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Daaras and development discourses: Three interventions targeting the practice of begging by talibés in urban Senegal

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Daaras and development discourses:
Three interventions targeting the
practice of begging by talibés in urban
Senegal

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Abstract

The practice of begging by talibés (Qur'anic school students) in urban Senegal has long attracted the attention of international development actors who either see the talibés' begging as the result of the exclusion of their daaras (traditional Qur'anic schools) from the state education system, or see the talibés as victims of child trafficking and exploitation. This thesis problematises both framings to understand how global development discourses influence state and NGO practice and policies towards daaras at the local and national levels.

Based on interviews conducted in 2017/18 with NGO workers, state officials and Qur'anic teachers, the thesis explores the construction of talibés (as Qur'anic school students, or, exploited children) and their teachers, or traffickers, as objects in need of development assistance or regulation. It focuses on the blurred boundaries between narratives about talibé begging that each relate to a different branch of global development discourse, be it Education for All or the anti-child trafficking agenda.

This thesis argues that these differing discourses both lead to, and are the result of, a fragmented landscape of institutions, structures, and organisations each claiming to be tackling a particular understanding of the problem and operating largely in silos. It highlights the dynamics of competition that exist between structures, as well as how the engagement of Qur'anic teachers is centralised. Requiring the existence of individuals who can translate between religious and secular worlds, this engagement and resistance within it both depend upon the use of dual narratives.

Using case studies of three projects – the modernisation of daaras, the state's push to remove children from the street, and a USAID project mobilising communities at municipal level – the thesis traces how these discourses and dynamics play out in practice, drawing attention to the contradictions and continuities between these projects.

Contents

DECLARATION.....	1
ABSTRACT.....	2
CONTENTS.....	3
LIST OF FIGURES.....	8
LIST OF TABLES.....	9
ACRONYMS.....	10
GLOSSARY.....	12
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	13
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	14
1.1 THE STORY OF A FIRE.....	14
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENT.....	15
1.2.1 <i>Research questions</i>	15
1.2.2 <i>Argument</i>	15
1.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE.....	17
1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS.....	19
1.5 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY AND ORTHOGRAPHY.....	23
PART ONE: CONTEXT, LITERATURE AND METHODS.....	25
CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT.....	26
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	26
2.2 DAARAS AND TALIBÉS TODAY.....	26
2.2.1 <i>Begging in daaras today and in the past</i>	27
2.2.2 <i>Counting talibés</i>	28
2.2.3 <i>Why parents choose daaras for their children</i>	32
2.3 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SENEGAL.....	34
2.3.1 <i>Religious education</i>	34
2.4 THE ORIGINS OF DAARAS AND THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER.....	39
2.4.1 <i>Pre-colonial daaras</i>	39
2.4.2 <i>The colonial encounter</i>	40
2.5 EDUCATION REFORMS AND DAARA MODERNISATION.....	44
2.6 BROTHERHOODS, BEGGING AND THE LAW.....	46
2.6.1 <i>Brotherhoods and Qur’anic teachers’ associations</i>	47
2.6.2 <i>2005 Anti-trafficking law and other legal protections</i>	50

2.7	CONCLUSION	52
CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE(S), CHILD RIGHTS AND THOSE 'IN THE MIDDLE': EXISTING LITERATURE.....54		
3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	54
3.2	DISCOURSE AND PROBLEM CONSTRUCTION IN DEVELOPMENT	55
3.2.1	<i>Development discourse(s)</i>	55
3.2.2	<i>Constructing targets</i>	57
3.3	TALIBÉS IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE	59
3.3.1	<i>Vulnerable schools and the Education for All agenda</i>	61
3.3.2	<i>Child trafficking and anti-trafficking discourse</i>	66
3.3.3	<i>The dance between discourses</i>	70
3.4	RIGHTS AND VERNACULARISATION.....	72
3.4.1	<i>Vernacularisation of child rights</i>	73
3.4.2	<i>Vernacularisers in the middle and the double bind</i>	77
3.5	CONCLUSION	79
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS..... 80		
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	80
4.2	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	80
4.2.1	<i>Research questions</i>	81
4.2.2	<i>Site selection</i>	81
4.3	DATA COLLECTION.....	83
4.3.1	<i>Sampling and access</i>	83
4.3.2	<i>Interviews</i>	87
4.3.3	<i>Translation</i>	89
4.3.4	<i>Observation</i>	90
4.3.5	<i>Document analysis</i>	91
4.4	DATA ANALYSIS.....	93
4.5	ETHICS, POSITIONALITY, AND REFLEXIVITY.....	94
4.5.1	<i>Consent and anonymity</i>	94
4.5.2	<i>Reciprocity</i>	95
4.5.3	<i>Excluding children</i>	96
4.5.4	<i>Reflexivity and positionality</i>	97
4.6	LIMITATIONS.....	100
4.7	CONCLUSION	100
PART TWO: PROBLEMATISATION, DISCOURSES AND DYNAMICS101		

CHAPTER FIVE: VICTIMS AND VILLAINS: NARRATIVES ABOUT TALIBÉS, THEIR SĒRIŊ DAARAS, AND THEIR PARENTS.....	102
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	102
5.2 CONSTRUCTION OF ‘TALIBÉS WHO BEG’ AS VICTIMS	104
5.2.1 <i>A focus on begging, excluding talibés who do not beg.....</i>	<i>104</i>
5.2.2 <i>A focus on talibés, excluding other children who beg</i>	<i>106</i>
5.2.3 <i>Talibés and talibés: differentiated by narratives about begging</i>	<i>109</i>
5.3 CONSTRUCTION OF VILLAINS: (SO-CALLED) SĒRIŊ DAARAS	113
5.3.1 <i>Spectrum of acceptability of begging as distinction between real and fake sĕriŋ daaras</i>	<i>113</i>
5.3.2 <i>Finding the faux marabout: an abstract and elusive construct</i>	<i>123</i>
5.3.3 <i>Alternative narrative: all begging is unacceptable.....</i>	<i>126</i>
5.4 INADEQUACIES OF OVERSIMPLIFIED NARRATIVES	128
5.4.1 <i>Grand talibés: from victim to villain</i>	<i>128</i>
5.4.2 <i>Between victim and villain: talibés’ parents.....</i>	<i>129</i>
5.5 CONCLUSION	137
CHAPTER SIX: COOPERATION, COMPETITION AND ENGAGING SĒRIŊ DAARAS.....	140
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	140
6.2 FRAGMENTATION OF STATE STRUCTURES	141
6.2.1 <i>Issue-specific structures connected to different problematisations</i>	<i>142</i>
6.2.2 <i>Child protection and child rights in the Senegalese state: a sector in flux.....</i>	<i>144</i>
6.2.3 <i>Competition and inadequate cooperation between state structures</i>	<i>147</i>
6.3 BEYOND THE STATE: NGO COOPERATION AND COMPETITION.....	150
6.3.1 <i>Tensions among NGOs and between NGOs and the state</i>	<i>151</i>
6.4 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SĒRIŊ DAARAS THROUGH VERNACULARISERS	156
6.5 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT ACTORS AND SĒRIŊ DAARAS	156
6.5.1 <i>Child rights and the Islamic argument</i>	<i>159</i>
6.6 THE ROLE OF VERNACULARISERS	163
6.7 CONCLUSION	165
PART THREE: CASE STUDIES	168
CHAPTER SEVEN: “COME, WE’RE GOING TO DRAFT A LAW!”: THE DAARA MODERNISATION APPROACH	169
7.1 INTRODUCTION.....	169
7.2 THE MODERNISATION APPROACH: ONE VISION OF MODERNITY FOR DAARAS	170
7.2.1 <i>Which modernity?.....</i>	<i>170</i>
7.2.2 <i>Background to the project</i>	<i>173</i>
7.2.3 <i>PAMOD and PAQEEB.....</i>	<i>175</i>

7.3	ENGAGEMENT AND RESISTANCE	179
7.3.1	<i>Collaboration as the result of resistance</i>	180
7.3.2	<i>Professionalisation and the contested curriculum</i>	185
7.3.3	<i>Modernisation by choice or obligation, and financial implications</i>	190
7.3.4	<i>Qur’anic Teachers’ Associations, disinformation and delay</i>	196
7.4	“THERE ARE NO PERFECT LAWS”: THE MODERNISATION BILL	200
7.4.1	<i>Silencing begging and repercussions for discourse</i>	201
7.4.2	<i>Failure to enact the bill</i>	206
7.5	CONCLUSION	207
CHAPTER EIGHT: SAVING THE #TALIBÉS: THE REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM THE STREET		
.....		210
8.1	INTRODUCTION.....	210
8.2	PROJECT BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE.....	211
8.2.1	<i>ACERWC ruling and TIP reports</i>	212
8.3	AN UNPLANNED AND EVOLVING PROJECT.....	216
8.3.1	<i>Phase One (2016-2017): A sector taken by surprise</i>	216
8.3.2	<i>Interlude: Opération Epervier (2017)</i>	222
8.3.3	<i>Phase Two (2018): new leadership</i>	223
8.4	SĒRIÑ DAARAS AND THE REMOVAL OF CHILDREN FROM THE STREET.....	224
8.4.1	<i>Sĕriñ daaras in Phase One: rewarding those responsible</i>	224
8.4.2	<i>Sĕriñ daaras in Phase Two: differentiating sĕriñs</i>	226
8.4.3	<i>The sĕriñs’ mixed views</i>	228
8.4.4	<i>Creating tensions with cooperative Qur’anic teachers or excusing abusers?</i>	230
8.5	CONCLUSION	234
CHAPTER NINE: ZĒRO MENDICITĒ IN DAKAR.....		237
9.1	INTRODUCTION.....	237
9.2	FROM ANTI-TRAFFICKING TO REHABILITATION	239
9.3	CONTINUITY AND DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER APPROACHES.....	244
9.3.1	<i>By-laws and (limited) project success</i>	244
9.3.2	<i>Engaging communities and sĕriñ daaras</i>	249
9.3.3	<i>Cooperation or competition between structures</i>	252
9.4	CONCLUSION	255
CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION		257
10.1	INTRODUCTION.....	257
10.2	KEY CONTRIBUTIONS AND ARGUMENTS	257
10.2.1	<i>Problem construction and discourse</i>	258

10.2.2	<i>Cooperation and competition: fragmented development landscape</i>	260
10.2.3	<i>Engaging sėriñ daaras: collaboration and resistance</i>	261
10.3	DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	262
10.4	COVID-19 AND BEYOND.....	263
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	266
	APPENDICES	292
	LIST OF PARTICIPANTS BY DATE AND LOCATION.....	293
	CONSENT FORM	296
	SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	298

List of figures

Figure 1. Map of Senegal showing Dakar to the west and Saint Louis on the coast to the north.	83
Figure 2. Map showing the four départements of the region of Dakar.	83
Figure 3. Comparison of traditional and public modern daara	187
Figure 4. Non-public modern daara	188
Figure 5. Map of GTFC and Médina communes.....	238

List of tables

Table 1. Typology of Islamic education.....	37
Table 2 Table of participants.....	88
Table 3. Timeline of key events in the history of the modernisation project and the associated bill.....	179

Acronyms

ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ANIOS	<i>Association Nationale des Imams et Oulémas</i> - National Association of Imams and Ulemas
CAPE	<i>Cellule d'Appui à la Protection de l'Enfance</i> - Child Protection Unit
CNLTP	<i>Cellule nationale de lutte contre la traite des personnes</i> - National Taskforce for the Fight against Human Trafficking
COMOD	<i>Collectif pour la modernisation des Daara</i> - Collective for the modernisation of daaras
DDPEGV	<i>Direction des droits, de la protection de l'enfance et des groupes vulnérables</i> - Department of Rights and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Groups, former name for DPDE
DPDE	<i>Direction de la promotion des droits de l'enfant</i> - Department for Promotion of Children's Rights, formerly known as DDPEGV
DPE	<i>Direction de la protection de l'enfance</i> - Department of Child Protection
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation/cutting
FNAECS	<i>Fédération nationale des associations de maîtres coraniques du Sénégal</i> - National Federation of Qur'anic Teachers Associations of Senegal
GSi	Global Solidarity Initiative
GTFC	Commune of Gueule Tapée-Fass-Colobane, Dakar
HRW	Human Rights Watch
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
MBGPE	<i>Ministère de la Bonne Gouvernance et de la Protection de l'Enfance</i> - Ministry of Good Governance and Child Protection
MEN	<i>Ministère de l'Education Nationale</i> - Ministry of National Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAEP	<i>Projet d'Amélioration de l'Environnement physique des daara</i> - Improvement of the Physical Environment of Daaras Project

PAMOD	<i>Projet d'Appui à la Modernisation des Daara - Project Supporting the Modernisation of Daaras</i>
PAQEEB	<i>Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité et de l'Équité de l'Éducation de Base - Quality improvement and equity of basic education project</i>
PAQUET(-EF)	<i>Programme d'Amélioration de la Qualité, de l'Équité et de la Transparence (Secteur Éducation-Formation) 2013-2025 - Programme of Improvement in Quality, Equity and Transparency, Education and Training Sector</i>
PARRER	<i>Partenariat pour le Retrait et la Réinsertion des Enfants de la Rue - Partnership for the Removal and Reinsertion of Street Children</i>
PPDH	<i>Plateforme pour la Promotion et la Protection des Droits Humains - Platform for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights</i>
RADDHO	<i>La Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme</i>
SNPE	<i>Stratégie Nationale de Protection de l'Enfant - National Child Protection Strategy</i>
TIP reports	Trafficking in Person reports, issued annually by the US State Department
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000, a USA federal law
UNCRC	United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WPR	What is the problem represented to be? approach, developed by Carol Bacchi (2009)

Glossary

<i>Baraka</i>	Divine benediction, spiritual power
<i>Boubou</i>	Traditional outfit comprising tunic, robe and trousers
<i>Confiage</i>	Various forms of child-placement or fostering
<i>Conseil des ministres</i>	Ministerial Council, akin to the UK government's Cabinet
<i>Daara</i>	Qur'anic school
<i>Fàqman</i>	Runaway or child who lives full time in the street
<i>(Franco-)Arabe school</i>	School combining Islamic teaching with other subjects taught in French and/or Arabic
<i>Khalife</i>	Caliph, leaders of brotherhoods
<i>Kolërë</i>	Relations of friendship and loyalty between families
<i>Marabout</i>	Often refers to a Qur'anic teacher but may also be a spiritual man who does not teach
<i>Médersa</i>	Madrassa, or colonial religious school combining Islamic and secular teaching
<i>Ndeyu daara</i>	'Daara mother', women who volunteer to provide services such as laundry and cleaning to local daaras
<i>Ndeyu talibé</i>	Similar to ndeyu daara but providing support to an individual talibé or talibés rather than the daara
<i>Palermo Protocol</i>	The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
<i>Préfet</i>	Chief administrative officer of a region
<i>Retrait</i>	Short-hand used for <i>le retrait des enfants de la rue</i> /removal of children from the street project
<i>Rabbita (or Rabita)</i>	Arabic for association, referring to the League of Qur'anic Schools that unites Murid sēriñ daara
<i>Sēriñ daara</i>	A Qur'anic teacher, one who transmits religious knowledge including the Qur'an and baraka
<i>Talibé</i>	A student of a daara, many but not all of whom beg
<i>Tarīqah</i>	Arabic term referring to Sufi orders, more commonly referred to as brotherhoods (or confréries in French) in the Senegalese context
<i>Toubab or tubaab</i>	Wolof term for white person or European
<i>Waqf</i>	Islamic endowment of a property for religious or charitable purposes
<i>Xamxam</i>	Embodied religious knowledge

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 The story of a fire

During the night of the 3rd-4th March 2013, nine children died as a blaze swept through a structure in Medina, in the centre of Dakar, Senegal, as firefighters struggled to access the area through a maze of side-streets. Seven of these children were *talibés* – young boys sent far from home to memorise the Qur’an under the tutelage of a religious teacher, or *sëriñ daara*, who was not present at the time of the fire. He slept elsewhere with his own family, leaving the children locked inside the building.

The children’s horrific deaths sparked outrage in the Senegalese media and among the population of Dakar, for many of whom giving alms to talibés who beg in the streets is a daily act. In the weeks that followed, politicians, including President Macky Sall, made promises that changes would be made and *daaras* - traditional Qur’anic schools, although it is debated how much of the Qur’an children learn in many daaras today - would be closed if they did not meet standards (AFP, 2013).

As such, the fire has been presented as a turning point in the story of policies towards daaras (Hugon, 2015; Ndiaye, 2015). On a personal level, the Medina fire also marked a turning point for my own trajectory: I had arrived in Dakar just a few weeks earlier to take up a position with a non-governmental organisation (NGO), and the incident sparked an interest that would eventually lead to this thesis as I began to notice the different ways in which my colleagues and others I spoke to in Senegal talked about the talibés. The complex and contradictory narratives that are offered to explain the talibés’ begging, in particular, are not hidden. At once, the children are described as street children, students, exploited victims, virtuous embodiments of long-held religious practices, or traditional practices, or both; their teachers, or traffickers – never both – should be supported, or prosecuted, or taught to respect children’s rights; the government – between a rock and a hard place, unable, or unwilling, to act for fear of a backlash from religious leaders and their followers; and the NGOs, the international

institutions and bilateral aid projects seen either as vital systems of support, or as outsiders trying to destroy the daaras.

