only few classes in the villages' schools impacted the view on their enrolment, as some children reported to find it useless to follow the primary school's years without the possibility to continue it further, and preferred to start working right away; this view is consisted with Lachaud's study (1994, quoted in Hashim & Thorsen, 2001: 104), which noted that youth with no education are less likely to be unemployed because of their experiences in apprenticeships and in the labour sectors, compared to those who completed secondary education.

Furthermore, for many migrant children in Djibouti, school's fees represented a cost that the family couldn't have afforded; in other families, availability of money was not equivalent to the consent of the household, which had instead decided to pursue other strategies than sending the child to school; among them, some kids also reported that, in their families, younger kids were sent to school, while they, as older, helped to pay their fees.

Other kids, as the testimony of Ahmed shows, reportedly aspired to education rather as a *sequel* to their employment experiences, in order to be able to pay for their own fees.

These narratives make it clear that conceiving education as the top priority for children worldwide not only ignores the different levels of economic development as well as wider social, political and cultural features of communities around the world, but also act as a top-down intervention, failing to take into account the needs and desires of children it attempts to help.

In this regard, efforts to stop child's employment appear to be uncritical and unspecified, and driven by selective conceptions that tend to focus on hideous practices as exploitation. In this regard, it is easy to remember Peter Nyers, who analysed the emergency discourse often associated to humanitarian programs (Nyers, 2006). According to him, these interventions are often characterised by a specific vocabulary, and words such as "problem", "crisis", "danger" are constantly used by media, aid workers and government officials. The urgency of action that these narratives arise has the effect of granting immediate credibility and legitimate the intervention, by reinforcing the idea that a quick, operational

action has to be carried out, usually to save precarious lives. To Nyers, this approach translates into a problem-solving mentality, that proposes solutions to "fix" a problem, but lack of a critical analysis of the contexts and their own modes of intervention.

This reflection appears to be extremely relevant for ideas on children needs and vulnerabilities. Seen as weak and in need of protection, children in working situation or elsewhere are regarded as requiring an urgent intervention, to restore a "normality" typical for their age, made of school and leisure time. Nevertheless, and as previously seen, this normality often ignores the beneficiaries' context, with its long-standing and rooted social, cultural and economical features, as well as the children's needs in this regard.

This, of course, is not to say that children in African communities do not face risks and lack of rights - particularly when migrants or workers - or that steps to address their well-being should not be taken. Rather, that these interventions often fail to have a comprehensive look at the factors that characterise the children's situations, and consequently provide solutions which could result to be meaningless for the desired outcomes. Providing a school in a remote village in Eastern Ethiopia could appear as a nice action. But when structural economical features are not taken into consideration, children could anyway remain compelled to migrate from that village or look for job in order to sustain their families, as in the case of Ahmed. In this case, the quick, operational intervention of building a school where lacking, results completely inefficient in bringing more children to school.

Reinforcing the school enrolling as a good practice compared to the bad practice of sending children to work can further stigmatise those who have no choice in that. At the same time, preventing children's mobility and access to work further disadvantages less resourceful families, who look at migration as one of the only viable strategy to improve their condition, if not to survive.

4.1.4 Choosing To Move

Despite widespread conceptions and international efforts, children do move and look for work, and can be motivators of their independent migration even at a young age (Yaqub, 2009). Among the children who moved for work interviewed in Djibouti, none said they

were forced to migrate and rather claimed that that had been a personal choice, generally aimed at better supporting the family. Elias, 15, is one of them:

"I was living near Harar with my parents and 8 sibling (…) My father went crazy and he started beating my mother every day when he came back home. My mother was upset, we were very poor and 2 of my siblings died. I was the oldest one, so I started helping: I cooked, planted crops in the little garden we had, looked after the youngest ones. My father started beating me as well (…) We couldn't live with him anymore. One night we left without him and went to Jijiga [N/A, A town in the Eastern part of Ethiopia]. *When we arrived I helped my mother to settle with my siblings then I immediately left for Djibouti to look for job and help them. I had some money with me and I could pay a bus to Loyada* [N/A, At the border with Djibouti]. *Once there, there were policemen checking the documents of the people entering, but I had none. So I descended form the bus and waited the night to come. When it was dark I took a long tour to avoid the frontier post and entered in Djibouti. With some money left I bought the cleaning materials and started working cleaning shoes and then cars. (…) Now I do a lot of jobs, I clean cars and shoes in Menelik Square, and I do commissions for people living there.… I got to know some people while staying here, and Ithey give me something to do, take away the garbage or clean their houses. They give me food or let me sleep inside sometimes. (…) I'm saving a lot to send money to my family. I arrived here in 2011 and I gave money to my family twice: once I gave them 7000 djf, the last time 170.000 djf. I brought them to my mother personally: I went to Jijga before Ramadan and came back at the end of Ramadan, passing form Loyada like the previous time."*

It is not difficult to perceive a strong motivation emerging from Elias' words: the struggles in his country of origin, the decision to move, the plan of a strategic journey to enter in Djibouti, where finally look for multiple, informal jobs to save for a family counting on his work, are central to his migration. Hashim & Thorsen have reported on children's agency and participation in the decision to move in West Africa (Hashim & Thorsen, 2011) and Yaqub has collected substantial studies that reveal how migration can be entirely initiated and executed by children (Yaqub, 2009).

Among the motives that push children to migrate, interviews in Djibouti generally showed: (1) search for income and active participation to the family livelihoods strategies; (2) participation in movement of peers looking for experience, skills development, economic independence and opportunities for the future; and (3) responding to unexpected intra-familial conflicts, difficulties or losses. In all these cases, children stated to have played a key role in the decision to move. Interestingly, however, in several interviews children questioned their own decision, and the notion of agency itself, by addressing a net of factors and expectation that surrounded their choice of moving.

As Tesfay, 12, remembers, talking about his trip to Djibouti - *"It wasn't my choice, it was the only thing to do"*. Orphan of both parents, he was expropriated from his house together with his baby siblings and an aunt. Other relatives were far and didn't have enough to provide for him, so at 7 years old he followed a group of peers heading to Djibouti to find a job. Similarly, behind Elias's account on his efforts to contribute for his mother and siblings an idea of ineluctability emerges: If it is true that he chose to move and try his luck in Djibouti, one could ask which other opportunities he had.

Despite the full participation in the planning and execution of migration plans, children's decision to move is undoubtedly shaped by their conditions at home, which are generally extremely difficult; both Ethiopia's and Somaliland child migrants originated from rural areas, with fragile environments and lack of livelihoods. In Ethiopia particularly, already existing environmental and economic challenges have been further exacerbated by forced eviction from farm land, prices rising, poor harvesting and debts caused by the Government's policies on fertilisers (RMMS, 2012). This context could have caused some families to see migration as the only way to try improve their condition, if not a matter of survival.

Even for more resourceful households, expectations on children's participation to the family's income and gain of independence influence the kid's decision to move, (Hashim and Thorsen, 2012), and the peers' behaviour reinforces this attitude. For many boys interviewed in Djibouti, the migration of peers indeed acted as push factor, even for children who didn't have previous intention to migrate but have reportedly followed the friends.