While my own personal interest in the topic was sustained over the years, having stayed far longer than initially intended in Dakar, the policies announced and promises made after the Medina fire largely were not. Bursts of state-led action to sweep children from the streets contrast with the glacially slow movement of the state's project to modernise the daaras.

1.2 Research questions and argument

1.2.1 Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following overarching research question:

How do global development discourses influence interventions targeting the practice of begging by talibés in urban Senegal?

This overarching question can be divided into three sub-questions:

1. How is the practice of begging among talibés in urban Senegal problematised for intervention by development actors?
2. How do these problematisations and the discourses in which they are situated shape development structures and interventions?
3. How do these competing discourses and the resulting dynamics play out in the three approaches of daara modernisation, removing children from the street, and building community-based support for municipal by-laws?

1.2.2 Argument

The thesis argues that a clash between global discourses results in competing problematisations of talibé begging that each bring a different set of solutions, creating dynamics of competition and distrust between stakeholders. Building on the work of Lahti (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019)¹ who had identified two discourses, each with different narratives to explain talibé begging, the study focuses on the messiness that this

¹ Sara E. Lahti's doctoral thesis was written under the name Thiam (2014), with subsequent publications under the name Lahti (Lahti, 2018, 2019).

collision of discourses brings. It examines the porous boundaries around the socially constructed category of ‘talibés who beg’ as a target group for interventions, and the shifting line between legitimate *sëriñ* daaras and unscrupulous imposters pretending to be religious teachers in order to exploit children. The thesis argues that the confusion between categories is not unconscious. Rather, NGO workers and representatives of state structures alike find themselves in a “double bind” (Timmer, 2010), in which they recognise the complexities of the issue, but are forced into reproducing oversimplified narratives that fit within development’s global discourses, namely the universal education discourse and anti-trafficking discourse, and which necessarily lead to solutions that only attempt to tackle one aspect of the issue.

This theme, of those involved in working on interventions targeting daaras being cognisant of the imperfections of the system they work within, also applies to the dynamics between various actors. Many of those interviewed lamented the lack of cooperation among state structures, between these state structures and NGOs, and among NGOs and local associations. These divisions are in part caused by the fragmented nature of development support, with issue-specific structures set up with a limited mandate to tackle one facet of the problem linked to a specific strand of development discourse. Even structures that claim to have a coordinating role find themselves trapped into one framing. This fragmentation reinforces the multiplicity of narratives around the daaras as the policies produced and programmes implemented by each structure feed back into the discourse. At the same time, it is this lack of cooperation between structures that offers each a scapegoat when policies go unimplemented, or projects fail to achieve what was intended. Each structure is able to outsource blame to another, or to the lack of coordinated effort itself, giving the impression that the limitations on each project were preordained.

The clash between discourses also constructs a second scapegoat in the form of the *sëriñ* daaras, or, in some framings, of supposed imposters. As Lahti (Thiam, 2014) remarked, the spectral figures of ‘fake’ *sëriñ* daaras are rarely able to be tangibly identified. Even when *sëriñ* daaras or NGO workers are aware of individuals who abuse children and are assumed not to be teaching them the Qur’an, they move away from referring to them as fakes or imposters and instead label them as bad apples. The result is that action is

almost never taken to intervene. Rather, in projects that are justified by references to the anti-trafficking discourse, there are examples of individual *sëriñ daaras* forcing children to beg but who are reframed as vulnerable, but legitimate, teachers in need of support and training rather than prosecution.

This framing enables the engagement of *sëriñ daaras* in development projects. This often requires the involvement of individuals who can translate between religious and secular worlds, akin to the process of vernacularisation (An-Na'im, 1990; Levitt and Merry, 2009). However, this thesis argues that this engagement is not open to all. Gaining access to the material and financial benefits development projects can offer requires *sëriñ daaras* to make use of the dual framings to portray themselves as legitimate and differentiate themselves from other, exploitative, imposters. There is also evidence of resistance by *sëriñ daaras* within processes of collaboration, which equally require the use of dual discourses.

Ultimately, the thesis demonstrates the power of discourse, to shape how issues are constructed as problems, to influence how structures and interventions are organised and how they interact, and to set the rules by which development actors engage with and are resisted by those they target.

1.3 Contributions to the literature

In addressing these questions, this thesis contributes to the existing literature in two domains.

Firstly, it contributes to the evidence regarding the case study of development policy and practice around *daaras* and *talibés* who beg in urban Senegal. It builds on existing work analysing current and recent responses to the issue of begging across various academic disciplines. While the modernisation of *daaras* approach has been discussed by several scholars, in particular those from the field of the sociology of education such as Jean-Émile Charlier and Oana Panait (Charlier, 2002, 2004; Charlier and Panait, 2017, 2018; Charlier, Croché and Panait, 2017), less has been written about the more recent, and less organised, state-led initiatives to remove children from the street. Existing work has critiqued earlier NGO-led iterations of this approach from an anthropological perspective focusing on the *talibés'* parents and communities of origin (Einarsdóttir *et*

al., 2010; Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016; Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020) but not from the perspective of those involved in the project and the wider development sector in Dakar where the project has been executed. The third approach discussed in this thesis, a municipal level project operating in two communes of Dakar where it has sought to regulate begging through local by-laws, has not previously been discussed in the academic literature. My analysis therefore considers to what extent the dynamics present in the earlier approaches hold true in this intervention.

Secondly, the thesis contributes to the existing scholarship on the process and consequences of problem construction in international development, beyond the problematisation of talibé begging. In this respect it engages with the body of literature on development discourse, where discourse is considered not only in the linguistic sense but in the sense, largely inspired by Foucault, that brings meaning to the world, and, in the context of development, “identifies appropriate and legitimate ways of practising development as well as speaking and thinking about it” (Grillo, 1997, p. 12). I focus on the power of discourse – how it shapes and is shaped by the architecture of development structures, understandings and responses – while also recognising that development discourses are both multiple, mutable and contested (Gardner and Lewis, 2000; Hilhorst, 2003).

In bringing together these two domains of literature, the thesis builds in particular on the work of Sara Lahti (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019) who first theorised the “dance between discourses”, identifying a conflict between a discourse grounded in education and one that sees talibés as victims of child trafficking, with actors moving easily between the discourses to justify their own actions, or inaction. Taking this as a starting point, this thesis considers how the landscape of development actors, each intervening in the daaras, is the product of the dual discourses but also reinforces them. Having established that in practice, the two sides of the problem are interlinked, the thesis uses evidence gained from interviews, observation and document analysis to demonstrate the repercussions of the contradictions between competing discourses.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts. Following this introductory chapter, Part One gives the theoretical and contextual grounding for the research and presents the methods used.

Chapter Two situates the case study within the historical and socio-political context in Senegal. Beginning with a discussion of the daaras as they are today, it then steps back in time to present how repercussions of the relationship between the daaras and the Islamic brotherhoods that their *sëriñ* belong to on one hand and the French colonial regime on the other continue to echo through both the educational and legal landscapes of present-day Senegal. It establishes how colonial policies eventually excluded daaras from the formal education system, and by extension from the definition of schooling, and sets out how legislative attempts to prohibit begging have, since the colonial era, gone largely unenforced.

Zooming out from the case study, Chapter Three begins by grounding the study's focus on discourse and problem construction in development in the existing literature. It discusses how and why problem construction necessarily occurs in development, as in all policy making, and the repercussions of this process for those intended to be the targets of development programming. It draws particular attention to the need for social categories of people that are inevitably homogenised, with assumptions made about their lives, often by external experts, forming the basis of interventions that, even if well-intentioned, may not be rooted in local priorities and understandings. Having established this theoretical framework, the chapter then returns to the discourse around daaras, summarising the existing empirical evidence from and about Senegal. It introduces the dual discourses that have previously been identified to frame the practice of begging by *talibés* as a development problem: one which sees daaras as legitimate sites of education struggling to care for their pupils; the other presenting begging as an act of exploitation and child trafficking (Thiam, 2014). It discusses how these discourses relate to wider development discourses of education and trafficking, before considering how the process of vernacularisation has been used as a way to overcome the tension that is commonly perceived between global rights discourses and tradition.

Chapter Four then sets out the research design and methods used, with the primary methods of fieldwork being semi-structured interviews coupled with observations and document analysis. The chapter includes a discussion of ethics related to research about an issue concerning vulnerable children, and in particular the decision *not* to include children themselves as participants in the study. It also considers my own position not only as an outsider conducting research in Senegal but as a development practitioner myself conducting critical research about NGOs and the development industry.

Part Two presents findings on the problematisation of talibé begging and connects global discourses to the dynamics at play on the ground. Chapter Five is the first chapter based on data from the field. It examines the social construction of the talibé problem, with the homogenised categories of victims and demonised villains that this brings. The chapter focuses on how the act of begging is centralised in the construction of a category of children who are deemed to be both in need and worthy of intervention. It argues that the term ‘talibés’ has been reconstructed through development discourse to refer to two overlapping yet separate groups. On one hand, it retains its traditional meaning of students of the Qur’an. On the other, when NGOs and other development actors use the term talibé in official publications, they tend to mean children seen begging in the streets. The chapter demonstrates how the discursive construct ‘talibé’ is therefore used *both* to differentiate talibés from other boys who beg based on their connection to the memorisation of the Qur’an and to refer to boys who are assumed not to be learning the Qur’an due to their time spent begging. This amalgamation is reproduced despite the recognition of the complexities it masks by NGO and government staff on an individual level. The chapter argues that more focus is placed on the adults responsible for child begging than the experiences of the children, with the shadowy character of the *faux marabout*, or fake Qur’anic teacher, introduced to differentiate between begging that is seen as more or less acceptable. The chapter is particularly interested in exploring the boundaries of these constructs, concluding that those who are perhaps the most vulnerable are relegated to the grey areas. The chapter finds that there is less disagreement among the individuals who work for these organisations, who recognise the complexities that the discourse forces their organisations to ignore.

Having established in Chapter Five that ‘the talibé problem’ is constructed in multiple contradictory ways, Chapter Six explores how these differing problematisations both lead to and are the result of a fragmented landscape of institutions, structures and organisations each claiming to be working to solve a different version of the problem and operating largely in silos. It describes an uncoordinated sector that appears to react to international trends and priorities, including the global discourses around Education for All and child trafficking, with tensions between different actors as a result. The chapter considers the lack of collaboration between these structures, as identified by research participants, and considers the fault lines along which disagreements lie. These tensions are not only between those who base their interventions on different problematisations, but also between international NGOs or institutions and local organisations who work more closely to the children themselves, as well as between state and civil society organisations and among the different ministries of the state. This “cacophony”, as one participant refers to it, has led to the perception of a lack of political will to tackle the issue, and accusations of INGOs being more interested in receiving funding than in addressing the underlying issues. Despite this discordance, the chapter finds that collaboration with religious leaders and *sëriñ daaras* is commonly invoked as a central tactic of both state and non-state approaches, bringing to light the contradictions between some NGOs public discourse and their actions. The chapter considers the centrality of individuals who can move in both the secular development world and the religious realm of the *sëriñ daaras*, for the purpose of persuading *sëriñ daaras* of the value of child rights through a discourse grounded in Islam. It argues that this approach based in religion also depends upon both framings of *sëriñ daaras* in order to facilitate engagement and justify failure to convince all *sëriñs*.

In Part Three, Chapters Seven to Nine look at three different approaches undertaken by the government and NGOs, examining how the dynamics laid out in the previous chapters play out in practice. The first, *daara* modernisation (Chapter Seven) considers *daaras* to be sites of education that should be regulated. This chapter summarises the history of the modernisation approach before introducing the state’s current modernisation projects. It demonstrates that the *daara* modernisation approach offers a particular form of modernity that claims to valorise Qur’anic education as well as

secular school subjects deemed necessary in global discourse. It looks at how the collaboration between the government, NGOs, and Qur'anic teachers to redraft a previously rejected bill that would see daaras brought into the formal sector has depended on Qur'anic teachers organising themselves into associations which take forms familiar to the development industry, even though they were originally established in resistance to the modernisation agenda. It turns to the tensions that remain in this collaborative approach, which can be summed up as a disagreement over what type of education is in children's best interests and whether or not modernisation should be obligatory. The chapter demonstrates that the modernisation discourse minimises begging, not least by removing mention of begging from the bill of law, and that this was necessary in order to construct sēriñ daaras as providers of education. It argues that the sēriñ daaras have themselves made use of the dual discourses in order to resist as well as engage in the project.

At the same time as the modernisation approach, the Sall government has adopted a policy of removing children from the streets of Dakar when they are found begging, which will be explored in Chapter Eight. It presents several phases of a project that would see children removed from the street, including talibés, either taken to a local residential centre, eventually returned to families, or returned to daaras. Chapter Eight presents this approach, which, conversely to the modernisation approach, sees talibé begging as exploitation. It demonstrates, however, that this framing of talibés as exploited children has not led for repercussions for those who would logically be assumed to be exploiting them. Rather, it, like the modernisation approach, relies on collaboration with selected sēriñ daaras that in turn requires differentiation between legitimate and fraudulent sēriñ daaras.

A third approach, colloquially known as the *Zéro Mendicité* (Zero Begging) project, was unfolding during the time of my fieldwork which offers an alternative to these centralised state projects. Funded by USAID and UNODC, this community-based approach focussed on working with two municipalities within Dakar to build local support for the creation and implementation of local by-laws restricting begging, with varying degrees of success in the two areas, resulting in one area in the closure of daaras where begging persisted after awareness raising efforts. Recognising the potential and

limitations of this localised approach, the chapter demonstrates the competitive dynamics that exist between different structures at different levels of the state. It also draws on project documents to trace the evolution of the global, and specifically American, discourse of anti-child trafficking to the community level, highlighting where silences allow assumptions and contradictions to creep in. It demonstrates how easily one discourse can be replaced with another when it comes to interactions with individual *sëriñ daaras*.

Finally, in the closing chapter I return to the central themes of the thesis: problematising the problematisation of talibé begging and the social categories necessarily constructed through this process, and exploring the dynamics created by the competing narratives that underpin these constructed categories. I discuss the dynamics of cooperation and competition that exist in each project and the engagement of *sëriñ daaras*, arguing that all of these themes rely upon the skilful use of competing narratives.

1.5 A note on terminology and orthography

In reference to the Qur’anic teachers in charge of *daaras*, I prefer to use the Wolof term *sëriñ daara* (for which some use the French phonetic spelling *serigne*). The term *sëriñ* refers to a man of religion: a leader or, in the case of *sëriñ daara*, a transmitter of religious knowledge including the Qur’an and *baraka* – divine benediction or spiritual power (Chehami, 2013a). *Sëriñs* may or may not be imams, and are often be aided by other Qur’anic teachers including *grand talibés*, older students who help the *sëriñ* to teach the younger students and enforce discipline, and who may be left in charge of the *daara* while the *sëriñ* travels. The term *marabout* is also commonly used to refer to in daily speech, including my interviews, as well as NGO documents and other academic works. This broader term has a multitude of meanings that may or may not refer to a Qur’anic teacher, including those who make amulets for protection and, in the past, warrior *marabouts*, as well as those who teach the Qur’an (Ndiaye, 1985). Still others use the term *borom daara* – literally, the owner of the *daara* in Wolof (but not necessarily the owner of the physical space where the *daara* operates, the same way that a *borom taxi* does not necessarily own the car that he drives) – to refer to Qur’anic teachers (Chehami, 2013a). No proof of religious knowledge nor pedagogical training is required

to start or teach in a daara: the position is often hereditary, or in some cases passed from a sēriñ to one of his own talibés.

When referring to the children in the daaras, I use the term talibé. An alternative term is *ndongo daara*, or daara students, or indeed *njàngaan* (from the verb *jàng* – to study or read), which has been used to refer specifically to the residential students who sleep in their daaras (Ware, 2004), as many talibés who continue to live with their families do not. These terms have not been widely taken up by the development sector, and as this research relates primarily to development work, I follow the use of the term ‘talibé’ and also adopt the most common spelling (the alternative being *taalibe* based on standardised Wolof orthography as opposed to French phonetics). As the primary focus of this research is on the subset of these children who beg for alms at the behest of their sēriñ daara, I specify talibés who beg when referring to this subgroup specifically. As Chapter Five will show, these categories are in fact more complicated than they at first appear.

For the sake of simplicity, and although it pains me to break the rules of Wolof grammar, I also replicate the common practice of pluralising words borrowed from Wolof with an added –s, despite plurals being formed in Wolof by a change in article rather than modification of the noun itself.

Non-English words are italicised on their first usage.

PART ONE

Context, literature and methods

Part One introduces the central themes of the thesis, provides historical and contemporary context, and grounds the thesis in the existing literature. It then describes the methods used for the study, along with a consideration of ethics and positionality.

CHAPTER TWO

Context

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the context in which this research is situated. First, I introduce the current situation in today's daaras, including the practice of begging in some daaras which has become the focus of much of the literature as well as NGO intervention. Daaras are one of many educational options that exist in Senegal, including both religious and secular forms of schooling, and this chapter will present a brief overview of this landscape.

Having introduced contemporary daaras, I step back to explore how colonial policies excluded daaras from the national education system, as they remain. I present reforms to the education system which have culminated in the current modernisation project, intended to bring daaras into the official system, allowing access to funding in exchange for regulation. I then turn the focus to the practice of begging, exploring the legal situation and the resistance of Senegal's powerful religious leaders to attempts to implement the law.