Stating whether their movement is about conformity to social expectations and norms, an inevitable response to compelling conditions, or an autonomous choice, resulted impossible, if not meaningless, given the frequent coexistence of these factors and the children's different experiences in this regard. It is however interesting to note that children's agency in migration struggles to get consideration in international instruments. Exemplary in this regard are the Palermo Protocols - The *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* and The *Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants By Land, Sea and Air* (UNGA, 2000); It has been argued that the very existence of these two Protocols, which entail different provisions for trafficked and smuggled people, establishes an artificial dichotomy between the two categories, failing to consider that they could represent two phenomena on a same continuum (Gallagher, 2001). This is particularly true for children migrants, as the Trafficking in Persons Protocol states, in Article 3: "*(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph.*"

This provision set the consent of children as irrelevant, if the movement is considered "for the purpose of exploitation". Despite trying to protect young movers, this implicitly overlooks the possibility that children may actually choose to migrate - using illegal networks when other ways are not available - and easily links migrant children with the idea of passive victims.

Smuggling and trafficking networks were indeed very active in Djibouti at the time this research, and IOM staff reported the presence of a 30 to 40% of underage migrants among those using them. Nevertheless, among the kids interviewed in Djibouti-ville only a small minority expressed the desire to continue their migration to Yemen and Saudi Arabia, using those networks. For the majority of them the lack of resources and connections made Djibouti the only available country of destination at that time. As Tesfay put it: "*I didn't choose Djibouti, nor I want to go to Yemen. I'm just trying to gain a little money to survive*".

Some children did report of having travelled with other peers who used smugglers boats to go to Yemen, as Faram, 15, who remembered:

"2 of the 5 friends who arrived here with me continued their trip to Yemen, so I think they are earning money to send to their families (…) but I didn't want to go up there. I just want to earn something and go back. Now I don't have anything to send to my family, so I cannot go back because they are going to complain and ask what did I do all this time if not working and earning. So I'm going to earn and send them something, and then I'll go back."

Generally, Djibouti was viewed as the first reachable place where to go and try earn something, while more elaborated migration plans involving more countries of transit and destination were not common among migrant children I interviewed. Nevertheless, all children seemed to have exercised an active role in choosing the means and route through which migrate, depending on the resources they could count on and the type of migration they had in mind. For example, older children willing to work and reside in Djibouti for a prolonged period were generally more used to save money to pay a regular ticket and travel by bus, and then enter in the country with different strategies, which normally vary from from smuggling into the borders for Ethiopian nationals, and pretending to visit a relative or disguise as a Djiboutian for Somalilanders. Smaller children, with limited or shorter migration plans would normally come from Ethiopia by jumping on the train connecting Dire Dawa to Djibouti - a custom interrupted in the summer of 2014 due to the railway's closure for renovation works. Further individual decisions were constantly taken during their life once at destination, where they were severely impacted by a net of practical constraints and other's perceptions of them. The relationship between these perceptions and children's life in Djibouti will be the focus of the second part of this analysis.

4.2 Second Part - Life At Destination: Labels and Living in Djibouti

In the previous part we have analysed how ideas on childhood and migration worldwide affect young migrants' perceptions and how these relate with children's situations at home, decision to move, as well as their relationship with work and educational opportunities. This part will try to expand this reflection by looking into children's life once at de-

stination, to see which obstacles they can face while settling into the new context and how others' perceptions of them can shape their living. Primarily, the chapters will be organised along the distinction "victims" - "criminals", taken from the literature on street children (Thomas de Benitez, 2011: 11). This is particularly relevant for migrant children in Djibouti, who, sleeping and dwelling in the street due to lack of resources were commonly indicated as *"enfants de la rue"* (street children) by both Djiboutian nationals and the organisations dealing with their protection. Despite being quite indicative of the children's way of living, this label greatly impacted the way they were perceived, and the responses generally implemented towards the phenomenon of child migration, as this part will show.

4.2.1 Victims, Vulnerable, Poor

Studies in this area have analysed how the term "street children" generally evokes negative images of problematic orphans, abused runaways, or children with extremely dysfunctional families (Thomas de Benitez, 2001: 9). This seems consistent with what seen in the previous part of the analysis, and the conceptions of protection needs as naturally ascribed to children; In this regard, Malkki (2010) has reflected on how children are widely used to depict peace and human goodness, basing on their presumed features of innocence and peacefulness. This representation, in her argument, not only depoliticise and infantilise the notion of peace, but eventually leads to treat phenomena which deviate from this image of children as shocking, as it happens for the the case of children soldiers, criminals, or workers. Such categories, failing to display the mite features of what we understand to be a universal and uncomplicated "moral subject" (ibid: 60), are perceived as deviating from a natural norm and in need to be saved. This attitude seems reflected by the aid organisations working on street children's protection in Djibouti, whose programs generally tended to foster an over-romanticised image of them; During fund-raising events and presentations from both Caritas and Unicef I could assist to while in the country, migrant and street children were usually depicted as victims of their fate and context, brutalised by the Djiboutian society and in need to be saved from multiple risks and abuses.

As anticipated, Caritas was the only Ngo specifically devoted to the protection of migrant street children in Djibouti, and provided services and activities for them; nevertheless, it was clear during my work there, that some management's choices hampered the children's active role and decisions while inside the structure. Generally, workshops and learning activities were organised to allow the volunteers to teach small groups each time, to which kids were allowed to participate just once, in order to have everyone participating over time. This provision was envisaged by both the children - who couldn't freely choose which activity to follow and when - and by volunteers, who couldn't structure any learning program but were forced to repeat similar lessons each time. Because of this, the activities remained very informal and unstructured for the whole period I spent there, and were poorly helped by Caritas' paid staff, leading all volunteers to frustration and eventually to the decision to stop their service. When workshops started to be canceled, children were kept without any organised activity or supervision, and either left wandering around the yard or locked in a room.

This series of poor outcomes ultimately originated from the decision not to let kids participate in choosing their activities, or let them attend with regularity the ones they preferred; This was justified by the management saying: "*We have to give everyone the same opportunities. These kids are all equals and have to be welcomed in the same way*". Despite aiming at a faire attitude towards children, this vision and the actions that it originated also implied a homogenisation of them, in an extreme denial of their different individualities, needs and wishes. This is consistent with Nyers (2006: 37), who argued that humanitarian interventions seem to be essentially aimed at supporting the concept of a sacred, bare human life, more than its individual manifestations; By drawing on Agamben, this would derive from the Ancient Greeks' distinction between *bios* and *zoé*, the first expressing the peculiar form of life of an individual or group of people, the latter the mere fact of being alive, common to all animals, human beings and Gods (Agamben, 1996). In Agamben's reflection, Ancient Greeks used to indicate with this second word those forms of life which essentially lacked the features of rational speech and reasoning, and were therefore to be excluded from the political life in the *polis*. Despite being cut out from the State and its decisional processes,

these forms were considered to be alive, sharing the common characteristic of existence with all the other beings, and were therefore to be respected as sacred. In Nyers's argument, this is often the case of refugees, who, despite being excluded from the decisional process and the possibility to be political agents, are still perceived to be "life", even though bare, and therefore in need to to be saved and supported. Through this representation, refugees and other outcasted forms of life are at the same time granted with the sacredness of existence - and the assistance and urgent help it deserves - and imposed with qualities of speechlessness and passivity. This approach, consistent with the way Caritas saw and treated migrant children, eventually homogenises different identities and stories in a common category of needy, vulnerable people, with the systematic effect of silencing their political agency. Perceived as "all equals" because "all vulnerable", children were prevented from behaving as rational actors even in the smallest decision, as which workshop to follow or for how many times.