2.2 Daaras and talibés today

Daaras and talibés are not only found in Senegal; equivalent categories of institutions and children exist in other West African countries with substantial Muslim populations.² Begging is part of the experience of many of these children, also known as talibés in Mauritania (Ballet, Bhukuth and Hamzetta, 2012), *almajirai* in Northern Nigeria (Aluaigba, 2009; Kwagyang and Mahmood, 2015), *almudos* in The Gambia (Hunt, 1993) and *karimbii* in Northern Ghana (Fiasorgbor *et al.*, 2015). These contexts have both continuities and differences with that of Senegal in both their history and

² Although there are informal Islamic schools elsewhere, from Tanzania to Indonesia, begging by their students is not a widespread practice outside of the West African region. There are, however, parallels that can be drawn between the process of reform or modernisation of daaras in West Africa and madrassas in South Asia (Bano, 2010).

present situation. French colonial policy in West Africa differed from the British approach but for the Qur'anic education sector the results were broadly the same: a nonformal, Qur'anic education system excluded from the official education system and national funding (Izama, 2014). However, in recent years, discussions around Qur'anic school in contexts outside of Senegambia, particularly in Nigeria, are, rightly or wrongly, often linked to a focus on extremist Islamist groups including Boko Haram (Hoechner, 2014). This issue, while bubbling under the surface, has not drawn the same attention in Senegal as elsewhere, for the obvious reason that Senegal has not suffered from widespread violent Islamist insurgency. Furthermore, in their quantitative analysis of survey data covering 1,484 people in 94 villages across five regions of Senegal, Michelle Kuenzi (2011, p. 114) found no significant relationship between Qur'anic education and respondents' political values, including "the likelihood one will embrace democratic values". The topic of extremism is not absent in the discourse in and about Senegal and its daaras, but it is not central in the same way that it is elsewhere. Rather, it is the practice of begging that has dominated the discourse around talibés and daaras in Senegal in recent decades, as many young boys are seen on urban streets seeking money, food, and other items considered to have spiritual significance. I now turn to this practice.

2.2.1 Begging in daaras today and in the past

Giving to these talibés is an entrenched practice among many Senegalese Muslims. Although the function of the talibés' begging in terms of Islamic practices of charity is often linked to zakat, (Bass, 2004, p. 25; Baldé, 2010, p. 18) which is obligatory according to the Qur'an, others (Mommersteeg and Webb, 2012, p. 125; Ware, 2014, p. 238) hold that when talibés seek alms, often using the Wolof word sarax, it is the non-mandatory sadaqa that they seek, in return for which the giver can request favours from God in return. Bondaz and Bonhomme (2014, p. 369) describe sarax "as a category that lies on the border between alms, offering, and sacrifice but which in any case refers to Islam". Chehami (2013b, 2013a) claims that talibés offer both of these functions, amongst others, to the Senegalese populace.

Begging has long been part of the experience of learning in a daara. Although contemporary narratives often claim that daaras today bear little resemblance to their

counterparts in the past, with begging becoming the primary activity over Qur'anic memorisation in many daaras, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, this narrative has been challenged by Rudolph T. Ware (2004, 2009, 2014) who has conducted extensive historical research into Qur'anic schooling before and during the colonial period, based on a combination of European written sources, oral histories, and first-hand accounts of Qur'anic schools written by pupils at the William Ponty School who had previously attended daaras. Ware (2014, p. 46) describes the assumption that "in the good old days, students did not beg much" as "plainly false." On the contrary, talibés, through a combination of labour made up of farming, begging, and chores, have always been responsible for their daara's economic functioning (Ware, 2004), with many students begging as well as working in the fields even in the early 20th century. In the wet season, studying was subordinate to farm work, while in the dry season, talibés completed chores in the daara alongside learning and begged for food - and in some cases arbitrarily set amounts of money - to sustain themselves as well as to instil values of humility and resourcefulness (Ware, 2004). According to Ware (2004), critiques of today's daaras that are based upon the idea that farming was the core economic activity in rural daaras in earlier times are ignoring the fact that the rainy season, the busy time in a farmer's calendar, is only three months long. Contrary to representations idealising traditional daaras in contrast to corrupted daaras today, therefore, these institutions have always been sites of both hardship and learning. Since the 1990s, however, the practice of begging has become discursively linked to harsh conditions and abuse, attracting the attention of international and national child rights activists (Perry, 2004).

2.2.2 *Counting talibés*

The absence thus far in the thesis of figures estimating either the total number of talibés or specifically the number of talibés who beg in Dakar or Senegal generally is not an oversight. It is not known exactly how many children study in daaras nor what proportion of these children beg. This is in part due to the varying ways of defining who should or should not be counted, linked to the constructions of who is or is not a talibé (who begs), as discussed in Chapter Five. Estimates do exist but vary wildly, necessitating further analysis to avoid falling into the trap of continuing to use figures

known to be fundamentally flawed. According to Ferguson (1994), this is a common feature of development discourse, whereby figures that are known to be inaccurate continue to be presented if *and only if* they are consistent with the dominant narrative and support the need for development intervention. One relevant example of this is the case of street-connected children. In that field of practice, a UNICEF estimate that dates from 1985, claiming 100 million street-connected children in the world, is routinely trotted out by practitioners and academics alike, even though the figure was recognised as unrealistically inflated as far back as 1986 and not based on any rigorous methodology (Ennew, 1986; Aptekar and Stöcklin, 1997). Aside from the usefulness of this inflated estimate for fundraising purposes, part of the reason that this figure has not been replaced in the discourse with one that is more realistic is because street-connected children are notoriously difficult to count accurately, or even to estimate, due to difficulties including the mobile and transient nature of some children's lives, and the lack of agreement over definition of who should be counted under the label (Gurgel *et al.*, 2004; Naterer and Lavrič, 2016). These difficulties remain relevant when enumerating talibés who beg, which, in keeping with the focus of development actors and institutions funding the counts, has been attempted more often than counting all talibés. Here, therefore, I present the results of the existing studies without claiming them as fact.

According to Charlier (2002), (unspecified) local sources in the late 1990s/early 2000s estimated the total of number of talibés (here defined as all children in daaras) in Senegal as between 600,000 and one million. The middle of this range comes from a simple subtraction of the number of children counted as being in school (1.1 million) from the total (known) child population (1.9 million) in Senegal 1998/1999 (Charlier, 2002), therefore assuming that all children who are not in formal school attend daaras and ignoring both that some children study both in school and in daara, and that many children in daaras in Senegal are not Senegalese.

Until very recently, the number most frequently referred to in the case of talibés who beg in Senegal was 50,000-100,000. This number is variously attributed to UNICEF or Human Rights Watch, but the original source and the methodology used to calculate this estimation seems to be an unpublished 1991 UNICEF study (Gouvernement du

Senegal and UNICEF, 1991). In 2007 the ILO, World Bank and UNICEF critiqued the media's usage of this estimate without clarifying the group (talibés who beg, street children generally, or talibés generally, including those who do not beg) or area to which it refers, confirming the conceptual confusion:

In October 1991, a UNICEF study on the situation of children and women in Senegal estimated the number of talibés who beg at 50-100,000. Today, the figure of 100,000 children is regularly advanced in the press or in certain studies, even if the specificity of the group is not mentioned: it can concern the number of children who beg, the number of talibés who beg, the number of children in the street, or even the total number of talibés. At times, these estimations refer to Senegal, at other times, they refer only to Grand Dakar.

(ILO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2007, p. 35 (footnote). My translation.)

This critique was part of the justification for a collaborative attempt to more accurately count talibés who beg in the region of Dakar, one of three high-profile attempts to do so in the last 15 years.

This 2007 study estimated that there were then 7,600 children who beg (not all talibés) in the region of Dakar (including the departments of Dakar, Pikine and Rufisque), far fewer than the earlier estimation. The study relied upon a capture-recapture methodology³ combined with respondent driving sampling to conduct a short survey. The study described 90% of the estimated 7,600 (so 6,840) children as talibés, based on a self-declaration approach, asking children directly and counting as a talibé any child “who declared having spent the night before the survey in a Qur’anic establishment, and declared receiving religious teaching” (ILO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2007, p. 2 (footnote). My translation.) As it has been demonstrated elsewhere that children who are not currently residing in daaras or learning the Qur’an may well claim to be doing

³ A method that comes from wildlife counting which involves counting the number of a certain population in an area at two different points in time, often involving giving the first group a unique identifying object, and then using the difference between the two counts to estimate the population missed using a statistical calculation. The method and its variants have been used to enumerate populations of street children in a variety of contexts including cities in Brazil (Gurgel *et al.*, 2004; Bezerra *et al.*, 2011), Cambodia (Rubenstein and Stark, 2016), Mali (Hatløy and Huser, 2005) and Mauritius (Ndeboc *et al.*, 2012) as well as many other difficult to reach or ‘hidden’ populations.

so if asked while on the streets (Champy, 2019), this may lead to inaccurate numbers. The study also found that 95% of the children surveyed said they were not from Dakar region, with 58% coming from other areas of Senegal and 42% from other countries (ILO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2007). This idea of migration has been central in the recent discourse around talibés who beg and their teachers (as discussed in Chapter Five). This study differed fundamentally from other studies in that it attempted to find and count talibés while they were on the street, rather than a daara-based approach, explaining why it reached far lower estimate than those that followed.

Both later attempts to count talibés also shared the objective of mapping out daaras in the Dakar region. A 2014 mapping study conducted for the Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes (CNLTP, National Taskforce for the Fight against Human Trafficking), a state structure under the Ministry of Justice, identified 1,006 Qur'anic schools in the region of Dakar and calculated that this accounts for 54,837 talibés, including 38,079 boys (Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes, 2014). The other 30% are girls, reflecting the inclusion of all forms of Islamic teaching establishments including Arabe and Franco-Arabe schools⁴ (accounting for 19% of the 1,006 establishments between them), and non-boarding daaras under the label of Qur'anic school. We are told that 80.6% of these establishments (811) are daaras. The report estimates that 30,160 of these children beg, accounting for children in 51.1% of the daaras (and 1.8% in arabic schools) (Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes, 2014). Crucially, researchers conducting this study did not visit each of the daaras. Instead, the number was arrived at working from the knowledge of resource persons and the *sëriñ* of 221 daaras.

The second mapping exercise, conducted by NGO Global Solidarity Initiative (GSI) in 2018 sought to achieve a more accurate number by visiting and geolocating every individual daara (though the staff member interviewed recognised that the number is in flux as new daaras are set up and then move). GSI counted 183,835 talibés and 1,922 daaras in this region alone, of which just 27,943 (15.2%) talibés in 515 daaras (26.8%) are claimed to be involved in begging activities (UNODC, 2018). The same study counted

⁴ The difference between these types of Islamic schooling and the daaras is discussed later in this chapter.

1,524 daaras and 127,822 talibés in Touba, Senegal's second most populous city and the holy city of the Murid brotherhood, including 1,016 daaras (66.7%) and 85,000 talibés (66.5%) who practice begging. These figures suggest that begging is more common among talibés in daaras in Touba, where public (secular) schools have been banned by Serigne Abdou Lahat Mbacké, former general caliph of the Murid brotherhood (Charlier and Panait, 2018).

The huge discrepancies between the two sets of figures, with the GSI report finding almost double the number of schools and more than three times as many children than the CNLTP report just a few years earlier, may lead us to question whether their eventual arrival at roughly similar numbers of talibés who beg in Dakar (30,160 in the CNLTP study versus 27,943 in the GSI mapping) may be little more than coincidence. However, as a result of these studies, the press and NGO reports have widely adopted the figure of '30,000' talibés who beg in Dakar, and HRW has doubled its previous estimate of a minimum of 50,000 talibé who beg across Senegal to 100,000 (Seibert, 2019a) - in other words, returning to the 1991 UNICEF estimate. The differences between the studies demonstrate not only the difficulty of gathering quantitative data on this population, but also the implications of the competing constructions of the category.

2.2.3 *Why parents choose daaras for their children*

While we do not therefore know exactly how many talibés they are or the precise prevalence of begging among them, it is clear that many boys continue to be sent by their families to daaras where begging is practised. There is no consensus about why parents (especially fathers, who, it is held, generally initiate the decision [Fiasorgbor *et al.*, 2015; Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016]) send their child to these daaras. Economic poverty is often put forward in NGO narratives and academic work as either a central factor or the context in which parents report divergent motivations (see, for example, Kwagyang and Mahmood, 2015). In the latter case, parents' decisions are not (only) motivated by an immediate need to cope with poverty but are inspired by the perceived long-term benefits of Qur'anic education: the Wolof parents in Perry's (2004) study described how the hardship faced in the daara teaches children to deal with difficult conditions in later life; Fula Diabe parents interviewed by Einarsdóttir and Boiro (2016) hoped that a Qur'anic education would allow their sons to themselves become

marabouts, seen as a stable and coveted position in terms of both finances and social standing. Both views demonstrate that sending a boy to a daara is believed by parents to be in his best interests.

Other narratives rationalise parents' decision by pointing to inadequate provision of secular state school in the boys' areas of origin (Gandolfi, 2003; Thorsen, 2012). The homes of the talibes' parents interviewed by Einarsdóttir and Boiro (2016) in rural communities in Guinea Bissau were over an hour's walk from the nearest state schools, for example, and other barriers such as the costs of schooling and frequent teachers' strikes exacerbate this lack of access (Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020). Economists André and Demonsant (2013) demonstrate that when a new formal school opens, the number of years in Qur'anic school among children in the area does decrease as enrolment and the number of years completed in formal school rises. Anneke Newman's (2017) anthropological study of how educational choices are made in Northern Senegal, however, refutes the idea that families will necessarily choose formal school where it is available, demonstrating that some families (and indeed children themselves, whose agency Newman highlights) choose local or distant daaras over secular school for some of their children and not for others. Rather than a simple rejection of secular, 'French' (as it is often referred to in Senegal) formal schooling, this choice can also be understood as founded in the supreme importance given to Qur'anic memorisation by a large proportion of the Muslim population (Ware, 2014), or a combination of these sentiments.

While these explanations throw light on parents' decisions to send a child or children to a daara, there are still debates about why parents choose to place children in a daara far from home where children beg over a local one where they do not. Anthropologists that have actually spoken to parents (Perry, 2004; Fiasorgbor *et al.*, 2015; including Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016) challenge the assumption that parents of talibés who beg are unaware of the harsh conditions and treatment that their sons will face, finding on the contrary that talibés' parents may value not only the Qur'anic education received in the daara but the difficult conditions, and in some cases the practice of begging, themselves. According to Einarsdóttir and Boiro (2016), fathers in Guinea Bissau who themselves received Qur'anic education (notably, not fathers who did not study the

Qur'an) thought that the distance from family and the resulting solitude would lead to dedication to studies, piety, humbleness and introspection. Others accepted begging and harsh conditions as an acceptable means to the end of learning the Qur'an, far preferable to being sent home from the streets of Dakar by an NGO (Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016). Parents were aware that many talibés beg, although they avoided the question of whether their sons specifically do so (Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016). Ultimately, different decision-making strategies have been shown to explain parents' choices for each individual child (Smith, 2015). As will be seen in Chapter Five, these complexities are often minimised by NGOs and other development actors through discourse that homogenises these parents, like the *sëriñ daara*, painting them as either victims or villains. Parents' decisions are also influenced by their beliefs about different forms of religious education, which are discussed in the next section.

2.3 Religious education in Senegal

Senegal's education landscape is a mosaic of public and private, secular and religious, formal and non-formal education, although the options available to specific families depend on their location and financial means (Charlier, 2002, 2004; D'Aoust, 2013). Official statistics now state the gross enrolment rate of all children in Senegal as 83.01%, with a significantly higher rate of girls enrolled in (formal) school than boys (88.92% for girls and 77.25% for boys in 2020) since 2006 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021). While girls' enrolment peaked at 92% (in 2011 and again in 2017), boys' enrolment has never surpassed 82.2% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018). These indicators have sparked debate over whether children attending daaras full-time should be counted as being in or out of school (Charlier, 2002; D'Aoust, 2012). Before returning to the repercussions of this question, I will first situate daaras within the context of the various types of religious education that exist.

2.3.1 Religious education

This sub-section will present the various types of Muslim education that are available in Senegal, their status in relation to the formal education sector, and the competing epistemologies that differentiate them.

Boarding daaras are just one of several forms of religious education available for Muslim children in contemporary Senegal.⁵ Rather than leaving home to attend a daara, many girls and boys attend daaras or Qur'anic pre-schools before beginning secular primary school at the age of 7. According to the Demographic and Health Survey 2017, 11.4% of boys and 11.3% of girls aged 3-5 in Senegal attended a daara, Qur'anic or Arabic school during the school year (Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (ANSD) [Senegal] and ICF, 2018), offering the opportunity for children to acquire a basic standard of religious education before beginning primary school with their age group. The attraction of attending a daara before transitioning to formal, secular primary school may also lie, according to Daun et al (Daun, Okuma-Nyström and Sane, 2004, p. 167) in giving children “immunity against Western ideas before they enter primary education”.