This approach produced a series of consequences while I was there: beyond fragmenting and eventually stopping the activities run by volunteers, the management decided to end supporting the public school's enrolment of children who wished a formal education by saying that no differences could have been made among them; additionally, they kept accepting violent kids into Caritas' facilities without sanctioning or addressing their behaviour, which provoked a series of serious conflicts among other kids and the staff itself. In both cases, the individual differences, wishes and needs of different children were not taken into account, in the name of an "equal treatment".

Generally, what emerged from Caritas' management was a lack of concern about children variegated experiences, while their homogenisation as "victims" made them passive recipients of welfare provisions. If it is true that the organisation was the only one in Djibouti to welcome them and provide them with a dedicated program, this seemed to originate more from a "moral imperative" to help a neglected category due to the Ngo's values and solidarity mission, than a critical and structured take of responsibility of these people's actual features and autonomous choices. When in Caritas, children were treated as equal, not through the granting of same opportunities, but with the *imposition* of these. Children were

registered on their first day at Caritas and then simply kept there during the opening hours, regardless of their individual needs: the same treatment was accorded to migrants, Djiboutian nationals, orphans, abused, runaways, 5-year-old kids, 20-year-old boys, workers, drug addicts, kids wishing to study, kids who just wanted to go back to their countries. The absence of any form of assessment, the impossibility to choose what to do and what not to do, or to structure different types of activities and support, despite the organisation's significant resources, reflected the perception of a basic homogeneity present in the "street children" category, essentially as "bare life", a *zoé* to be helped but not listened to. Caritas' mission in this regard was just *to be there* and welcome an unvarying mass of needy people, without questioning *how,* or what they really wanted.

This conception seems to related to the programs of another national organisation I entered in contact with during my fieldwork; Despite differing approach and methods, the "Orphanitel Daryel", an orphanage created and run by the country's First Lady, showed a similar perception of migrant kids as a homogenised and mute category of vulnerable people. This luxurious, large and well-equipped orphanage hosted around 100 children aged 0 to 4 years, of all nationalities, and was connected to associated structures for older kids and adolescents. Even at Daryel, as at Caritas, migrant children were welcomed and supported, but only if identified as "orphans". Indeed, the structure reportedly accepted only abandoned babies, who were brought in by the police and institutionalised as infants. It has to be noted that this latter situation represented a disputed issue in Djibouti, at the time of my research: due to the national system, mothers who arrived to the hospital to give birth were requested to pay 5000 Djiboutian Francs (around 168 DKK) due to "medical expenses". After the 5000 were paid, the hospital released a document (called "*Sorta*") which the new-parents had to take to the Ministry of Population, to get a birth certificate for the child. This was granted after the payment of 2500 djf (around 84 DKK), and had to be renewed every three months for the same amount until the child turned 18.

The birth certificate (A*ct de Naissance*) is the fundamental and in most cases only piece of document behold by the Djiboutian population. It allows them to get registered in schools, access the hospital, receive vaccinations, sign regular job contracts, and to be recognised

by the police as regular residents. Unfortunately, the sum to obtain the green light from the hospital and the resources requested to get and constantly renew the birth certificate were not an easy issue for migrants residing in Djibouti, neither for many Djiboutian themselves. My interviews with the staff of Unicef and Caritas showed that even resourceful migrants could anyway be prevented to get the A*ct de Naissance,* due to the country's strict polices on immigration, and a theoretical confusion between the concepts of citizenship and residency. According to my interviewees, migrant families with contacts in Djibouti were therefore used to stipulate an informal agreement with Djiboutian nationals, who could request the A*ct de Naissance* and register the kid as their own, in exchange for money. The staff of LIA, a faith-based Ngo working with vulnerable families in Djibouti, reported that, because of the amount requested, some migrant or destitute mothers avoided giving birth at the hospital, or run away with the newborn without paying the "S*orta*". In both cases this resulted with the absence of a birth certificate for the newborn and its virtual "non-existence" in the country. To avoid this, in some cases, destitute mothers who gave birth at the hospital would run away without the child and try to collect enough money to get the baby's documentation, before claiming it back. Due to the country's regulation, however, after three days at the hospital the child was officially considered "abandoned" and brought to the Daryel Orphanage.

While some kids were actually abandoned, according to LIA's staff it was arduous to distinguish real cases of abandonment from destitute families' desperate strategies. Asked about this, Daryel staff, stated that some women did indeed try to access the orphanage when found that their kids have been brought there; however, and as a rule, kids were not restituted, as: "*if parents cannot pay the hospital fees in the first place, it is unlikely that they will provide enough for the kid in the future anyway*".

This view is relevant in analysing perceptions on victimhood, as it unveils the rooted power relationship that often accompanies it. "The vulnerable" are here seen not only as a category to help, but ultimately to help even without their own will, in a definitive obscuration of their rationalities. By drawing on Nyers' emergency discourse (2006), we could argue that the urgency to help "poor" children is here followed by a quick, decisive inter-

vention: taking them away from their poor families, which won't anyway support them as good as the Orphanage. Despite being extreme, this action is supposedly done "for the best interest" of children, which the organisation assumed to know better that the children's own mothers. It's here easy to remind Foucault's conception of bio-power, as the State's intervention on people's life to optimise its biological manifestations, in an attempt to reshape and subjugate its population (Foucault, 1977). In this case, the authority to reclaim the children's care is justified by the moral obligation of preserving their endangered life, and construct a secure, life-supporting environment for them. The organisation is therefore not only allowed, but appointed to be responsible for these lives, for whom, by consequence, poor families are not able to be. Consistently with Nyers, this perception of victimhood ultimately tended to homogenise and silence the "beneficiaries" of its intervention, seen as a life to help, but deprived of any political and rational feature.

4.2.2 Criminals, Animals, Immigrants

It is interesting to note that, while victimhood labels tended to unifying and dehistoricizing categorisations, directed towards an archetypal form of "vulnerable", mute victim, the hostile visions in their regard varied greatly according to children's age, nationality and gender, producing diverse treatments of them, as this chapter will attempt to show.

Despite having a huge impact on their life and treatment, the perception of migrant children as pure victims was minimally diffused in Djibouti, as a widespread vision conceived them as essentially criminals. This was especially spread among law enforcement officials and some nationals; According to a Caritas staff, it was common for some nationals in Djibouti commonly to perceive migrant children either as delinquents, to be reported to the law enforcement officials, or "animals" to be treated as such. Beside children imprisonment and abuses by the police, the Ngo staff complained about the impact this situations had in hospitals and clinics, where national medical personnel often refused to cure street children, or did so only after pressing insistence, usually forcing the Ngo's staff to accompany sick children to medical facilities for several days before obtaining a proper visit. Du-

ring the interviews, some children indeed connected their image to "animals", to describe the treatment they used to receive. Abel, 16, reported:

"Sometimes I follow the other kids and try to get food at the restaurants in Rue d'Ethiopie, as some of them give us something after lunch or at night. If you are lucky, you get what the customers didn't eat, the leftovers from the plate. Other times they give us the crumbs and the leftovers from the ground, or what they collected after sweeping the tables, like we are animals".

Another kid I talked with during my volunteering at Caritas reported to have assisted at his friend getting hit by a car and being left on the ground, without getting assistance from the The main risk for migrant children in Djibouti was nevertheless represented by the police; Guards were appointed with the capture and deportation of every irregular immigrant on the Djiboutian's soil, children included. According to Mustafa, 15,:

"The police is always after us. I lost the count of the times I was in prison. What they do with us depends from your luck: sometimes they bring us to the borders, sometimes they bring us to clean their cars or shoes, sometimes we end up in jail (…) there we can stay from 1 day to a week (…) if you have money and you pay them you can go out almost immediately, you give them 1000 or 2000 francs and they let you go (…) Staying in the jail is ugly. We stay all together, 30-50 people in the same small room, and we have no toilet, everyone has to make his excrements there. The smell is unbearable. They give us dry rice and water once a day, sometimes a piece of bread, and that's it."

The mistreatment of children migrants by the national police did not happen exclusively in prison and for immigration-related crimes. During the time of this research, many children reported abusive behaviour from law-enforcement officials for other reason than their legal status or the national regulation in this regard. Aysha, a half Djiboutian half Somali girl of 14, habitué of Caritas, suddenly disappeared during September 2014, and when she finally came back, skinnier and with bruises, recounted of having been detained by the police to do some major cleaning of the barracks. Reportedly, she had been violently woken up by 4 or 5 officials at sunrise, on the beach where she was sleeping with other

girls. The policemen were kicking on the bodies of her friends and playing with a lighter near her feet, laughing. All the girls were taken to the police station and detained for three days to clean the site thoroughly, provided with dry bread and tap water to eat, and closed into the cells at night. After completing the cleanings they were released.

This was consistent with was recounted by other kids, who reportedly had been used for duties while caught; girls were usually forced to clean offices while boys used to clean cars, shoes or to sell contraband goods to detainees. The nature of duties and the duration of the detention period also varied according to their nationality; according to children, Ethiopians usually received the harsher treatment, were detained for longer, and in the majority of cases were deported at the borders. Somali and Somalilander children, on the other hand, reported less or no detention, and even when caught, served shorter periods in prison, where they were usually put to perform some cleaning and then released.

The national Protection Officer of Danish Refugee Council's office in the country commented on this data reflecting that Ethiopian migrants in Djibouti are largely Oromo, and thus expressing different features (Oromo language, Christian religion) from Djiboutian Somalis, the predominant group in the country, mostly Muslim and Somali-speaking. As Somalilanders migrants had these same features their conditions were better. Nevertheless, the simple beholding of the same national language and religion did not help integration, as Ethiopians originating from the Somali region and even second-generation migrants born and raised in Djibouti were equally marginalised and deported. What seemed to truly hamper integration was the sectarian conception rooted in the country, still deeply divided into two ethnic groups, the Issa/Somali and the Afar minority. Somaliland's migrants and children, as part of the peculiar clan division which characterise Somalia, Somaliland and Djibouti, seemed to be advantaged once in the country. On the contrary, Ethiopian children, even when displaying the same language and religion of the majority of the population, were more easily ostracised.

Beyond nationality, and according to Thomas de Benitez, another factor to affect and change the perception on street children is their age, as younger children are more likely to be perceived as vulnerable victims gradually turning into delinquents as they age into

adolescence (Thomas de Benitez, 2011: 11). In Djibouti, indeed, smaller children used to receive a different treatment while in prison, as Jemal, 8 years old, reported:

"When the police takes me, as I'm little, they don't always put me in the cell with the others. Instead they use me to prepare the food for the detainees, the tea for the officers, or to bring around the cigarettes and the things they want to sell to prisoners. If I sell everything they let me go."

This is consistent with what recounted by Daryel staff; when asked about orphan migrant children living alone in the city's neighbourhoods, the personnel was quick to state:

"Those kids are different. They are already used to be in the street. They do their things there. It would be impossible to have them come to the Orphanage, they are not used to stay in a single place, they would want to go outside all day."

When suggested about the opportunity of providing them with food or other type of assistance without institutionalisation, they insisted:

"You can't help that type of kids (…) they don't want our help. They are old already. They want to have their freedom and they have many problems. They won't even accept food from us."

This view seemed to suggest the existence of two type of street children for the Orphanage: those "rescued" and institutionalised at a very young age, which were changed name and given the Djiboutian nationality, and those older, grown with their real name and origin outside the structure, in the street. Despite their youth, these children were already conceived as irremediably "corrupted" by the life in street, and therefore impossible to approach, or help. While "baby orphans" were to be saved and nurtured into the Orphanage's luxurious structures, older orphan kids seemed to be condemned to a life in the street, to be persecuted and deported according to the national legislation.

4.2.3 Girls in the Street

Another main variable which influenced children's treatment was their gender. Despite all migrant children I had the opportunity to enter in contact with while in Djibouti reported to face precarious conditions of life, hostility from national citizens and rights abuses from the law enforcement officials, peculiar situations seemed to arise for girls.

During my field work at Caritas, it emerged rather soon that the number of girls accessing the structure and its services were extremely inferior to that of boys, amounting to around a tenth of it. Despite being present in streets and the city's old neighbourhoods, migrant girls were generally absent from the Ngo's facilities, and this represented a concern for the staff, who often discussed about ways to incentive the girls' presence. One of the solutions taken in this regard was the establishment of a weekly girls-only day, and therefore each Wednesday boys were refused the access to Caritas. This provision originated from the idea that girls wouldn't come due to embarrassment of sharing the facilities with boys, especially for what concerned the body and clothes' cleaning, performed at Caritas daily.

Nevertheless, this decision didn't improve the girls presence, and during the time I spent there the Ngo welcomed once a maximum of 9 girls, a couple of times 5 or 6, while the majority of Wednesdays passed with two or no girls at all.

In several occasions the staff was sent by the management to look for street girls in the city and bring them to Caritas. However, these expeditions were rarely successful. When asked about the girls' whereabouts, some of the national staff reported that they were busy working, or preferred to lay all day in video clubs, or hang around in the city, and simply didn't want to come.

Surely the number of girls migrants alone in Djibouti was inferior to that of boys, and during my field work there I met only a handful of them, normally migrated with a friend or a relative and separated from them at a later stage. However, a simple tour in the city could prove a huge presence of female street children, which I started to approach with the help of Amina. It soon emerged that most of these girls were migrants or of migrant origin, arrived in Djibouti with their families, or born there from a migrant family - in most cases Ethiopian and in minor part of Somali origin. I started finding out that the first

factor which differentiated underage migrant girls from their peer boys was a more habitual presence of the family in the country of destination. This however didn't mean that all migrant girls lived with their families in Djibouti, as many of them dwelled alone in the street.