Alternatively, Senegal's *Franco-Arabe* and *Arabe* schools offer another form of Islamic education to children of school age. Based on modern Arab curricula and initiated by a wave of reformist educators trained in Islamic sciences in the Middle East before returning to Senegal in the 1970s (Loimeier, 2000; Mbacké, 2005; Hugon, 2015), many of these schools offer secular subjects, taught in Arabic or French, or both, as well as Islamic science. While, like daaras, the majority of (Franco-)Arabe schools remain private establishments, unlike daaras, some fall into the category of formal education due to their ability to conform to the *Loi no 67-51 du 29 novembre 1967 portant statut de l'enseignement privé* (Ndiaye, 1985; D'Aoust, 2013).⁶ In the 1980s, those that conformed with regulations were given either authorised or recognised status, with the former integrated into the state system, allowing their pupils to pass secondary school entrance

⁵ Religious education in Senegal is not limited to the Islamic faith. Private Catholic schools in Senegal are widely recognised as consistently offering a higher quality of education than the state-led secular schools (Villalón and Bodian, 2012; Chehami, 2016) in part because they have escaped the cycle of strikes by underpaid school teachers that has plagued the public education sector (Charlier, 2004). By law, these schools are open to Muslim children, who do make up a large number of their pupils given that Christians in Senegal comprise less than four percent of the population (Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie, 2018).

⁶ D'Aoust uses the term *médersas* to refer to the (Franco-)Arabe schools throughout her article, before clarifying in an addendum that the term is not often used in this way in Senegal, where it may be used to refer to the colonial *médersas*.

exams and continue their education, and the latter also given state subsidies (Daun, 2002).

The fundamental difference between daaras and (Franco-)Arabe schools comes down to the distinction between classical Qur'anic and reformist forms of Islamic education. In essence, these differences stem from "two irreconcilable regimes of truth" in competing forms of Islam in Senegal (Launay and Ware, 2016, p. 261). Learning in most daaras is underpinned by the classical epistemology on which Sufism is grounded (Brenner, 2001). In this epistemology, religious knowledge is esoteric with the meaning of the Qur'an revealed gradually from the first step of memorising words (Brenner, 2001) which inherently have divine power (Launay and Ware, 2016). Religion is seen as transmitted (as opposed to taught) through marabouts whose authority comes from their own interiorisation of the Qur'an (by the same methods) and their physical embodiment of the faith (Launay and Ware, 2016) and religious knowledge believed to be superior to other, secular, forms (Brenner, 2007). Conversely, for reformists, who share the epistemology if not the ideology of the secular school system, the Qur'an is accessible to anyone who can understand its meaning, and therefore the first step in Islamic education is to learn the Arabic language (Launay and Ware, 2016). From this point of view, religious authority is gained from knowledge itself no matter its source (Launay and Ware, 2016) which is the same as the process by which secular knowledge is acquired (Brenner, 2007). Brenner (2007) describes this epistemology as "rationalized", and better suited to the political economy that has developed in modern West Africa, as the reformist schools - (Franco-)Arabe schools or madrasas - provide secular skills seen as essential for earthly life as well as religious studies. That many parents do not agree with this assessment is evident in the numbers that continue to send their children to daaras, and, moreover, in the fact that the classical Sufi epistemology continues to be the basis for 'modern' Qur'anic teaching.

The distinction between Qur'anic and reformist Islamic education informs the various typologies that have set out Senegal's religious education options (D'Aoust, 2013; Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes, 2014; Lozneau and Humeau, 2014), though they otherwise categorise the institutions differently.

	Type	Formal Status	Curriculum
Daara	Traditional (with or without boarding)	Non-formal	Memorisation of the Qur'an; basic religious practices
	Modernised	Non-formal	Memorisation of the Qur'an, then variable
	Modern	Intended to be formal in future ⁷	Memorisation of the Qur'an; Islamic sciences; secular subjects
(Franco-)Arabe school	Arabe	Non-formal	Arabic; Islamic sciences; sometimes secular subjects
	Private Franco-Arabe	Non-formal or formal	Arabic and French; Islamic sciences; secular subjects (if certified)
	Public Franco-Arabe	Formal	Arabic and French; Islamic sciences; secular subjects

Table 1. Typology of Islamic education. Adapted from D'Aoust (2013) and Lozneau and Humeau (2014).

The table above divides the daaras into three broad categories: traditional, modernised, and modern daaras. For D'Aoust (2013), the distinction between the terms modern and modernised is that 'modernised' daaras were traditional daaras that have (been) modernised as a result of NGO or religious group actions, while the term 'modern' refers to those that form part of the state's official project. I found that in practice the terms are used slightly differently, with 'modernised' daaras being those which have been upgraded to meet the standards of a modern daara through state or NGO-led projects, while 'modern' daaras are new establishments specifically built as modern daaras. Although modern daaras will offer a broader curriculum including secular as well as religious subjects, memorisation of the Qur'an continues to be prioritised. The distinction between this and a Franco-Arabe school is best explained by a staff member of the *Inspection des Daaras*, the body set up within the Ministry of National Education (MEN) to regulate modern daaras once they are operational:

The difference is that the Franco-Arabe teaches some verses of the Qur'an. The daara, its objective is first and foremost that the child memorises the whole Qur'an. You understand the difference? So there are parents who choose Franco-Arabe school. There are parents who choose the daara, because, for them, it's necessary that the child

⁷ This depends on the outcome of the modernisation bill (see Chapter Seven)

memorises the Qur'an and that he has a good religious education first. So we offer them the modern daara programme, telling them that the child goes there at the age of 5, comes out at the age of 13, he memorises the Qur'an, and as well as that he learns Arabic and French to be able to continue his studies.

(Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018)

Modern daaras are currently still considered to be non-formal education (Kim and Care, 2020) although, as shall be discussed below, as part of the state's daara modernisation project, a bill of law that would allow their official regulation and allow those meeting certain criteria to enter into the formal system has been drafted and approved by the cabinet in 2018, but has not yet been put to the National Assembly to be voted into law. This project and the process of drafting the law are the focus of Chapter Seven.

The majority of Senegal's daaras, however, fall into the 'traditional' category. Under this label, there is a large degree of variation. Not least, there is a distinction between those daaras where students do not sleep in the daara, which are non formal and not recognised by law, but which are attended by neighbourhood children some of whom may also attend formal school (D'Aoust, 2013); and those daaras where children do sleep in the daara, which are also non formal and not recognised by law but, because of the extensive time period spent in the daara, are seen as a barrier to formal education (D'Aoust, 2013). I have not divided these categories in the above table, because there are also many daaras with a mixture of boarding and neighbourhood children. It is, however, primarily among daaras with boarding students that begging is practiced.

Other typologies use the presence of begging to further divide the sub-category of boarding daaras, or distinguish along the lines either of what is taught in the daara (from only Qur'anic memorisation to the addition of other languages - Arabic, French, or national languages) or of the conditions and pedagogy. The 2014 mapping mentioned above, for example, in fact employs both of these approaches in the same document to disaggregate its findings (Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes, 2014, pp. 30, 33).

This brings us to a final brief note that provides the point of departure for Chapter Five on the construction of narratives about victims and villains. Although Qur'anic teaching is inherent in the very definition of a daara, in development discourse, establishments (in the loosest sense of the word) where children are assumed not to be learning the Qur'an at all, due to the amount of time they spend begging every day, are frequently still referred to as daara. I will now step back to the colonial era to explain how daaras came to be situated outside of the regulated education sector.

2.4 The origins of daaras and the colonial encounter

The daaras have existed for a thousand years. When the colonists came, the colonisers found these Qur'anic schools there in Senegal. And they fought them! They fought them... by [writing] decrees of this and that et cetera, and the Qur'anic schools defended themselves. And, not only did they fight them, but they didn't... they forgot them. They didn't give resources, they didn't finance them, [...] so the Senegalese state at the time of independence continued the same thing. They might not have fought them, but then they ignored them. So... now in the 2000s [...] when it was felt necessary to look after those children, a regulatory framework was needed.

(Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018)

The above quote, one of many references to colonial history I heard during my interviews, demonstrates the need for any discussion of policies towards daaras today to consider the history of their relationship with the state since the colonisation of Senegal. The following section delivers a brief overview of this history, reflecting upon how the colonial encounter has influenced state policy today.

2.4.1 Pre-colonial daaras

Daaras have existed in the area of West Africa that is now Senegal since the arrival of Islam to the region, around the 8th century (Ware, 2014). They have been described as the only form of education available before the arrival of missionary schools with colonialism (Baldé, 2010). While this assertion ignores traditional forms of education and socialisation that predate widespread conversion to Islam (see Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003 for a summary of the literature on traditional education in Africa) early

daaras incorporated pre-existing societal values into their structure (Mbaye and Fall, 2000) and the arrival of Islam “served as an initial impetus for literacy” providing both religious and secular functions in the region (Diallo, 2012, pp. 91–92). In pre-colonial times, led by Muslim teachers passing on esoteric knowledge and skills along hereditary lines (Ware, 2009), the daaras produced the “Senegalese intelligentsia” who spread Islam and studied and wrote about Islamic law, poetry and philosophy as well as the Arabic language (Gellar, 1983, p. 92), enabling students not only “to access Islamic and secular knowledge, but to appropriate (Qur'anic) Arabic script to write their own languages”.

In a caste-based social system, Muslim education offered a means of upward social mobility for individuals from slave and professional castes (Ware, 2009), which continues to echo today as motivation for the descendants of enslaved castes to send their children to daaras (Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016). Most clerical lineages emanated from the noble and free castes and, having initially been “in positions of clientage to secular rulers who identified themselves as Muslims but were distinguished by a hedonistic, aristocratic lifestyle, and social identity”, began to gain political power in the late seventeenth century (Ware, 2009, p. 25). Religious communities that had grown up around daaras then began to threaten the royalty and political elite through revolts and, later (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), jihad, with followers attracted by the clerical opposition to the practice of enslaving free Muslims (Markovitz, 1970; Ware, 2009). When the French colonists destroyed the royalty “with diplomacy” and their “slave warriors militarily”, the clerical lineage was less affected, until the French targeted the daaras (Ware, 2009, p. 27).

2.4.2 The colonial encounter

While the daaras were already a “key public symbol of Muslim identity” from the 14th century (Ware, 2014, p. 16), it was not until the late 19th or early 20th century that they spread in large numbers due to the economic and political changes that the consolidation of colonial rule brought to the region. The colonisation of Senegalese territory did not begin in earnest until the 1850s (though there had been trading posts on Gorée – an island off the coast of Dakar – since 1444 and Saint Louis since 1659). It was around the same time that the daaras proliferated across the region, with large

numbers of men “calling themselves marabouts” and setting up new villages where they could be power holders with the support of their talibés (Perry, 2004, p. 56). During the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, seasonal labour from Mali and Guinea began to migrate into the peanut basin, allowing parents to replace the loss of labour created by sending sons to study in daaras and making it possible for more parents to send their sons away to learn the Qur’an from a marabout in another village (Perry, 2004). In addition to responding to changing economic structures, the daaras at this time became a “symbol of cultural resistance” (Villalón and Bodian, 2012, p. 7) against the colonial power, drawing more parents to send their children to study the Qur’an, coinciding with the growth of Muslim brotherhoods in Senegal. Thus, although at the turn of the 20th century less than half of the territory’s population were Muslim (Gellar, 1983), by 1912, the colonial administration counted approximately 1,700 daaras in Senegal (Marty and Salenc, 1914 cited in Behrman, 1970).

Throughout the colonial period, French policies towards Qur’anic education in Senegal, as well as the rest of the administrative territory of *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF), varied, as the administration sought to close down, co-opt, or replace the daaras (Brenner, 2001). This inconsistent approach reflected the inconstant nature of French policy towards Islam, particularly Sufi Islam. The French colonists were conscious that their presence had contributed to the spread of Islam across West Africa, due to factors including the breakdown of the tribal system, the imposition of peace across the Western Sudan (facilitating the travel of missionaries), and the use of literate Muslims as clerks and interpreters by the administration (Klein, 1968; Behrman, 1970). From the mid-1850s, this “deliberate fostering of Islam” shifted towards a position of public neutrality, coupled with a so-called ‘civilising’ mission that saw Qur’anic schools as a threat to French language education, itself employed as a tool to “make Africans more amenable to French rule” (Behrman, 1970, pp. 37–38).

With this shift came the first French schools. Between 1854 and 1864, Governor Louis Faidherbe’s administration tried to contain the spread of the daaras and promote French school in order to train a pool of Senegalese subordinates and change the way of life of the population (Villalón and Bodian, 2012). In June 1857 - just three months after the first secular school was opened - a decree required daaras in Saint Louis to

obtain official authorisation, and required children over the age of 12 to be sent to French school (Bouche, 1974; Ware, 2009; Villalón and Bodian, 2012). This began a series of decrees imposing conditions that were almost impossible to meet, including: requiring Qur’anic teachers to speak and teach French (which very few did – making the 1906 promise of a subsidy of up to 300 francs to “any maribu who would spend at least two hours a day teaching French” (Behrman, 1970, p. 39) entirely worthless); to submit “a copy of [their] judicial record, a certificate of good moral conduct, and proof that he [the sêriñ daara] was a French citizen or subject” (thus ruling out those involved in “anti-French campaigns”) (Behrman, 1970, p. 39); to take an exam in Arabic (which most did not know well) and to provide a register of pupils in French (which they did not speak or write); to close their daaras during hours of French school, and prove that their pupils were also attending French school (which almost none were); to submit to inspection by a commission, including “the Administrator and at least one person who knew Arabic” (of which none were available in most areas) (Klein, 1968, p. 222); and, to cease the collection of alms by children (Klein, 1968; Behrman, 1970; Bouche, 1974). These repressive measures were increased on paper in the late 1800s and around the turn of the 20th century. Implementation, however, was limited to the towns directly controlled by the French, and even there was incomplete (Klein, 1968) and met with resistance from local public figures who stepped in to protect individual marabouts (Bouche, 1974). Successive short-lived attempts at enforcement therefore fell flat.

Overall, the regulation of daaras and other efforts to control or limit the spread of Islam “were a resounding failure” (Klein, 1968, p. 221). Following a model tested in Algeria (Brenner, 2001), the colonial administration adopted a different tactic from 1908: attempting to infiltrate the Qur’anic education sector by establishing state-run *médersas*⁸ to “domesticate” (Brenner, 2001, p. 52) the daaras by training teachers who would preach messages deemed acceptable while training them in “French and their civic duties to the colonial state” (Behrman, 1970, p. 40). However, the *médersa* opened in Saint Louis in 1908 “never had more than a handful of students and eventually

⁸ *Médersa* is the French form of *madrassa*. I continue to use the French word to refer specifically to these colonial institutions to avoid confusion with other forms of *madrassa*.

disappeared”, and another national *médessa* proposed in 1936 never materialised (Behrman, 1970, pp. 54–55). Repressive policies did continue during this period, particularly in attempts to control marabouts’ collection of alms. In 1911, Governor General William Ponty stated that those living purely from the profit of alms should be imprisoned on the charge of “vagabondage”, while a bill passed in the same year by the Lieutenant Governor prohibited voluntary donations to marabouts without authorisation (Behrman, 1970, p. 40).

With repression having little effect, and infiltration failing, co-option of religious leaders became the next strategy. Already by 1913, administrators had largely abandoned efforts to control the *daaras* and force children to study in French schools (Klein, 1968). By then, the French administration was more comfortable in its position and no longer convinced that the brotherhoods were planning to revolt (Behrman, 1970). In this period the administration took the stance of using the marabouts as “auxiliaries of our administration” when required (1913 letter from William Ponty to Lieutenant Governor, cited in Behrman, 1970, p. 41). In the same year, Paul Marty advised that the French had no reason to intervene in *daaras*, describing them as posing no political danger, thus setting the apathetic tone of French colonial policy towards the *daaras* that would dominate until independence (Bouche, 1974).⁹ From then on, although there was little further attempt to repress or control the *daaras*, they were also excluded from the formal education system, not considered as schools and received no financial support from the administration (Brenner, 2001).

Meanwhile, attempts to provide any other form of education for Senegalese children were half-hearted at best. During the 1880s and 1890s, as more public schools were being built across the territory, the idea of teaching Arabic to attract pupils from Qur’anic schools went some way towards being implemented, with Arabic inspectors installed in the communes (Bouche, 1974). This teaching however had “disappeared rapidly and without noise” by 1906 (Bouche, 1974, p. 228). If, when the first colonial-era schools were run by European Christian missionaries, *daaras* were popular with parents who feared

⁹ Aside from a brief revival of repressive policies under the Vichy administration of French West Africa during World War II (Behrman, 1970).

that their children would be converted (Villalón and Bodian, 2012), according to Bouche (1974, p. 231) it was not because education was secularised in the early 20th century that schools in towns were teaching Muslim boys by 1920, but by coincidence that this happened at the same time that Muslim Senegalese parents “had discovered the practical utility of the knowledge that only it [French school] dispensed.” Yet by the end of the colonial period, the official French education system had been intentionally deprived of sufficient investment to reach many Senegalese children (Behrman, 1970). Both secular and Christian schools educated just enough people to fill the administrative positions available, indoctrinating them with French cultural values and ways of thinking (Pourtier, 2010) while keeping them as a “semi-elite, always below the French in status” (Kuenzi, 2011, p. 62). As evidence of the limited scale of colonial education, in 1957, just a few years before independence, only 172 students in Senegal (including Europeans living in Senegal) achieved the high school *baccalauréat* (Bokamba, 1991; cited in Diallo, 2016). As a result of such perfunctory attempts to spread secular education, formal education did not compete with Qur’anic school on a large scale at any point during the colonial period. In the next section I explore attempts to bring daaras into the national education system.

2.5 Education reforms and daara modernisation

Following independence in 1960, the challenge facing the Senegalese education sector was two-fold: “to increase school attendance and to africanise teaching” (Pourtier, 2010, p. 101. My translation). Over the following 40 years the education system continued “in a bipolar manner with, on one hand, secular teaching organised by the state in the framework of regulatory texts, and on the other, non-formal, essentially Islamic education, which has seen an anarchic development and a lack of state control” (Villalón and Bodian, 2012, p. 7. My translation). Reforms made to the national education sector in response to teachers’ strikes in the late 1960s and 1970s, then again in the 1990s in response to the Education for All agenda, served to confirm the secular character of formal education (Daun, 2002; Villalón and Bodian, 2012). From the 1980s, structural adjustment programmes and the associated budget cuts further undermined the education system, compounding the economic challenge of educating a

disproportionately young population (Pourtier, 2010; Villalón and Bodian, 2012). This evolving economic context also affected the daaras.

By the 1970s, Senegal was faced with an economy in crisis, coupled with severe droughts that exacerbated the situation of many living in poverty and dependent on agriculture. Many daaras from the south that had relied on farming before losing this income when peanut prices fell in the 1960s (Diouf, 2013) migrated to urban areas, either definitively or in a circular fashion (with daaras and their talibés returning to rural areas during farming seasons), and in turn the practice of begging for alms by these child talibés began to be a common sight as Senegalese cities grew (Diouf, 2013; Gueye, 2014). Together with the state of the national education sector, this resulted in the first post-colonial calls for the modernisation and formalisation of daaras.

In 1977, the ruling Socialist Party proposed giving daaras legal status - a fundamental part of the current approach to modernisation - in order to be able to regulate the talibés' living conditions (Villalón and Bodian, 2012), while the expansion of the daaras curriculum, establishing a system to inspect them, taking (unspecified) "measures to halt begging" and introducing religious lessons in state schools were recommended in a series of conferences and seminars between 1978 and 1988 (Nguirane and Badiane, 1995, pp. 13–14). Aside from brief experiments with national language teaching in daaras in the 1980s, these propositions went largely unimplemented (Daun, 2002). Following reforms in the 1990s, formal education enrolment rates increased significantly (from 54.3% in 1993 to 68.3% in 1999), but religious education continued to be excluded (Villalón and Bodian, 2012).

It was only in the 2000s that plans to modernise daaras would begin to gain traction, following the election of President Wade and the setting of the Millennium Development Goals and accompanying targets for universal education. The Wade government produced the *Programme décennal de l'éducation et de la formation* (PDEF; Ten Year Programme for Education and Training) 2000-2010 laying out steps towards universal education (Diallo, 2010) and recognised that it would be impossible to achieve this universal target without widening the definition of education to include religious forms (Villalón and Bodian, 2012). As part of Senegal's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, in 2002 the government commenced reforms to both the formal and non-formal

education sectors, including announcing the intention to introduce religious education in public schools, launching public Franco-Arabe schools, and beginning the project of daara modernisation (Charlier, 2002; Lewandowski, 2011; D'Aoust, 2012; Charlier and Panait, 2017, 2018).

These reforms were neither as innovative nor as immediately effective as intended. Charlier (2002) has argued that their content was nothing new and had been discussed since before independence. In terms of religious teaching, the main consequence was to add two weekly hours of each religious education and Arabic language to the primary curriculum, but a lack of Arabic teachers (also expected to teach Islamic studies) means this is still not accessible in all primary schools (Dione, 2019). Nevertheless, these reforms began an era in which the modernisation of daaras is seen as a serious aim of the government and international institutions. Since the election of Macky Sall in 2012, the state has attracted international funding from the World Bank and Islamic Development Bank for projects intended to bring the daaras, at last, into the national system. This project is the basis of Chapter Seven, which explores the renegotiation of the accompanying bill of law that will, if passed into law, allow the regulation and funding of daaras. Since 2018, however, when the bill of law was approved by both Qur'anic teachers and the *Conseil de Ministres*, it has not been put to the National Assembly for a vote. Looking back to the early 2000s, at the same time as initiating these limited reforms to the education sector, the Wade government also took steps – at least in rhetoric - to act to crack down on the practice of child begging.

2.6 Brotherhoods, begging and the law

The practice of begging - both generally and pertaining to daaras and talibés specifically - has been the object of a succession of laws and policies in Senegal since the colonial era. Colonial regulations outlawing either the practice of begging and alms-seeking or of profiting from these practices, went largely unenforced, setting the tone for the post-independence state. Ambiguity about the legality of begging in post-colonial Senegal began a loophole in the original *Code Pénal*: Article 245 both prohibits begging and excludes alms-seeking (during “the days, in the areas and in the conditions sanctioned by religious traditions”) from the definition of begging (République du Sénégal, 1965, p. 41. My translation). A 1975 amendment altered Article 245 to more clearly outlaw the

practice of making children beg, stating the penalty of three to six months in prison for “those who will allow minors below 21 years of age under their authority to beg” (République du Sénégal, 1965, p. 41. My translation) but, crucially, is silent on the practice of making or allowing children to collect alms, leaving space for the practices to be conceptualised as separate. Ware (2014, p. 218) claims that talibés were explicitly left out from laws banning begging in the 1970s “to avoid offending religious sensibilities”. Before continuing the history of the legal status of child begging, I will first make a brief detour to discuss the brotherhoods behind these ‘religious sensibilities’ and how they relate to the law and politics around daaras in Senegal.

2.6.1 Brotherhoods and Qur’anic teachers’ associations

In this sub-section, I briefly introduce the key religious stakeholders relevant to this thesis: the brotherhoods and the Qur’anic teachers’ associations. Around 94% of the population of Senegal is Muslim, and a similar percentage of those Muslims adhere to one of the Sufi brotherhoods, mostly to one of the four major brotherhoods: Murid, Tijaan, Qadir, or Layene. While the history of these brotherhoods is beyond the scope of this thesis, and has been discussed at length by others such as islamologist Khadim Mbacké (2005), there are several germane elements that must be briefly included.

By the point of independence, the brotherhoods had consolidated extensive economic and political power. While under colonialism the Tijaaniyya and Qadiriyya¹⁰ had been treated more leniently due to the support of some of their marabouts for the French in battles (Mbacké, 2005), by World War Two it was the Murid leadership who, in return for instructing their disciples to respect the authority, pay tax, and follow law, received material aid in various forms including “great tonnages of seed and large agricultural credits for the modernisation of their enterprises”, grants towards the construction of the great mosque in Touba, subsidies for pilgrimage, and, importantly, agreement that interfering through law in daaras was “disallowed” (Markovitz, 1970, p. 89). The resulting economic power, in addition to the apparent willingness of its disciples to submit to political instruction from those further up the brotherhood hierarchy

¹⁰ The -iyya suffix refers to the brotherhood in question.

(Mbacké, 2005), endowed the Murid brotherhood with a particularly strong political influence that was sustained post-independence.

By the time the role of the brotherhoods in post-colonial Senegalese politics became an object of much scholarly interest in the 1970s (for example Behrman, 1970; Cruise O'Brien, 1970, 1971; Markovitz, 1970), the Murid brotherhood in particular had consolidated economic power by dominating the groundnut industry which made up "over 80 per cent of Senegal's gross national product" (Markovitz, 1970, p. 92). The brotherhoods' power over their followers – the Senegalese electorate – was theorised by Donal Cruise O'Brien (1992) as part of a uniquely Senegalese social contract. This concept, used to explain not only the position of the brotherhood leaders in society but also the endurance of peace and a stable democratic system in Senegal (Villalón, 1995), holds that Senegalese disciples (and voters) blindly follow their marabouts "like a corpse in the hands of a mortician" (Mbacké, 2005, p. 76), giving the brotherhood leaders the power to negotiate with the state for resources to be distributed to their followers in exchange for support in elections. In the run up to independence, and in elections up to 1993, brotherhoods explicitly or implicitly directed their followers on how to cast their votes through injunctions or *ndigal* (Villalón, 1995; Cruise O'Brien, 2003), reproducing the same reciprocal relationships between administration and religious leaders that had worked in the latter stages of colonialism (Loimeier, 1996; Mbacké, 2005). Since the 2000 election, in a context where the brotherhoods have refrained from issuing official *ndigal* in presidential elections, the Senegalese social contract theory has been challenged and critiqued as an oversimplification of both the political landscape in Senegal (Gifford, 2016) and the relationship between marabouts and their disciples (Babou, 2013), with Cruise O'Brien (2003) himself recognising that in the twenty-first century the social contract has taken a pluralistic form in which middle and lower level marabouts and fringe politicians alike now have more power. This is not to say that the brotherhoods' leaders have lost their political power altogether. During his 2000-2012 presidency, President Wade attempted to curry favour with the Murid leadership in particular (Babou, 2016) while, according to Gifford (2016), it is because President Sall was presented as the less religious candidate – and offering fewer advantages to the

brotherhoods – in the 2012 election campaign that he has struggled to gain the explicit support of religious leaders despite many concessions to them as president.

For the purpose of this thesis, the brotherhoods' power is most relevant in terms of the influence of the brotherhoods over policy and practices towards talibé begging, daaras, and the education sector. Their voice in education policymaking, for example, is summarised by André and Demonsant (2013, p. 6), who found that although it is only in the holy Murid city of Touba (Senegal's second biggest city) that “brotherhoods actively lobby against formal education” (and indeed banned secular primary schools from the city [Charlier and Panait, 2018, p. 357]), elsewhere “politicians clearly seek for the brotherhood's voting instructions, and this might soften their incentives to promote formal education”. This thesis does not delve deeply into the role of the brotherhoods as such. Indeed, every time I mentioned the brotherhoods in interviews, respondents insisted on dismissing this line of questioning. While this may seem to be at odds with the powerful image of the brotherhoods painted above, those interviewed pointed instead to the Qur'anic teachers' associations as the more pertinent vehicle through which *sëriñ* daaras make their opinions on policies towards daaras known.

The creation the National Federation of Qur'anic Teachers' Associations (FNAECS) was a reaction to the state's creation of the Inspection des daaras in 2009, in order to give a unified voice to this heterogenous group in conversations with state and international bodies (Hugon, 2015). FNAECS is not a homogenous group. Rabbita, an association of Murid marabouts that pre-existed FNAECS is, for example, one particularly powerful member (Hugon, 2015). Opinions on topics such as the modernisation of daaras differ vastly between individual members, too, as Anneke Newman's (2016a, 2016b) ethnographic work with *sëriñ* daaras in a village in Northern Senegal demonstrates. To build unity, after its creation, FNAECS took steps - including a tour of the country to reach those Qur'anic teachers *à la base*, the creation of a network of *ndeyu daara* (literally daara mothers, women who support daara and their talibés), a health insurance scheme, or an agricultural cooperative - to build a common identity to overcome internal fractures as well as a shared discourse promoting and legitimising daaras as spaces of religious education (Hugon, 2015). Through these actions, FNAECS successfully served to transform the *sëriñ* daaras from beneficiaries of aid programmes

to a unified group participating in the development of public policy and promoting their own vision of modernisation (Hugon, 2015). FNAECS and its member associations at national, regional, and departmental level have become a route for state and non-governmental actors to engage *sëriñ daaras*, particularly in the modernisation project.

With this brief contextual overview of the religious stakeholders complete, I now turn to the law and the legality of begging.

2.6.2 2005 Anti-trafficking law and other legal protections

In this final section of the chapter, I explore Senegal's laws in relation to talibés' begging. In 2005, with increasing international attention falling upon the talibés' begging and framing the practice as putting children at risk or violating their rights, the Government of Senegal passed the *Loi n° 2005-06 du 10 mai 2005 relatif à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et pratiques assimilées et à la protection des victimes* (Law relating to the fight against human trafficking and similar practices and to the protection of victims). Under Article 3 of this law, which is commonly referred to as the '(anti-)human trafficking' or 'anti-begging law', "anyone who organises the begging of another in order to gain profit[,] employs, trains or diverts someone in order to engage them in begging or to exercise pressure upon them such that they beg or continue to do so" is liable to be sentenced to a prison term of two to five years as well as a fine of 500,000 - 2,000,000 CFA (République du Sénégal, 2005).

No serious attempts to apply this law were made until 2010, when Wade's government made a brief attempt at implementing it, arresting a small number of *sëriñ daaras* who were later released without serving their sentences (Anti-Slavery International, 2011) before marabouts rallied their supporters with the slogan "to oppose almsgiving is to oppose Islam" (Gifford, 2015, p. 481) and Qur'anic Teachers' Associations reportedly threatened to withdraw support for Wade in the 2012 elections if the law was applied (Anti-Slavery International, 2011). In October 2010, just two months after the Prime Minister Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye had sought to implement the 2005 law, President Wade denounced it. The Prime Minister justified the attempt at action as a response to the government being "under threat from its partners who believed that Dakar was not fighting in an effective way against human trafficking" (RFI, 2010. My translation). Due to the continuing power of religious lobbies, as discussed above, this incident is still

frequently invoked to explain the current government's failure to enforce the 2005 law consistently. No attempts were made to apply the law for several years following the 2010 debacle, with no prosecutions whatsoever until 2016, according to Human Rights Watch (Seibert, 2016). Since then, arrests and prosecutions have slightly increased. Between 2017 and 2019, "at least nine Quranic teachers [were] arrested on charges related to child smuggling or 'exploitation of begging'" but although eight were convicted, ultimately "penalties were reduced by judges to fines or a few months in prison" (Seibert, 2019b, p. 6). The law therefore remains largely unenforced as the government focuses on other measures.

Occasionally, *sëriñ daaras* have been prosecuted for breaking laws that protect talibés not due to their status as children who beg but simply as children. Media reports refer to a small number of cases in which *sëriñ daaras* have been prosecuted for the most extreme abuses or deaths of talibés in the *daaras*, but even in these cases the sentences handed down are disturbingly short. In February 2019, for example, a criminal court in Saint Louis handed down a sentence of just two years in prison to Cheikh Tidiane Lô, a Qur'anic teacher who admitted beating to death an 11 year old talibé, also apparently a relative, as punishment for supposedly stealing a sum of 2,000 cfa (3€) from the teacher's bedroom while cleaning (Diouf, 2019).

Senegal has signed and ratified international treaties protecting children's rights, such as the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the Palermo protocol. In April 2014, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC, which monitors the implementation of the ACRWC) found the Government of Senegal to be in violation of eight articles of the ACRWC – including Article 29b which explicitly holds states to "take appropriate measures to prevent... the use of children in all forms of begging" (Organisation of African Unity (African Union), 1999) - due to its failure to protect the rights of talibés (ACERWC, African Union, 2014). This followed a communication to the committee filed in 2012 by the Pretoria-based Centre for Human Rights (beginning, in fact, as a student project) and *La Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme* (RADDHO, a Dakar-based NGO) lodged on behalf of individual talibés (interviews with just two boys are included as an annex) but on behalf

of the group, which would not be possible in Senegalese courts where claims must come directly from the person whose rights have been violated (ACERWC, African Union, 2014). While it cannot be ascertained exactly to what extent this decision influenced the policy and actions of the Senegalese government, who did not deny the violation of the Charter but rather argued that the government was already attempting to resolve the issues and protect *talibés* (ACERWC, African Union, 2014), just as they have done in reports to the committee monitoring the implementation of the CRC (République du Sénégal, 2013), since 2016 the state has conducted a series of projects to remove children from the street, in keeping with the first of the committee's recommendations of ensuring "that all *talibés* are immediately taken back from the streets to their families" (ACERWC, African Union, 2014, p. 14). This series of projects forms the basis of Chapter Eight.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the research project within the historic and socio-political context of Senegal. It has described what we know (and what we do not know) about *daaras* and the children who study in (and beg for) them today, and has shed light on both the position of the *daaras* in Senegal's education landscape and the practice of begging in the law. We have seen how colonial efforts to repress, co-opt, then ignore *daaras* continue to have echoes in the present day, with reverberations in both policies made by successive governments and in resistance to the application of these policies. By intentionally pitting Qur'anic education against the official system of French-based, secular education, the colonial administration succeeded in excluding *daaras* from investment and regulation but also served to make them stronger in terms of the society's attachment and respect for the institutions, and also more prevalent as they became symbols of the resistance. When the colonisers left, a newly independent government was left with this same situation, and, perhaps in fear of antagonising politically powerful brotherhoods, did little to disrupt the legal contradictions established by their predecessors, writing loopholes into law.

In this context, the Wade government's short-lived imposition of the 2005 law and the subsequent backtracking can be seen either as an attempt to align their rhetoric to the international child rights agenda under pressure from donor governments, perhaps

without any intentions of changing policy, or as part of his larger, “failed political experiment” in limiting the power of religious leaders (Babou, 2016, p. 183). More recently, the failure of the modernisation bill to be passed into law, even after approval from FNAECS, and the brief projects focusing on removing children from the street each raise similar questions. These examples draw attention to the question of through what processes and to what extent the global discourse influences the rhetoric and actions of national development actors including the state and the NGOs. The next chapter turns to the competing discourses around talibés and daaras and how they are linked to global goals.