What started to be clear during interviews, however, was that among migrant children with families in Djibouti girls were more likely to be either at home all day, not mingling with other street children neither accessing Caritas, or completely alone and on their own in the street. Boys with families, on the contrary, seemed to manage these two settings in a more fluid way, and generally had the opportunity to look for income and going around during the day and reside with the family at night.

This situation appeared to be linked to gender-specific treatments of migrant children; While all migrant street and destitute children in Djibouti, regardless of their age and sex, were facing a series of arduous situations while navigating the context of the new country, peculiar obstacles seemed to arouse for girls, in virtue to their being females. Generally, while all migrant street children were conceived as poor, unwashed and problematics, girls in the street were more likely to be stigmatised as immoral and, as a direct consequence, to be subject to harassment and sexual violence, as this chapter will attempt to show.

Almost all the girls I had the opportunity to speak with during my field work recounted of having personally faced sexual abuses, from Djiboutian nationals, policemen, or other migrants. Former street children confirmed that this was a widespread, if not normal, treatment of girls living on the street. Amina herself, referring to her childhood as a street child, argued:

"It's completely common for girls of all age. It can happen at night, when men approach you in the street, or assault you where you are sleeping, and it's almost sure when you get arrested. When policemen take girls, they'll ask them to to do something to them in exchange for letting them free. Some refuse, some accept. But in most cases you have no choice, they'll rape you anyway. Sometimes, when you are little, they make you watch when they rape other girls, "to get experienced". But many times I've seen little girls being equally raped. Sometimes, when some are too little, or are cut

[N/A Female Genitale Mutilation] *the policemen are afraid of having problems, or that the girl will bleed too much, and they prefer to have oral or anal sex. Everyone knows and no one does anything. We are street children, who do you think will listen to us?"*.

A Caritas' staff recounted:

"Rape is particularly common among lowest grade of police, especially among guards in prison, but everyone knows that this happen. One girl said that once when she and a friend were raped by two guards while the commissar was in the room. In some cases the policemen let them free after the rape. It's like a form of prostitution. Also some men in the street throw them coins after raping them. Some girls understand that they could earn a living from that, and they end up in prostitution this way"

In an article on female street children in Egypt, the journalist Amira El Feky has investigated on girls experience in Cairo's street, analysing how they are significantly different from those of boys. According to her, these differences can be ascribed to three main perceptions on women, namely that they are seen as weak, sexually provoking and not belonging to the street in the Islamic Egyptian culture (El Feky, 2013). As perceived as naturally weaker than boys, girls in the street can elicit more violence towards them, and being less able to defend themselves; moreover, widespread conceptions on women want them to behave quietly, stay in the house with their husband and close relatives, and expose themselves as less as possible in public places, due to the concept of '*awrah*, roughly translated with "sexuality", rooted in Islamic norms on women (ibid). El Feky argued that as women are conceived to be sexually provocative and thought to arise men's desire with their body, voice, or hair, it is easier to conceive sexual violence on them as their own responsibility, particularly if they didn't hide their body correctly or frequented places they were not supposed to be, as the street. In her analysis, this is extremely relevant for a female street child, as her presence in the street clashes with conceptions on the women's place and behaviour, making her appearing as immoral and ultimately *"viewed as and dealt with as a prostitute, a sex object, (…) entirely responsible for any sexual abuse or assault she falls victim to"* (ibid).

This reflection is relevant for street female children in Djibouti not only due religious resemblance of the contexts with the Egyptian one, but also because of a coherent perception of street girls as immoral. This concerned not only Djiboutian nationals but migrant families equally; Salma, an Ethiopian girl of 12 years old migrated with her family, recounted:

"When we were living in our village it was fine, I had no problems with my mother. But when we arrived here things started getting worse. We needed money, so my father started transporting these big jerrycanes of water around the neighbourhood, while my mother had to stay at home because she was pregnant and had to look after my two little brothers. I begged in the street all day and gave her anything I could find. When the new baby born, we moved from Quartier 4 to Balbala [N/A, a poor neighbourhood very from the city centre] *and I kept begging in the street in the centre during the day and came back to my family at night. One night after spending the day begging I couldn't come back to sleep at home, it was too dark and I was too far, so I stayed in the street with the other girls. When I got home the next morning my mother was very angry at me, she asked "where have you been?" "what have you done?". She said that I did bad things with men, and yelled at me (…) after that she didn't want to see me again. Every time I tried to come back to her she beat me up and insulted me, so I had to leave home and started living in the street. Now when I earn something from begging I take it back to my mother, because I love her. But she takes the money and yells at me (…)I beg her to take me back, I don't buy any food or clothes for me with the money I collect, I bring everything to her but it's never enough, she's always screaming and say I don't do enough because I stay in brothels and do bad things."*

Similarly, Hodan, 17, recounted:

"Since my brothers saw me once going around with the other street girls, they believe I'm a prostitute. Since that day I cannot come back home anymore, as they don't want me there, they beat me up and insult me. So I started living in the street, because at least here I can find some money, and buy some food and clothes to survive. Yes, it's not what I wanted to do, and it's difficult. I mainly work in houses, as a domestic worker, I clean and cook (…) I don't like these jobs, and I don't like living in the street, but what else can I do at the moment?"

Both Salma and Hodan have been forcibly expelled by their houses because of their mingling with street children, and girls in particular. Other girls interviewed recounted similar stories, usually ending with their leaving the household because of familiar conflicts.

It appeared that some migrant families bore peculiar conceptions on what "street children", and particularly girls, were; for Salma's and Hodan's families, girls leaving in the street were prostitutes. Paradoxically, Salma and Hodan did spend the major part of the day in the street, and could have been initially encouraged to do so, to support the household by begging or finding income generating activities. However, their families reacted violently when they realised they spent time with other street girls, either hanging around with them or sleeping together at night. Immediately, they turned from being normal girls trying to support the family to prostitutes, immoral women, dishonouring themselves and their relatives.

As anticipated, it is true that life in the street exposed girls in Djibouti to sexual violence, harassment and to generally being seen as "sexually available" for men. All of the migrant girls I interviewed did show to be aware of the risks their life in the street could have exposed them to, and had experienced them in various degrees.

The central point here is how perceptions on women and girls legitimated and even produced these risks. The ideas that Salma's and Hodan's families had on street girls, their being prostitutes and prone to do "bad things", were the same ones that men trying or forcing an approach with them bore, and that possibly pushed them to approach street girls in the first place. These girls deviated from the norm wanting women residing at home with the only company of their close relatives, and were therefore exposed to gender-specific risks during their life in the street.

Consequently, the idea that their daughters had been with and *like* street girls, elicited their stigmatisation as immoral, as they could be held responsible for any sexual abuse they fell victim to due to their deviating behaviour and their mingling with other street children.

Nevertheless, perceptions and ideas on girls in the street also had other consequences, not necessarily harmful, for migrant girls in Djibouti. Generally, they were seen as more harmless and needy than their male peers, arousing more pity and donations from people. Beg-

ging was almost only practiced by them, and by small boys, as male teenagers were more easily seen as dangerous or elicit rejection.