CHAPTER THREE

Development discourse(s), child rights and those ‘in the middle’: existing literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will situate my research within the existing literature. The questions addressed in this thesis span multiple academic disciplines and areas of research, a reflection of the multi-faceted nature of the issues concerning daaras and talibés. Firstly, the chapter will define what is meant by discourse in this context and will include discussions of problem construction in the international development industry in particular. In policymaking and development work, discourses can be considered as both a tool used to construct problems and the context in which a problem can be understood (Hajer, 1993). This is not to say that problems (or the experience of conditions) do not exist in the real world, but that it is through discourse that issues become labelled as problems to be solved, and specific solutions justified.

Having presented these theoretical underpinnings I then turn to existing literature on the competing discourses that exist to explain ‘the talibé problem’, drawing heavily on the work of Sara Lahti (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019). Lahti identifies two discourses, one grounded in the global Education for All agenda, and the other in anti-child trafficking discourse, that are used concurrently, with actors ‘dancing’ fluidly between them (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019). I introduce both of these global discourses as well as the dance, setting the scene for the contributions of my thesis which lie in applying the dance between discourses theory to three recent interventions, and bringing a focus to the blurred boundaries between categories of victims and villains that these discourses construct.

I then step back out from the case study to consider how global child rights discourse, connected to both the education and trafficking discourses, is utilised by development actors. Here, I focus on the theory of vernacularisation of child rights (Merry, 2006b, 2006a; Levitt and Merry, 2009) to build cultural legitimacy. This draws attention to

those ‘in the middle’, the people who are destined to be caught conducting the dance between discourses. My thesis adds to this literature by exploring how an ‘Islamic argument’ is used by development actors, who otherwise ground their work in secular global discourses, to build support for child rights among *sëriñ daaras*.

3.2 Discourse and problem construction in development

3.2.1 Development discourse(s)

In the following section I discuss the literature on the role of discourse in development work and particularly the construction of development ‘problems’. The term discourse has been endowed with a plethora of definitions, and is just as often left undefined by those who employ the term (Mills, 2004). Discourse in the sense it is used in this research is broader than, but includes, language. Drawing from Foucault’s work, discourse in this sense represents “what people do, think and are in the social world” (Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak, 2014, p. 6). It is what brings social and cultural meaning to the world, including what is considered to be a problem (Blommaert, 2005). In the context of international development, discourse in this use of the term “identifies appropriate and legitimate ways of practising development as well as speaking and thinking about it” (Grillo, 1997, p. 12). Discourse, therefore, has real implications as it governs policy and interventions.

Post-development thinkers such as Arturo Escobar (1984, 2012) focused on the role of the ‘discourse of development’ in maintaining the power of the Global North over the Global South. Escobar (and to a lesser extent Ferguson [1994]) has been criticised for presenting development discourse as one single, hegemonic discourse, imposed by the Global North on the Global South (Grillo, 1997; Crewe and Harrison, 1998; Gardner and Lewis, 2000; Robinson-Pant, 2001). These critics demonstrate that there are multiple discourses between (and within [Grillo, 1997]) groups of stakeholders at different levels, international, national and local, and with different connections to the development sector (Crewe and Harrison, 1998; Gardner and Lewis, 2000; Robinson-Pant, 2001), showing how global discourses can be reinterpreted and redefined at the local level (Mercer, 2002; Hilhorst, 2003). Development discourse is therefore not static or homogenous (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). From another perspective, the rise of Chinese development work represents a different discourse to that used by the Western world,

although both visions of development are fuelled by the desire for economic growth (Nordtveit, 2009). Most interestingly for the purposes of this thesis, however, are the multiple specialised discourses and approaches that exist under the umbrella of development discourse, which, although intended to address different ‘problems’, each start from the assumption that development interventions are the solution.

The process of framing issues as problems within a discourse, which is necessary for policy to be developed (Cornwall and Brock, 2005), defines not only which aspects of an issue are understood as problems and therefore given attention, but also which aspects are silenced, and therefore ignored (O’Brien *et al.*, 2007). This process then legitimises particular kinds of intervention (Cornwall and Brock, 2005) while ruling out others. Development discourse, and the specialist discourses it encompasses, “produce power relations of domination at the level of the individual” by promoting particular behaviours and practices (DuBois, 1991, p. 24), including through development programmes. This ‘promotion’ does not need to be coercive. Where Scott (2008) focuses on state-led schemes that have the power to enforce compliance, Tania Murray Li (2005) extends this analysis to bring in international institutions and NGOs that implement their projects - still designed by external experts to solve problems that are also diagnosed externally - through guidance and conditional benefits, rather than coercion. Such experts impose their own goals, definitions and paths to progress that include changing the target population’s behaviour, and do so without any “democratic mandate”, even though they may be well-meaning (Li, 2005, p. 384). Thus, although the process is not, or at least is not necessarily, malicious or dishonest (Li, 2005; Bacchi, 2009), it valorises the values of external experts above those of the people labelled as beneficiaries.

The framing of a problem in a particular way can originate from commitment to a preconceived solution, which can dictate what the causes of a problem are represented to be (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994). International development organisations can, having decided to target a particular social practice or problem or employ a pre-existing solution (Ferguson, 1994), choose or be constrained to adopt a causal explanation which fits their wider aims and organisational vision (Shweder, 2002). Framing a problem in a particular way can thus be a strategic decision for an organisation or actor, including

NGOs (Allan and Hadden, 2017). This is particularly true in the development industry because the framing of issues to fit predesignated categories is central to how development organisations function and seek or grant funding. This siloing of programming in development is aggravated by the turn to universal goals that encourage fragmented approaches by separating out broad issues into measurable problems (Fukuda-Parr, Yamin and Greenstein, 2014). Alternatively, framing a problem in a particular way, particularly when combined with a preoccupation with measurable results (such as the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] or Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]), can perpetuate the issue when there is not an appropriate solution identified to the particular problem as it is framed (Unterhalter, 2012).

Anne Kielland and Ingunn Bjørkhaug (2009, p. 242) describe the framing of development issues in policy as a “sales strategy” designed to draw budget to those defined as the most needy. Drawing on Bøås and McNeill (2004), Kielland and Bjørkhaug (2009) in fact give the example of overestimations of the number of talibés in Dakar (100,000 as opposed to the “less than 10,000” counted in the Understanding Children’s Work study [ILO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2007]) to demonstrate the policy framing’s reliance on inaccurate figures to present problems as urgent and worsening. The framing strategy also relies on the presentation of extreme cases as the norm, and then isolating those (academics or local governments) who reject the simplified framing of problems (Bøås and McNeill, 2004; Kielland and Bjørkhaug, 2009). In the next section, I focus on how this oversimplification requires the construction of groups of beneficiaries, and, in the case of problems framed as rights violations, the attribution of blame.

3.2.2 Constructing targets

As a result of the framing strategies mentioned above, the development sector has been criticised for allowing “false assumptions [to] creep into the design of development programmes” at the problem identification stage (Pottier, 1993, p. 3). Development projects rely on the construction of “visible social groups” who are then assumed to be homogenous (Grillo, 1997, p. 189), labelled to reflect the frames through which problems are defined via a process that generally “persist[s] at a distance (social, political, economic, spatial)” from those being labelled (Moncrieffe, 2007, p. 9) and is never

neutral (Escobar, 2012). As already demonstrated in Chapter Two, attempts to count these discursively constructed groups or to quantify their suffering are then used to justify particular actions by particular actors (Naylor, 2011).

One effect of this process is to differentiate constructed groups of target beneficiaries from others, portraying some groups of people as worthy of intervention or aid, and others as not (or less) deserving (Timmer, 2010). As Nieuwenhuys (2001, p. 543) notes, most NGOs continue to be founded on beliefs “rooted in a Western philanthropic tradition revolving around the notion of the ‘deserving poor’”. When it comes to children in particular, and as Lahti (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2018) discussed in reference to how talibés are portrayed in INGO fundraising efforts, their construction as in need of help refers to westernised conceptualisations of universal childhood (Burman, 1994; Cheney, 2013). Although the definition of some people as worthy poor to the exclusion of others is not limited to Western welfare societies or the international development sector, but is also inherent in local and national systems to distribute zakat on the basis of interpretations of the groups identified in the Qur’an (Clark, 2001), Nieuwenhuys (2001, p. 544) contrasts the giving of alms to people begging with Western notions of the poor only deserving help to overcome a “temporary setback” or as a stepping stone towards self-sufficiency.

One category that has been constructed in such a way is that of ‘street children’. In his discussion of the configuration and implications of ‘street children’ as a social category in the late 1980s and the 1990s, de Moura (2002, p. 356) argues that divergence of definitions of street children are ignored purposefully to create a rhetoric which portrays one homogeneous group with the same back-story as “a powerful strategy to sensitize audiences”. For de Moura (2002), the consequences of this strategy are not only to stereotype and stigmatise the children involved but that these stigmatised representations then become the basis for interventions. Chapter Five will demonstrate that in Senegal, ‘talibés who beg’ has come to be constructed as a category distinct from other street children yet following the same pattern identified by de Moura. It will also address the narratives that have been developed around other social groups, the *sëriñ daaras* (and so-called *sëriñ daaras*) and talibés’ parents, which are central to the identifiable discourses.

Drawing attention to the process of problem identification, or problematisation, is not to dispute that there is a “full range of troubling conditions that ought to be dealt with” in any society, but rather is to begin from a point of acceptance that these conditions are not *problems* to be fixed until they are represented as such in policy and discourse (Bacchi, 2009, p. xi). As Escobar (1984) writes, the conditions experienced are real, but their construction as problems and the prescription of solutions is the result of processes of power:

Why, for instance, and by what processes, did the experience of hunger (lack of adequate food intake) become successively green revolution, agrarian reform, single cell protein, integrated rural development, comprehensive food and nutrition planning, and sectoral food policies? (Escobar, 1984, pp. 389–390)

This leads us to question “how and why” a particular phenomenon or behaviour “became a problem” (Foucault, 1983, p. 66). In the next section, I turn to existing work that has analysed the problematisation of Senegal’s *daaras* and *talibé* begging within competing discourses.

3.3 Talibés in development discourse

The issue of begging by *talibés* is an example of where and how different institutions and actors have constructed a ‘problem’ in different ways over time, leading to particular forms of intervention. The academic literature related to *talibés* and *daaras* can be largely grouped into two categories: those works which seemingly accept and therefore reproduce the discourses of the development industry, and those which critique and challenge those discourses. In the first category, many of which focus on documenting the extent of the poor living conditions and abuses suffered by the children, we find those which unquestioningly reproduce narratives of child trafficking or abusive ‘so-called’ Qur’anic teachers (for example, Kwagyang and Mahmood, 2015). Like in the wider development discourse, solutions suggested by these works can be categorised broadly as education or modernisation focused (Aluaigba, 2009; Ballet, Bhukuth and Hamzetta, 2019) or alternatively as calling for further criminalisation or application of existing laws criminalising *sëriñ daaras* viewed as perpetrators (Fiasorgbor *et al.*, 2015). This thesis however sits within a field of scholarship which has attempted to move

beyond such simplistic representations to focus on the discourse around talibés and the process of problematisation itself.

To take a critical view towards the discourse around talibés and daaras and the studies such as those mentioned above which themselves adopt the same discourse is not to dispute that the harsh conditions that they document are not the lived daily experiences of many talibés, nor that there are indeed abuses committed towards some of these children, in some cases extreme abuse resulting in death. Media reports provide evidence (too often with accompanying photographs) of such cases. According to Human Rights Watch (Seibert, 2019a, p. 3), between 2017 and 2018, 16 talibés aged 5-15 are known to have died as a “direct result of abuse, neglect or endangerment by Quranic teachers or their assistants”: three from beatings, four in fires affecting two different daaras, five in traffic accidents while on the streets, and four from illnesses that were not treated. Further documenting these conditions and abuses, however, is not the focus of this research project.

The most comprehensive analysis of the discourse around talibés and daaras in Senegal in the existing literature can be found in Sara E. Lahti Thiam’s (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019) doctoral thesis and subsequent publications. Lahti identifies two distinct discourses surrounding daaras and talibés which are utilised in tandem, or, to use her phrasing, in a “dance between discourses” by governments and NGOs. She labels the two competing discourses around talibés and daaras as (1) the vulnerable schools discourse and (2) the trafficking discourse (Thiam, 2014). Each discourse relies upon a different narrative – each connected to a strand of global development discourse - to explain why talibés in urban Senegal are subject to poor conditions and why the practice of begging persists. At the heart of these different explanations is a focus on who, or what, is to blame for the circumstances in which talibés who beg find themselves.

The vulnerable schools discourse as identified by Lahti (Thiam, 2014, p. 174) relies upon the “framing of the *daaras* as educational institutions comparable to Western schools, and portraying the current problem of mass *taalibe* begging as rooted in endemic poverty, not criminal exploitation”. In this framing, daaras – here understood as legitimate sites of education – require talibés to beg because their *sëriñ*, lacking financial support from either parents or the state, cannot otherwise afford to pay for their food

and other costs. Although Lahti does not herself make the connection, the vulnerable schools discourse is closely related to the “strategic structural” discourse identified by Donna L. Perry (2004). Perry (2004, p. 50) conceptualises a discourse adopted by NGOs in order to frame talibés who beg within a “metanarrative of large-scale structural forces that have ‘tainted’ local culture and rendered it dysfunctional” rather than giving attention to beliefs and value systems. The strategic structural discourse constructs talibés who beg as a social category which is an unintended result of processes of globalisation rather than adherents of a cultural practice and, in doing so, aims to avoid accusations of Western imperialism as well as political opposition nationally in Senegal (Perry, 2004). In this narrative, daaras retain their legitimacy and there is no individual villain deemed responsible for talibés’ hardships, and therefore no one who can be personally held to account.

The child trafficking discourse, on the other hand, is centred around the presence of a villain. In this framing, talibés are constructed as victims of child trafficking and the adults who are responsible as exploitative criminals (Thiam, 2014). Lahti (Thiam, 2014) argues that framing talibés as trafficked children is a relatively recent development apparently better able to bring in funding for NGOs and government initiatives, and linked to global shifts in the understanding of what trafficking is (removing the need for physical movement to have occurred and making consent irrelevant) as well as the growing importance of the USA’s Trafficking in Persons reports and rankings as a condition for the receipt of American funds. Before returning to Lahti’s central theory of the ‘dance’ between these discourses, I will first further explore how each of these discourses is connected to a different strand of global development discourse.

3.3.1 Vulnerable schools and the Education for All agenda

Framings of talibé begging as a symptom of poverty, and daaras as ‘vulnerable schools’, position the issue within the discourse of education and development. Education has become a prominent focus for development interventions, but what this has meant in terms of what kinds of education should be provided for whom, by whom, for how long, and with what curricula has shifted over time. Historically, education has long been seen as a driver of human welfare, societal good, and economic development. Since being established as a human right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

education has held a central yet metamorphic role in development discourse, with implications for how daaras and Qur'anic education in Senegal are seen.

Colette Chabbott (2003) traces the evolution of development discourse and how it relates to education over the period between World War II and the Education for All conference and its aftermath in the 1990s. From manpower planning and community-based 'fundamental education' programmes in the 1950s, the 1960s saw the rise of the concept of human capital and a focus on basic literacy for productivity in the 1960s. Although largely ignored by international institutions and organisations, calls for educational reform from theorists critical of the imposition of Western models took precedence in the 1970s, only to submit to the imposition of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and the decentralisation of education systems that these programmes insisted upon (Chabbott, 2003). From the early 1990s, the rise of 'human development' brought a focus on measuring and reducing exclusion, particularly of girls, from formal primary education in the early 1990s (Chabbott, 2003). This led to the Education for All conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990, which cemented the role of NGOs in broadening the reach of primary education. In the 2000s, with the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the associated goals, the focus remained on universal primary education (at the expense of other aspects of education – in part because of the World Bank's higher return on investment into primary education over tertiary or vocational education [Fukuda-Parr, Yamin and Greenstein, 2014; Tikly, 2016]), and particularly on increasing gender parity (Monkman and Hoffman, 2013) before turning, eventually, to an increased concern with the quality of education in the first decade of the century (Yamada, 2016). Post-2015 and in the context of the SDGs, attention has turned to ensuring education is not only accessible but 'equitable, quality, relevant and effective', as per Target 1 of SDG 4 (Yamada, 2016).

Knutsson and Lindberg (2012) argue that the apparently global consensus on the importance of prolonging education and the means to achieve this that is presented in policy documents is, however, false. Instead, budgetary constraints and "concealed contradictions" in what the various partners believe to be appropriate strategies continue, as does local level resistance to the idea that formal education is either important or relevant (Knutsson and Lindberg, 2012, p. 817). These debates are glossed

over in policy documents, with international targets and goals inserted unquestioningly into national plans (Nordtveit, 2010a). It is within this discursive context that the discourse around talibés and daaras is situated, with, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Senegal's national plans for universal education since 2000 inspired by the MDGs and associated targets (Charlier, 2002; Diallo, 2010; Villalón and Bodian, 2012).

In the Senegalese context, striving to meet these targets was recognised as requiring the expansion of the definition of education to include those in religious forms of schooling (Villalón and Bodian, 2012). Even since the quality of education has been increasingly raised as a concern, it is conceived of in terms of "higher international test scores, and lower dropout and repetition rates; not the change of the education system into a structure that fits the locality" (Nordtveit, 2010b, p. 327). Differing understandings of what counts as education have complicated the measurement of the attainment of the right to education for as long as the right has existed (McCowan, 2010). As a result of the dominance of Western thinking about education in the globalised world, however, the term education has become synonymous with schooling that fits a model that developed in the West, excluding education that takes place outside of this particular model (Brock-Utne, 2000; McCowan, 2010). The Education for All agenda, writes Brock-Utne (2000, p. 274), in practice means "Schooling for Some". In Africa, this often means being taught in colonial languages that children do not understand (Brock-Utne, 2000; McCowan, 2010). This concern, albeit legitimate, about the language of instruction has often preoccupied those seeking to expand access to education. In Senegal, for example, this has been a focus of many projects targeting the daaras, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s (Charlier, Croché and Panait, 2017), although the history of national language education is as long as the colonial education project, with Jean Dard, a teacher at the first colonial school in 1817, transcribing Wolof using the Latin alphabet to facilitate teaching in Wolof - an aim swiftly abandoned when he left Senegal (Nordtveit, 2010b). Questions about the form of education have not received as much attention.

Religious, and in particular Islamic, forms of education, have been especially marginalised in this discourse, as they do not always replicate the prototype valorised in the Eurocentric discourse. Even critics who go further to challenge the imposition of Western schooling on African societies have failed to take into account Islamic forms of

education, either by omission or by design. Brock-Utne, for example, while looking further than language to valorise pre-colonial types of education and their content in Africa in her book *Whose Education for All? : The Recolonization of the African Mind*, almost entirely ignores religious variants of education (except colonial missionary schools) on the basis that “the basic African consciousness of life is fundamentally different from the European or Arabic, however much Christianity or Islam may have proselytized in Africa” (Brock-Utne, 2000, p. 277). Even where attention is given to religious forms of education, it is generally in professing their potential role in meeting goals defined on a global level, and those that best fit the secular norm and idea that “[i]n an ideal world, schools are indeed neutral, not perhaps ‘value free’ but teaching students to think on their own, to respect difference in views and backgrounds, and to work to create new and better societies” are given the most value (Marshall, 2010, p. 284). Thus, despite the fact that “for Muslims in West Africa, education is not merely an economic matter and should be seen from a holistic perspective, i.e., the whole life situation of the child should be considered” (Daun, Okuma-Nyström and Sane, 2004, p. 181), religious education and how it interacts, competes or coexists with the secular norm is one area which has not received adequate attention.

Thus, in the context relevant to this thesis, Qur’anic teaching has not always been considered as education. As illuminated by the historical context chapter above, this exclusion of Qur’anic teachers was by no means an accident on the part of the colonial administration. In countries such as Senegal and Nigeria (Villalón and Bodian, 2012; Antoninis, 2014), many children counted as ‘out of school’ in national data collection exercises receive either Qur’anic or other forms of Islamic education. That these children are counted as uneducated in national statistics reflects the fundamental discord between the very purpose of Islamic education and secular education. While the latter aims to train future productive workers, the purpose of the former is, for “the ulama... to discover God through better understanding of his texts, moral training, and the search for real truth” (Deneulin, 2009, p. 118). Deneulin (2009) identifies this conflict as the main reason for resistance to state attempts to change the religious school sector in South Asia, and the same can certainly be identified in Senegal. This is most clear in the colonial attempts to create state-run *médersas* with the explicit purpose of training

loyal, obedient civil servants - as outlined in Chapter Two - which attempted and failed to alter the goals of religious education to secular ends. On the other hand, more cynically, the function of Qur'anic education has been explained as the reproduction of power relations at the local level, which is invoked as a way of rationalising local religious leaders' attachment to the model (Brock, Dada and Jatta, 2006, p. 221). Furthermore, in contrast to literature on religious schools elsewhere in the majority world which tends to focus on "their contributions to child well-being, often outside of external NGO intervention", in literature about Senegal the daaras are also framed as a threat to this well-being (D'Agostino, D'Sa and Boothby, 2021, p. 8).

The 'vulnerable schools' discourse therefore connects into the wider discourse of education for development as it follows the logic that talibés suffering is due to the marginalisation of the daaras from the state education sector. As well as recognising and legitimising the value of Qur'anic education as a form of schooling, which as discussed above represents a twist on the global discourse, this discourse that emphasises structural vulnerability has since (and particularly during) the 1990s allowed external actors access to the daaras through social assistance projects and donations which have sought to improve the conditions for children, and expand the curriculum, without calling the existence of the daara into question (Hugon, 2015). Eventually, these projects developed into the logic of modernisation which aims to expand the state education sector to regulate and provide for the daaras. Charlier and Panait (2018) have applied a Foucauldian lens to the daara modernisation case study as evidence of resistance to global education prescriptions. They consider the Senegalese example as resistance on the part of both individual subjects - including Qur'anic teachers - and institutional actors to the prescriptions of the international Education for All agenda. They demonstrate how institutional actors have been able to appropriate and adjust the prescriptions given to the Senegalese state through the global discourse, although they cannot fully reject them: bringing daaras into the state system requires the daaras to take on a form more in keeping with the Western model of education promoted by the global discourse, with a hybrid curriculum marrying Qur'anic memorisation and secular subjects and pedagogic methods akin to those found in secular schools (Charlier and Panait, 2018). In Chapter Seven of the thesis I extend this analysis to look at the

modernisation project in detail, demonstrating how resistance existing *within* the process of engaging the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations resulted in the silencing of begging within the approach.

3.3.2 *Child trafficking and anti-trafficking discourse*

While the global education discourse provides the context for the 'vulnerable schools' discourse framing daaras as impoverished, but legitimate, sites of education, the alternative narrative given to explain the practice of begging in daaras in urban Senegal, which Lahti (Thiam, 2014) refers to as the child trafficking discourse, sits within the global discourse on anti-trafficking.

Globally, the construction of trafficking, particularly that of women and children, as a problem arose as a continuation of anti-slavery discourse (Lawrance and Roberts, 2012). Originally concerned with trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and prostitution, a continuation of concerns about 'white slavery', the definition of trafficking was broadened beyond the sex industry and linked to organisational crime with the development of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and associated Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (herein referred to as the Palermo Protocol, with recognition that it was one of three such protocols) in 2000 (Segrave, 2013). The Palermo Protocol defines "trafficking in persons" as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

(UN General Assembly, 2000, Article 3[a]).

The Protocol also confirms that in the case of children, the means listed here are not a necessary condition for the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt

of a child for the purpose of exploitation” to be considered as trafficking (UN General Assembly, 2000, Article 3[c]). The label of trafficking is thus applied to acts and processes of many forms, with the crucial element for inclusion being only that the purpose of such processes is ‘exploitation’ (Anderson and O’Connell Davidson, 2003; O’Connell Davidson, 2011). Although the child trafficking label is most commonly applied to children moved for the purposes of sexual exploitation (O’Connell Davidson, 2011; O’Brien, 2016), other forms of exploitation including labour exploitation are included in the definition given by the Palermo Protocol, which tied together sexual exploitation, slavery and child labour (Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2014).

The trafficking discourse has gained dominance among (I)NGOs and lobby groups since the adoption of this protocol (O’Connell Davidson, 2011). Child trafficking overtook child labour in particular on the agenda of child rights advocates in West Africa from around 2000, as divisions between activists on the acceptability of children’s work led to the construction of the label ‘Worst Forms of Child Labour’, paving the way for a focus on exploitation and trafficking (Lawrance and Roberts, 2012). Meanwhile, the contemporaneous development of the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, and the associated framework and annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) reports do evaluate the progress of selected states towards meeting “US-defined minimum standards” (Segrave, 2013, p. xvi). The reports designate to each country a Tier status (1, 2, 2 Watch List, or 3) based “not on the size of the country’s problem but on the extent of governments’ efforts to meet the TVPA’s [the Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000, a domestic USA federal law] minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking” (United States Department of State, 2019, p. 35). Countries downgraded to Tier 3 “may be subject to certain restrictions on assistance, whereby the President may determine not to provide U.S. government nonhumanitarian, nontrade-related foreign assistance” (United States Department of State, 2019, p. 37). Although the TIP rankings are not based on any robust data, since no such reliable data on the numbers of people being trafficked exists (Warren, 2010) the reputational risk to countries, coupled with the potential loss of access to US aid funding, makes the rankings a powerful tool for guiding both national policy in many countries. Lahti (Thiam, 2014) has documented how TIP reports since 2005 have been instrumental in the reframing of talibé begging

as an issue of child trafficking rather than as other forms of exploitation. Talibé begging remains the central issue in Senegal's country narrative in the annual report (United States Department of State, 2019).

This expansion of the definition of trafficking has led to scholarly critiques of the anti-trafficking discourse which draw attention to the conflation of the concepts of child movement and child trafficking (Bastia, 2005; Boyden and Howard, 2013). As well as talibé begging, the label of trafficking has been applied to many other practices that have their roots in traditional practices. Evidence from studies of various forms of so-called 'child trafficking' in West African countries have found that the acts or practices in question are not always seen as such, or even as harmful, by the local cultures (for example migration of children for work was seen as a cultural rite of passage in Mali (Busza, Castle and Diarra, 2004), child placement or fostering seen as a way to share labour among kinship networks in Benin [Howard, 2011]). On the other hand, Roberts (2012) draws attention to the rise of instances of trafficking or selling children "disguised" as cultural practices as a response to the expanse of the colonial administration's ability to implement laws banning slavery within French West Africa after 1905. This narrative assumes that the cultural practices providing the cover for criminalised actions are themselves seen as legitimate. In the example given by Roberts, trafficking girls by passing them off as wives required child marriage itself to be accepted practice. As my research demonstrates in Chapter Five, echoes of this narrative can be found in the discourse around boys begging in Dakar, who are sorted into different categories based on the perceived acceptability of their begging.

The construction of an issue as a crime relies upon the unambiguous presentation of victim as innocent, and perpetrator as exploitative, which is a common feature of child trafficking discourse (Best, 1999; cited in O'Connell Davidson, 2011). Once labelled as such, trafficked children - as opposed to child migrants - are placed "at the high table of child suffering, deserving of special and particular care and protection, because they are non-agential - they are 'unwilling or unknowing victims', vacant, inert, innocent, entirely lacking in will or agency" (O'Connell Davidson, 2011, p. 464). On the other hand, trafficking narratives necessarily construct villains as well as victims, while also deflecting blame from the wider society (O'Brien, 2016). This is therefore the crucial

difference between this discourse and that which portrays the daaras as vulnerable schools: in this discourse the *sëriñ* daaras, or ‘so-called’ *sëriñ* daaras as this discourse frames them, are constructed as villains.

With a differing framing of the problem to be solved, the child trafficking discourse therefore brings with it a different set of solutions. Generally, defining a problem as one of child trafficking leads to the adoption of a standard set of responses summarised as “rescue–repatriation–reintegration” which may ultimately have a negative effect on the lives of the children that such policies claim to be assisting (Huijsmans and Baker, 2012) or have other unintended effects: Nordtveit (2010a, p. 709) for example references “*le bonus du trafic*” through which parents in Benin access programmes and services through the act of trafficking a child, for which they also receive money. Despite the tactics of “shock, melodrama, hyperbole, and accentuation of the most egregious cases” that are employed to justify rescue-based interventions above any other possible solution, such missions often clash with local communities (Okyere, 2017, p. 103) Hamadou Boiro and Jónína Einarsdóttir have conducted research with returned Bissau-Guinean talibés and their communities, marabouts, and the NGOs responsible for the repatriation of these ‘victims of child trafficking’ since 2009 (Einarsdóttir *et al.*, 2010; Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016; Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020). They have drawn attention to the unintended impacts of unwanted repatriation of talibés to their villages which variously include stigmatisation of boys within their communities and their struggle to reintegrate without the resources that were promised but reportedly not received, conflict between parents as mothers are blamed for repatriation, repeated migration (or re-trafficking) of boys back to Dakar, and ignoring the legacy of slavery as experienced by the Fula Diabe group in the region and escaped through Qur’anic teaching (Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016; Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020). Despite this evidence, in recent years the child trafficking discourse, and the risk of falling once again to the TIP Watch List, have seen the Senegalese government lead a series of brief projects to remove children from the street in Dakar. This initiative forms the basis of Chapter Eight, where I examine the lack of coordination between state and non-state actors, perceiving the projects as a way for the government to do just enough to be seen to be acting in international eyes.

3.3.3 *The dance between discourses*

Considered separately, the logic of the two dominant discourses and the programmes they have inspired to provide for or modernise daaras, on one hand, and ‘rescue’ child trafficking victims (and potentially prosecute their traffickers, though this has not been attempted on any large scale [Seibert, 2019a]) may at first seem to be describing different problems. Yet, as this thesis will argue, there is often no distinction between the daaras that are deemed to be legitimate sites of education as well as begging, and those which are labelled as sites of exploitation. The two narratives offer different, contradictory, understandings of what the daaras are and who is to blame for the child begging visible on Senegal’s urban streets.

This question of blame is a fundamental difference between the two narratives, and one with repercussions for how development actors interact with the *sëriñ* daaras. While the education-based narrative lays the blame on structural poverty, the trafficking narrative like those of the worst forms of child labour or slavery, necessarily implies that “there needs to be a villain” (van den Anker, 2004, p. 8), as an individual rather than a global system, while continuing to recognise that “systemic poverty is the driving force behind” slavery and slavery-like practices (van den Anker, 2004, p. 10). In this approach, the *sëriñ* daaras are no longer, or not only, presented as constrained by structural poverty but as villains seeking to make a profit. This criminalisation of adults is a common feature of child rights discourse. The child rights regime has been accused of promoting misanthropy and being founded on an implicit lack of trust of adults generally and of parents or carers in particular (Pupavac, 2001). For Roe (1991; as summarised in Gasper and Apthorpe, 1996), development planning narratives follow a storyline in which a problem is defined, the project presented as the ‘hero’ who will endeavour (but fail, creating a cycle of disappointment and inspiration) to solve it despite “a series of trials (constraints)”. In considering the importance in policy definition of placing culpability for the identified problem with someone (on an individual level) or something (on an impersonal level) (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994), the role of a villain can be added to this idea of a narrative. For Pupavac (2001), child rights discourse necessarily requires this dualistic presentation of (child) victim and (adult) perpetrator.

What this means for organisations working to protect talibés is that they find themselves on one hand portraying children as victims of child traffickers, and on the other, supporting the sèriñ daaras with funds and material goods. In order to facilitate this apparent paradox, in Lahti's (Thiam, 2014) analysis, the actors using these discourses – government officials and civil servants, NGO actors, and sèriñ daaras themselves – perform a 'dance' between the two discourses. She argues that "the line between the two aid discourses [...] cannot be drawn at the institutional level" (Lahti, 2019, p. 120), with organisations and indeed individuals moving seamlessly between the two discourses as it suits their requirements. This dance is facilitated by the discursive construction of the faux marabout – an imposter posing as a Qur'anic teacher to exploit children for monetary gain – which allows intervening organisations to justify supporting daaras with funds raised through communications emphasising the exploitation of talibés by distancing the 'real' sèriñ daaras they support from the supposed fraudsters (Thiam, 2014). According to Lahti, however, the faux marabout does not really exist. Instead, he is a spectre that disappears when one attempts to shine a light directly at him, meaning such so-called imposters can never be found and are not prosecuted for the abuses of which they are accused (Thiam, 2014). The result, according to Lahti is, for NGOs, increased funding for ineffective programmes, and for the government, the justification of their inaction on the issue (Thiam, 2014). My thesis seeks to identify how this 'dance between discourses' plays out in three projects which have all started or, in the case of modernisation, accelerated in the period since Lahti's fieldwork.

The discrepancy between the caricature of a villain and perceptions of them in their own minds and within their communities is by no means limited to the issue of talibés or even to child trafficking. Austin Choy-Fitzpatrick (2017, p. 4), in his study of modern-day slaveholders in South Asia, notes that "[t]he evil villain surely exists, but more frequently, contemporary slaveholders are respected members of their community, violating human rights but not social norms". It is this distance which allows the 'faux marabout' to exist at a transcendental level, invoked without being identified. In the next section, I turn to the clash between rights and cultural norms, and the implications of this for those who find themselves 'in the middle'.

3.4 Rights and vernacularisation

In this section I explore the literature around the question of tradition and culture in child rights and introduce the concept of vernacularisation. This is important to this thesis because the distance between global and local norms is often given as a reason for the inapplicability of national laws that have been passed in Senegal based on international rights commitments and under pressure from external actors, and because the concept of vernacularisation is recognisable in many of the activities of NGOs, which employ an ‘Islamic argument’ to persuade *sëriñ daaras* of the value of child rights. The discourses discussed above each connect into the child rights discourse. The Education for All discourse is clearly connected to the right of the child to education, but also to the requirement for states to “make primary education compulsory”, thus endorsing a particular form of education (United Nations General Assembly, 1989. Article 28). Anti-trafficking discourse and rights-based discourse are more uncomfortable bedfellows. Julia O’Connell Davidson (2011) differentiates between actors working against trafficking who are motivated by human rights, and thus argue for all migrants in situations of forced labour to be included under the label of trafficked people (whether they moved by choice or not), and those whose motivation is the control of immigration, who distinguish between deserving trafficking victims with no agency and undeserving migrants who can be blamed for their own situation. The language of the TIP reports since the Bush administration, for example, gives more attention to the criminal nature of trafficking than to either the rights of victims or to the global socio-economic conditions that enhance vulnerability to trafficking (O’Brien and Wilson, 2015). Nevertheless, children do have the right to protection from trafficking and exploitation under international law, as the UNCRC gives states responsibility for preventing “the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form”, and protecting children against exploitation (United Nations General Assembly, 1989. Articles 35 and 36), and the Optional Protocol further requires states to criminalise forced child labour (United Nations General Assembly, 2002). Perhaps more pertinently, in the case of the *talibés*, the trafficking narrative is (as shall be explored further in Chapter Five) linked to violations of children’s other rights, not least the right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect. Many of the NGOs who justify their actions by framing *talibés* as victims of trafficking therefore do so in the name of child

rights. This makes the question of how child rights discourse is used at the local level interesting. This thesis contributes to these discussions by exploring how NGOs employed an argument grounded in religion to persuade *sëriñ daaras* to their perspective, rather than the language of child rights, and places a focus on those responsible for making this vernacularisation possible.