Also, groups of women and girls seemed to have more emotional ties among them, through which they could help each others. Frequently, when talking with children at Caritas, it happened that a child would get extremely sad and about to cry; when the child and bystanders were girls, an almost immediate support strategy were created, and older girls would encourage or give practical tips to the distressed peer. When the same thing happened with boys, however, the child would try to hide, or get aggressive, as not to show their weakness to the others, who in turn remained silent or in a couple of times mocked the distressed child.

Some girls also recounted about material help they could get from other women in the street, as Amal, 14, who stated:

"Since my stepmother kicked me out I started sleeping on the ground in front of the station. At night other women let me sleep near them, so that I'm less exposed to abuses from men. Each morning they give me 100 djf to have breakfast, then the rest of the day I have to get by on my own. It's hard for me to beg, I feel like laughing, I'm can't do it (…) but the women with small children get a lot, so sometimes they give me something."

That said, street girls remained largely invisible to services directed to street children in Djibouti, as for Caritas, and most of them didn't attend the Ngo's activities or handouts; girls living alone in the street explained their lack of participation with their need to work, a condition shared with girls living with their families, who usually added their relatives' opposition to it.

Additionally, the fact of having just one dedicated day in the structure, with fewer activities, did not represent a pulling factor for them, who often declared to forget about it, compared to boys who had established daily routines around and inside Caritas. In this sense, Caritas' treatment of girls as a minority group could have contributed to shape their minor participation to their program.

4.2.4 Agency and Strategy

As seen in the previous chapters, labels and perceptions on migrant children in Djibouti shaped their life in multiple ways, and particularly shaped the risks they faced and the opportunities they could access. Nevertheless, during my field work among them, I could notice how these categorisations were not passively accepted by young migrants; from one side, children seemed to be constantly exercising their agency and individual choices, that often contrasted with other actors' treatments of them: exemplary, in this case, was the continuous return in the country of children deported at the borders, in what seemed a constant - even if desperate - affirmation of their chosen migratory path and life, despite the hostility this exposed them to. Furthermore in this regard, children migrants expressed their independence by actively pursuing their life once while in Djibouti. From looking for work, resources and connections to finding a place to sleep at night, children had to find autonomous strategies, regardless of others' views on them, and engage in varying activities to sustain themselves and their migratory plans.

It has been suggested that this degree of agency has been left heavily unexplored by research on minor migrants, which has on the contrary emphasised the children's vulnerability and lack of voluntary decision (Mai, 2010). In this line, and relevant with the first part of the analysis, it has been noted that much of the recent research on children on the move has focused on children in negative or passive situations, as those trafficked and exploited or merely tagging along behind adult migrants (Hashim & Thorsen, 2012: 13). This discourse seems useful to reinforce the purposes of agencies and organisations working for children protection, which can have an implicit reason to depict children as victims, in order to raise compassion, care, and giving. Nevertheless, Bhabha has noted that even trafficking situations cannot be addressed simplistically, identifying children as passive victims, as for many of them this move represents the only exit option to follow to try enhance their conditions (Bhabha, 2014: 149). Moreover, while trafficking and its consequences undoubtedly represent dreadful situations for moving children, the growing emphasis on them has contributed to obscure actively pursued child migration, its benefits, as well as children's agency in it.

Some studies focusing on children agency in difficult contexts have identified the display of what called "tactical agency" (Honwana, 2005), defined as *"decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterised by few viable alternatives"* (Klocker, 2007, cited in Thomas de Benitez, 2011).

This is particularly relevant for migrant children in Djibouti, who had to deal with a series of obstacles in their everyday life, mainly arising from other actors' perceptions on them, as seen in this second part. Nevertheless, interviews among them showed the great impact that individual characteristics and choices played in this regard.

The issue of working is exemplary in this context; despite being treated as one of the highest priorities among all the interviewed children, who constantly referred to their only desire to work, this concept carried different meanings for them, depending on individual features such as sex, age, family situation, conditions in the country, and personal aspirations.

Smaller children were generally less concerned about work, as they were more easily given food and leftovers by restaurants and received lighter treatments from the police. Also, they didn't feel the pressure to help the family as much as their older peers. For the smaller children I interviewed, earning money was mainly connected to buy clothes and foods, or go more often to the video clubs, even if the future plan to get a better job and help their families was present in all their narratives. Having the opportunity to count on nicer treatments and generosity from residents and shop owners, they seemed more comfortable in postponing a more focused look for jobs, and many of them relied on begging, collecting empty bottles or cans in the streets and cleaning shoes as irregular sources of income.

Older children, on the contrary, seemed to feel much more pressured to have a job and provide for their families. They often disclosed sense of guilty and intense frustration when not able to earn enough. They also usually had more structured plans on how to start their income generating activities and scaled them up. For example, as Abdi, 13, reported:

"As I arrived, I started collecting the little branches and leftovers that I saw Djiboutian men where throwing on the ground while chewing khat[6]. I used to collect all that I found and sell it to Ethiopian migrants, who are too poor to buy normal khat from shops. In that way I started earning some money, and I saved some to buy the materials to clean shoes, and I started doing that. Now that I know the spots and some people, I can clean cars, help some people with the garbage, and some restaurants with their cleanings."

Among children who managed to get a stable job, many devolved part of the income to their families, some through the Dahabshiil money transfer or other informal system, others by coming back home during festivities such as the Ramadan. The rest of the money earned was used to buy food and clothes, to enter "video clubs" and to buy drugs.

The use of drug played an important role among migrant children in Djibouti, as it mostly represented a way to cope with the difficulties they found themselves in.

During interviews, kids often complained about the impact that police patrols against irregular migrants had on their jobs. Passing at random hours in different areas of the city centre, the police blue caged van provoked the immediate reaction of children, who started running and hide, advising all the other kids they met in their escape. Children working in the street complained that the necessity to flee affected their jobs, as it forced them to leave their occupation and avoid to return in the working area for a while, loosing current activities and potential clients. For this reason, working during the day was mostly irregular and fragmented for the majority of the kids, who reportedly had to continue their occupations at night, when police patrols were not conducted. Trying to work during the day and continue working at night in turn impacted the time they could reserve to sleep, and this according to them contributed to push them to use drugs, which helped them coping with fatigue and hunger.

In Djibouti, children mainly drink alcohol and use solvents like glue. During my research glue sniffing was widespread among children of both sexes and all ages, and some of them

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[6] Khat (*Catha edulis*) is a plant native to East Africa and southern Arabia whose leaves are chewed and used as stimulant drug. See, http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/khat

used to do it just outside Caritas' gates, before or after the structure's opening hours, or even tried to take them inside, despite the Ngo's strict rules on it.

Despite asking children about their drug addiction didn't turn out to be an easy task, as they mostly saw me as a Caritas' affiliate, some interesting reflections can be done on the way they talked about it in my presence.

During interviews, and in the presence of the translator, children usually stated that they didn't use drugs, explaining that "*they are a bad thing*" and "*I want to go to school*". This originated from Caritas' rule on not allowing kids to follow the activities with the volunteers, generally known as "school", if found in possession of drugs. The Ngo's exact words on drugs' addiction use were repeated mechanically by all children interviewed, but in many cases these did not seem to constitute any real belief among them, as I witnessed several kids visibly drugged at Caritas in different occasions.

When I started shifting the focus from the individual use of drugs to the causes which could push children to use them, some children disclosed more personal views, proposing reasons as "*because everyone else is doing that*" and "*not to feel hungry*", "*not to feel sleep*", and "*to be together*".

In her study among Tikyan in Indonesia, Beazley has collected similar findings, noting that drugs use was "*not only a form of diversion and enjoyment, but also a means of suppressing hunger and inhibitions, to reduce anxiety, stress and depression and to help release anger, frustration and dissatisfaction with their marginalised role in society. […] Moreover, it is a collective protest against stigmatisation as street children, and thus a claim to power over their own bodies.*" (Beazley, 2003: 195–6, cited in Thomas de Benitez, 2011). This seems to relate to Djibouti's migrant children relationship with drugs, firstly used as a coping strategy to face hunger and sleep, but also as a way to assimilate to the group of peers. Additionally, drugs seemed to represent a general declaration of autonomy towards the patronising attempts of Caritas' staff, as showed by many of them using drugs just outside the structure's gates, in front of the staff. In different occasions I witnessed boys and girls violently reproached by the national personnel, due to this habit; nevertheless, despite being deprived of their drugs and shaken, the kids usually stood their ground and tried to reclaim

their independence, with sentences like "*I do what I want*", "*This is mine and you cannot take it*", "*You cannot tell me what to do*", as well as supporting their peers when scolded, or even share their can of glue with them afterwards.

In this regard, the use of drugs seemed to represent not only a coping behaviour but a way to exercise personal agency, and support a social network with peers on the street.

This is consistent with Beazley's findings and more generally with the literature on street children, which suggests that drugs use can have a very diverse meaning for children's lives (Thomas de Benitez, 2010: 30). Beazley has proposed that drugs could be used by children to create a "*collective identity that assists them in their contraction of a new, positive self-image*" (Beazley, 2003: 185), as in the case of specific ways of dressing and behaving.

Beyond through the use of drugs, migrant kids in Djibouti seemed to bond by listening to the same music and through their meetings in video clubs. These latter were big rooms made of stones and metal sheets easily found in the centre-ville poorest neighbourhoods, which provided matting on the floor and a small television where Somali and Asian low-budget movies were displayed. Street children accessed the video clubs for 20 - 40 francs (around 1 DKK) and used them daily as a place of meeting, enjoyment or relax, both during the day and at night. This activity provided them with a common set of knowledge, related to songs, actors, and a peculiar way of behaving; Particularly, children used to display poses and gestures seen in movies, recite scenes and sing soundtracks together. Additionally, they will pose in the same way when photographed, usually enacting the role of fighters or "tough guys", both boys and girls.

During my field work there, I noticed that these characters were played also during conflicts with Caritas' staff, to which children used to react either very aggressively or displaying a provocative nonchalant attitude, with poses and gestures clearly dramatic. This personification seemed to be used not only as a way to conform and reinforce collectively the group's way of doing, but also as a mean of acquiring the features and bravery of the characters played, and through this enhance the street children's weak position towards adults. When children enacted these figures, they emphasised their bravery, toughness

and cool indifference towards the situation and their generally disempowered role, actively shaping a new way to be seen.

On the other hand, and in peculiar occasions, children seemed to display the complete opposite attitude, lowering their tone and eyes, showing a deep attachment to adults, and easily crying. This was mostly done when begging, or when approaching foreigners to sell chewing gum or clean shoes, when arrested by the police, and sometimes with volunteers in Caritas. In all those occasions, children would have generally benefited of being perceived as vulnerable and needy, and they therefore enacted the relative features, usually enhancing their being sad and in need of help. This is not to say that they didn't feel real sadness or real need in their everyday hazardous life, but that these characteristics were rationally and strategically enacted in certain situations, and to attain certain purposes.

Utas has used the term "*victimcy*" in his research on women coping strategies in Liberia's war zones. According to him, prevailing discourses on women in such contexts privilege the idea of them as victims, abused, and lacking of agency. In his analysis, he reversed this concept by conceiving victimhood as a strategic tactic that women may choose to exercise in difficult circumstances. By doing so, he draws from Vigh's notion of "social navigation" as "*the way agents guide their lives through troublesome social and political circumstances*" (Vigh, 2003: 10, 11, quoted in Utas, 2005). According to Utas, women in war areas might use tactics of victimcy among others, to face varying challenges and contexts; In this regard, he reflects that the conception of victimhood - empowerment as opposite notions is uncritically reproduced by media, particularly those covering women's stories in war zones, while the display of victimhood can actually be an active choice, part of the actor's strategy and directed to certain aims (Utas, 2005).

This reflection is relevant in analysing how migrant children in Djibouti decided to enact different self-representations, depending on the situations they had to face and in their general navigation of the context. Victimcy, in this sense, would be used to attain certain goals, from getting money or other goods or to be released from prison, in a general attempt to create a compassionate bond with the relevant actors.

Some of the boys were actively using this strategy to create and maintain one or several relationships of dependance with expats in Djibouti, as emerged from my participant observation there and some conversation I had with other expats. Generally they approached single women, or American soldiers deployed at the US base in Djibouti, and highlight an extreme need of their assistance. In doing so they normally tried to get the adult's attention by strategically using their piety or sense of guilt, ("*I have no mama. Can you be my mama?*" or "*The food was good*?" - said to expats leaving a restaurant) or by developing some client-customer relations, for example with those having their cars regularly washed by them. While most adults exchanged no or few words with kids, and irregularly gave them something, some were more prone to interact, and children seemed to use those interactions to deepen the adult's knowledge, by asking know where the person lived in the city and her or his habits while in Djibouti. After some days, they would appear near the house or the job place, and start to regularly visit the adult to ask for charity, stressing on the uniqueness of their relationship. On their side, adults started providing food, money and gifts for the child. Some expats did indeed maintain similar relationship over months, during their duty assignments in Djibouti.

This conclusive example is illustrative of children's agency and strategic navigation of their context and it shows how others' perceptions could also play a key role in their struggle for survival. In the previous chapter we have attempted to unpack the perceptions of actors who saw migrant children essentially as victims, and the consequences that this view had on the children's life and treatment; In this second one we looked at the opposing perception, analysing the widespread negative view on migrant children in Djibouti. Despite greatly conditioning their life at destination, as well as their vision from agencies and researches, both these attitudes were actively and strategically used by children, to pursue their own scopes. By enacting their role as victims to access someone's favours, or their image as unscrupulous and bold to bond with peers and reclaim their independence, children showed that labels were not exclusively set upon them and passively received, but could be appropriated, and become their own tools in pursuing their individual migratory experience.

5. Conclusion

The scope of this dissertation has been to analyse attitudes towards child migration in an African context, taking Djibouti as country of destination and case study.

The intellectual puzzle at the basis of this work grounded on two research questions, directed to (a) investigate the features and efficacy of conceptions towards migrant children and (b) assess the impact that these perceptions have on children's lives. This has been done by grounding on a rich and diverse literature, which included quantitative and qualitative research on child migration in developing countries, ethnographic studies among street children, as well as scholars' arguments on issues as social categorisation and labelling, used to reflect on the materials.

The analysis' main point of departure has been the data generated during a two-months field work among migrant children in Djibouti, which has allowed me to study the topic of my interest through interviews, participant observation and every-day life in the country.

While framing my research, I decided to focus on two main groups of perceptions: those bore by international actors and tools, as well as generally widespread ideas on childhood and migration, and those specifically held by actors on the Djiboutian soil. I tried to investigate those attitudes in the analysis related sections, "*Universal Ideas and Situations at Home*" and "*Life at destination: Labels and Living in Djibouti*".

The first section has focussed on conceptions on child migration at the international and legal level. The attempt has been to see how those understand the migration of children and how they relate with the actual children's experience of migration.

The main findings of this section have unveiled how definitions surrounding child movement (*Independent Children Migrant*, *Unaccompanied* and *Separated Children*) do not fully represent children migrants' features as found in Djibouti; this would be caused by narrow conceptions on mobility and independence, which, for example, fail to take into account children who become migrants while roaming or following the peers. Children in these categories could therefore result invisible to researchers and policy-makers; This is also the case of children migrated with a member of the family but separated from them at a later

stage, which are neglected by the definition. Generally, the relation between a child migrant and his or her family appears to be little understood, as factors as family's composition and duties in the children's communities of origin are not take into consideration.

Western ideas on family and childhood further contribute to make child migration highly misunderstood by setting specific expectations on children's conduct, development and needs which are not coherent with those displayed in many rural African communities.

The depiction of a universal children category, based on uncomplicated and decontextualised traits, may contribute to pathologise young migrants, and further stigmatise the children's actions rather than supporting their capacities and independent agency. Particularly, children appear to be seen as deviant because of their being displaced, mobile, and bread-winners. Exemplary in this regard is their participation to the productive sphere, often connected to their lack of education, which is addressed by international legal tools and aid agencies' programs as an untypical behaviours for children. The emergency discourse that surrounds these interventions seems to lack a critical assessment of the children's contexts of origin and own needs, and, as a consequences, child agency is often disregarded. The focus on exploitative situations on legal tools, such as the Palermo Protocols, further diminishes children's will, which, on the contrary, appears to be highly present in Djibouti's migrants narratives and decision to leave.

The second section has focussed on labels and conceptions in the country of destination, to see how these shape the life of migrant children living in the streets of Djibouti. The materials collected suggested the presence of two opposing groups of perceptions, generally based on the ideas of children as "victims to be saved" or "deviants to be sanctioned". The first was primarily held by aid agencies, such as Caritas and the Daryel Orphanage, and grounded on the children's supposed innocence and vulnerability; While primarily directed at helping children, these conceptions and the resulting behaviours appeared to have a silencing effect on them, by homogenising their individual stories under a generic category of victimhood that disregarded their rationalities; it is the case of Caritas' undifferentiated and top-down treatment of street children, or Daryel's policy on abandoned infants.

The second, widespread conception found in Djibouti related to the irregular status of children as migrants, which made them be seen as "animals", "criminals" or generally inferior to the national population. This vision, particularly enacted by some nationals and law enforcement officials, often resulted in the children's abuse, detention and deportation. Variables such as age and nationality seemed to influence this, as Somali and smaller children reportedly received less harsher treatments. Gender also greatly affected these attitudes; girls in particularly seemed to be more exposed to sexual abuse because of their unaccompanied wandering in their streets, seen as a deviant conduct that could legitimate harassment. This is coherent with family conflicts among migrant families, reportedly originated from the view of street girls as prostitutes. Interestingly, this view seemed to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as some migrant street girls kicked out from the household because of their supposed immorality ended up resorting on prostitution as a source of income.

Despite showing their massive impact on children's life at destination, the research found that labels used upon migrant children in Djibouti were not able to completely subjugate them; individual features and decisions also shaped their life in Djibouti, as well as their daily navigation of the context. A common culture on music and movies and the use of drugs seemed to be significant to bond and create a collective image of themselves, differing from the proposed ones. Moreover, their categorisations as criminals and victims seemed to be strategically used by children, who could displayed a tough, provocative attitude or their victimhood according to the circumstances and their aims.

Overall, this study has attempted to take into consideration the social beliefs which surround migrant children, the impact that these can have, and their relation with children's agency. The idea has been to find a balance with "*the background and the foreground, making agency and constraint, resilience and suffering, fit (even if in contrast) into the same picture*" (Bordonaro, 2010: 6). By doing so, this work has tried to contribute to current debates on child migration, providing data and reflections on the under-researched Eastern Africa's flux, and deepening attitudes towards it by analysing the perspectives held in an African country of destination.

Future developments in this area of research could try to focus on children migrants' dynamics by increasing the attention on a micro, more detailed level of their everyday life; as seen in this research, migrant children highly differ for experiences and individualities, but most definitions and related programs fail to address this diversity. Researchers could try to acknowledge these "multiple" childhood by using research methods strongly connected to children's account, and try to understand how they individually perceive their realities as migrants, and their possibilities for the future. Personal yet social experiences, such as the transition from childhood to adulthood within independent migration, could be studied through this approach, and contribute to unveil which processes influence migrant youth identities and future livelihoods.

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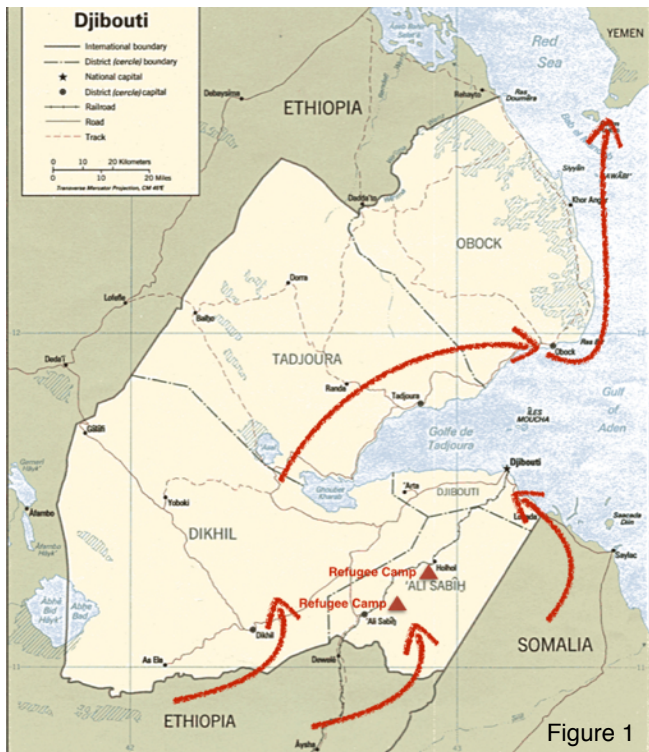
7. Appendix I - Images

Figure 1: The migratory fluxes through Djibouti. (© CIA)

Figure 2: Caritas Djibouti.

Figure 3: Migrant /street children awaiting a distribution at Caritas. (© UNICEF Djibouti/2014/Seixas)

Figure 4: A migrant child cleaning shoes for work.
(© UNICEF Djibouti/2014/Seixas)

Figure 5: The Daryel Orphanage.