3.4.1 Vernacularisation of child rights

The idea of discord between cultural context and international human or child rights instruments has been contested for many years between cultural relativists and universalists (Van Bueren, 1998; White, 1999; see the discussions in, for example, Donnelly, 2007) and I do not wish to rehash these arguments here. In recent years, rights literature has moved beyond the “stale (and stalemated) discussion” of whether rights are a western imposition (Opiyo and Hepner, 2013, p. 181) that dominated earlier debates and often essentialised culture, presenting culture and rights as diametrically opposed (Merry, 2006a; Kaime, 2010). This shift has been able to take place through the transformation of the concepts of culture and of rights (Kaime, 2010). It is true that the concept of universal human rights was founded in western philosophy and that the creation of a universal system was a response to violations in the west (Leary, 1990). However there is no longer a homogenous attitude that can be described as western, and as other cultures have contributed to the development of human rights, the concept and the discourse surrounding it should now be recognised as global (Leary, 1990; Tibi, 1990; Kaime, 2010; Robins, 2012). The concept of culture too has been transformed. Culture is no longer understood as a fixed and immovable barrier to the rights agenda, but as historically produced and continuously changing, based on outside influences as well as internal contentions of power (Merry, 2006a; Kaime, 2010). It is therefore possible for new practices that do not violate rights to be born from traditions which do (Ibhawoh, 2000; Kaime, 2009). Tradition may be an important factor on people’s opinions and actions but in today’s globalised, modern world it is only one of many influences (Mayer, 1990). Moreover, the rights regime can itself be seen as a new, global tradition (Douglas and Sebba, 1998).

However, even when tradition is considered as fluid and adapting over time, many practices are framed as corrupted through their interaction with capitalist modernity.

One crucial element that the two discourses about daaras in Senegal discussed above have in common is that they both rely upon an underlying narrative in which tradition and modernity are at odds with each other. On one hand, the trafficking discourse relies upon changing the narrative of talibé begging from a traditional, legitimate, and valued pedagogical practice to exploitation by unscrupulous, untrained marabouts. On the other, it is not that the teachers are out to harm or profit from children that is the problem, but simply that they do not have the (financial, material and human) resources to do their work well in the context of today's modern environment which has rendered them impoverished and vulnerable. These discourses instead rely on the idealisation of the original practice leading to a paradox in which tradition and modernisation are both simultaneously presented as problem and solution.

Rights-based discourses often begin with assumptions made on the part of rights activists and policy makers as to what practices do or do not conflict with the principle of the 'best interests of the child' as enshrined in the wording of the international instruments. The discourses that exist around daaras rely on different framings to construct the problem in a particular way and legitimise particular solutions, yet both rely upon the assumption that - for different reasons - daaras where boys beg are not in the best interests of these children. However, this assumption should not be taken for granted. That begging may be beneficial for a child to a greater extent than simply allowing them a means of survival, contradicts the perception of childhood that has developed in the West and upon which the child rights framework is based (Perry, 2004; Cheney, 2013). Article 21 of ACRWC commits states to taking "all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child" (Organisation of African Unity (African Union), 1999), but does not explicitly mention any particular customs other than child marriage and therefore is vulnerable to conflicting interpretations of which customs are harmful (Lloyd, 2008). In theory, interpretations of what is harmful should be reached through the guiding principle of the best interest of the child, upon which both the CRC and the ACRWC place importance, with the wording of the latter situating this principle above the other guiding principles shared by the two documents (Viljoen, 1998). In international charters, it would be impossible to define factors applicable in all

circumstances (Kaime, 2009) as the risks to children vary between cultures and between children. However, the vague nature of the concept of best interests of the child “allows for primacy of whatever cultural norms on upbringing happen to be current” (Lloyd, 2002, p. 183). This has led to harmful practices being outlawed in states one by one (Douglas and Sebba, 1998). Although Alston (1994, pp. 20–21) argues that the best interest principle can be called upon to prevent cultural norms being used as justification for the violation of children’s rights, in practice the meaning of the term best interests is both defined and continuously reinterpreted within a society (An-Na’im, 1994). In their work on the social norms underpinning the practice of female genital cutting (FGC), Gerry Mackie and John LeJeune (2009) begin with one assumption or “fundamental moral norm”, being that (the vast majority of) “parents love their children and ultimately want to do what is best for them”. Despite disagreement in the literature about parents’ main motivations for choosing to send their sons to memorise the Qur’an in boarding daaras (as discussed in Chapter Two), most (though not all) agree that they do so because they believe they are making the best choice for their son’s future. This may be one explanation for a lack of local legitimacy of child rights laws and associated policies.

For Freeman (2011, p. 10), transnational conceptions of child rights provide activists with a useful advocacy tool in what is essentially a moral debate, helping them in their mission to convince society that their position is “morally right, so right in fact that people will come to wonder how they can ever have thought – or more likely felt – otherwise”. Yet this “moralistic discourse” is far less likely to produce solutions than attempting to understand the points of view of those who do not accept the legitimacy of rights (White, 2002, p. 1101). An-Na’im (1990, p. 339) starts from the assumption that all cultures have “some problems with some human rights”, but that all are also likely to have values or norms from which the cultural legitimacy of a particular right can be built. Cultural legitimacy is strongest when it builds upon existing values (An-Na’im, 1990). In particular, it is not unusual for religion or religious practices to be seen to contradict human rights, or to be used to justify their violation, yet as An-Na’im (2002, p. 4) states “while religions are not easy allies to engage, the struggle for human rights cannot be won without them, particularly in the African context”. When Mayer (1990)

suggests there is a gap between the beliefs of most Muslims and their states, she is implying that the state uses Islam as a justification for curtailing the rights of its citizens. However, in Senegal we see the opposite. Although the Government of Senegal claims to have the support of religious leaders and the population on their approach to talibés (République du Sénégal 2013), in fact the state has faced backlash, justified on religious and cultural grounds, from the population, led by religious leaders, when it has attempted to take measures to protect talibés' rights (Dieng, 2009; Anti-Slavery International, 2011).

For Kaime (2010) the perception of populations that they have not been involved in creating policy and legal developments can be a barrier to the promotion of rights, as the language of rights remains seen as an elite discourse. This is particularly interesting in a context which has recently seen the involvement of Qur'anic teachers in the drafting of a law that would give their schools legal status, framed as a move towards realising children's right to education. On the other hand, the engagement of such religious leaders could be considered as instrumentalisation of religion for the purposes of development – as Østebø and Østebø (2014) found in their research with religious leaders engaged in workshops promoting the abandonment of FGC in Ethiopia. Calling for genuine dialogue, Deneulin and Bano (2009, p. 167) describe how the secular tradition of development has tended to “conceive religion as a set of static beliefs in the minds of individuals which can have a positive effect on outcomes that the secular tradition sees as valuable,” such as secular education as measured by international goals and targets, or the implementation of child rights laws. Yet, this does not explain *how* NGOs adopt a discourse grounded in religion to spread messages of human or child rights.

The question then is how to build cultural legitimacy of rights in such a context. One way to do this is through the process of vernacularisation. Vernacularisation refers to the translation of rights “into local terms” and their situation “within local context of power and meaning” (Merry, 2006a, p. 1). While An-Na'im (1990) suggests that cultural legitimacy is strongest when rights take hybrid forms with existing social values and beliefs, for Merry (2006b, p. 41) rights ideas must be novel, opening new possibilities, as well as reflecting the existing ideas in order to be able to create change. In this process,

global ideas are “dress[ed] in familiar costumes” in order to gain legitimacy at the local level (Merry, 2006a, p. 138). It is through the process of vernacularisation that the transnational discourse governs the forms of knowledge accessible and the actions permissible to local NGOs, and, in turn, to citizens (Adunbi, 2016). In the next section, I turn to those responsible for conducting this process.

3.4.2 Vernacularisers in the middle and the double bind

The process of vernacularisation requires vernacularisers, those actors who lead the process of translation and appropriation. This thesis demonstrates the role of individuals who can translate between the secular world of NGOs and the religious world of *sëriñ daaras*, in the name of child rights.

Vernacularisers are constrained both by the “rights discourse and by the cultural meanings” of the local context (Merry, 2006b, p. 42). In the literature on *talibés*, the local NGOs mentioned by Einarsdóttir and Boiro (2016) who have taken it upon themselves to return children found begging, or fleeing, from *daaras* in Senegal to their parents in Guinea Bissau, only to find themselves opposed by the Fula Diabe parents fit well within Merry’s (2006b, p. 40) description of those “in the middle”, who are translating the global to the local as “both powerful and vulnerable”, distrusted by and at times disloyal to both sides. NGO staff and national activists are identified by both An-Na’im (1990) and Merry (2006a) as having a role to play in promoting dialogue and in vernacularising transnational discourses and framing local stories in the language of the global. While Nyamu (2000, p. 394) defines as external not just foreign actors but “local human rights activists... perceived as outsiders to a specific social setting”, for Packer (2002), these people should be at the centre of debates around whether rights discourse clashes with local values. Mayer (1990, p. 146) cautions against dismissing as inauthentic the views of Muslims whose opinions converge with those dominant in Western thought or assuming them to be “alienated from their own tradition”, yet Hodžić (2017, pp. 98–99) suggests that national NGO workers do have to distance themselves from the cultural practices targeted by their workplaces. Like Mayer, Howard (1990, p. 160) refutes claims that African scholars supporting international human rights should be dismissed as “members of an ideologically captured, Westernized elite”, suggesting that an analysis of cultural legitimacy should consider

the views of those who do not necessarily agree with the majority. Flemmer (2018) cautions that the role of those 'in the middle' should not be depoliticised. In this vein, Tagliarina (2015) demonstrates that the process of vernacularisation can be led by and to the advantage of privileged groups as well as those who are disadvantaged, with culture and tradition invoked to justify practices that favour a dominant group (Ibhawoh, 2000). This, however, requires political will. As rights norms have developed among the elite, the political concerns of the powerful are a constraint to their adoption as much as their distance from less powerful groups (Robins, 2012).

Those in the middle, then, are subject to multiple forces and must negotiate between multiple discourses. Crewe and Harrison (1998, p. 18), critiquing Escobar's work for upholding the dichotomous notion that "developers develop, while local people resist, and arguably that this resistance is the most important part of their lives", demonstrate that these lines are blurred. For example, the constraints of development discourse also require NGO staff members who are well aware of the complexities of the contexts and issues in which they work to fall into line with the organisational framing, adopting certain formulaic representations of their intended beneficiaries. Timmer (2010) refers to this as NGOs' "double bind":

NGOs often find themselves in a double bind. They must highlight suffering, poverty, and discrimination despite the fact that many individual actors working within the organizations understand that the situation is exceedingly complex and that categorizing an entire people as 'in need' is, for the most part, counterproductive. (Timmer, 2010, p. 263)

The "double bind" (Timmer, 2010) of those working with street-connected children can be seen in the multiple representations of these children and the problems they are assumed to be facing. Ricardo Lucchini (1998) find two levels of discourse: one, the "institutional-pragmatic" level intended for national and international public opinion, governments, and (potential) donors, relies on the "dramatization of conditions of existence" (p. 358. My translation.) to portray these children as innocent victim (enticing pity) or future delinquent (enticing fear), both of which legitimise interventions. The other level, "interactional discourse" is produced by those programme workers who are in direct contact with street-connected children; here,

their individuality is recognised, yet they are still pathologised, still seen as both victim *and* deviant, though in this discourse these portrayals are combined. Boiro and Einarsdóttir (2020, p. 275) have remarked upon the same discrepancies between NGO staff's individual views and the organisations they work for, stating in reference to the unintended effects of returning talibés to their home villages in Guinea-Bissau, that “[a]lthough some workers recognise these complexities, the NGOs keep on with their business, i.e., repatriation, financed mostly by foreign sponsors.” I will extend this argument to demonstrate that it is not only NGOs, but also other stakeholders – including state officials, Imams and *sëriñ daaras*– who find themselves in the double bind.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the research within the existing literature. In doing so, it has demonstrated the relevance of the thesis to both the case study of development policy and practice around *daaras* and talibés in Senegal, and to the more theoretical literature on discourse, problem construction and the vernacularisation of rights.

My thesis builds upon Lahti's (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019) dance between discourses theory by demonstrating how the dual discourses have shaped more recent interventions, exploring the tensions raised by competing problematisations and the solutions they bring. It places greater emphasis on the grey areas between the categories constructed within this discourse, demonstrating the fluidity between what is perceived to be legitimate or fraudulent, acceptable or exploitive, deserving or devious.

The thesis raises awareness of those who perform this dance of the dual framings, as seen in many interviews in which participants explicitly lamented the amalgamation between supposedly separate issues while themselves reproducing the fluid movement between discourses.

It argues that there is a second discursive dance conducted alongside that which frames the talibés. In many of the interventions intended to eventually benefit talibés by raising awareness of their rights, individuals are needed ‘in the middle’ to vernacularise child rights using arguments grounded in Islam.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the research design, including justification for the methods chosen and the sites selected. It explains the choice to use qualitative methods, primarily semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions. It then discusses fieldwork undertaken between October 2017 and August 2018 in Senegal, including the challenges encountered and ethical dilemmas considered. In this regard, it explains the choice not to include talibés themselves among the research participants, a decision taken consciously as it was felt inappropriate to include them. The chapter then covers data analysis, before ending with my reflections on my own positionality and how this shapes the research.

4.2 Research design

The research was undertaken from a social constructionist epistemological perspective, recognising that multiple understandings of the world exist and are shaped through social interaction, and that these constructions necessarily endorse some forms of social action and exclude others (Burr, 2015). More specifically, the perspective adopted is ‘mild’ or ‘contextual’ constructionism, implying both the recognition that material realities do exist while social realities are constructed, and that social problems can exist in reality (Burningham and Cooper, 1999). This was crucial for the understanding of how development interventions are shaped by discourse and how problems are constructed within this discourse.

I began the research by reviewing existing literature on talibés and their equivalents elsewhere in West Africa, as well as on child rights and child protection in development, in order to identify research questions before conducting qualitative field research. A qualitative approach was the only viable approach for this research because of the project’s focus on “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”, rather than testing a hypothesis (Creswell, 2014,

p. 4). The flexible nature of qualitative research allowed me to then adapt the focus of the research and the research questions to evolve as I enhanced my understandings and different themes emerged while in the field and during analysis (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016; Bailey, 2018).

4.2.1 *Research questions*

The research responds to the following three questions:

1. How is the practice of begging among talibés in urban Senegal problematised for development intervention?
2. How do these problematisations and the discourses in which they are situated shape development structures and interventions?
3. How do these competing discourses and the resulting dynamics play out in the three approaches of daara modernisation, removing children from the street, and building community-based support for municipal by-laws?

4.2.2 *Site selection*

There are several reasons why Senegal was appropriate as a research site for this study. Firstly, although Senegal is not the only country in which talibés are found either in Qur'anic schools or on the streets, Senegal has long been recognised as a centre of Islamic learning and it is often claimed that many children move (framed either as migration or trafficking) both within and into the country as a result (Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016). Thus, the scale of both Qur'anic education in general and talibé begging in particular makes the country a suitable case study.

Secondly, given the project's focus on institutional policy and practices, Senegal was an appropriate choice because of the wide range of actors working on the issue both currently and historically. Talibé begging in Senegal has drawn the attention of international child rights activists since the 1990s and of Senegalese intellectuals for much longer than that (Perry, 2004). Qur'anic education has been on the political agenda to a lesser or greater degree since the colonial period, as demonstrated in Chapter Two. At the time of my fieldwork in 2017/18, Senegal's political sphere was already gearing up for the next presidential election, to be held in February 2019, and

the state structures related to child protection were changing rapidly. For example, a new government ministry was established in September 2017, under the title of the Minister of Good Governance and Child Protection (MBGPE). As discussed further in Chapter Six, this also led to the reshuffling of existing government structures such as the *Cellule d'Appui à la Protection de l'Enfance* (Child Protection Unit or CAPE), which had been under the direction of the Presidency before the creation of the new ministry. Moreover, my fieldwork fell at a time when there was a flurry of government action on projects related to daaras and talibés, perhaps related to the build up to the elections in addition (as I argue) to international attention to talibé begging. This led to a complex but fascinating political landscape which is specific to Senegal and to the time period of this research.

On a regional level, Dakar, where I based myself for the duration of the field research, is a hub of NGO activity, and home to many regional as well as national offices of international institutions and INGOs. With an estimated population of 3.6 million people, the region of Dakar is inhabited by almost a quarter of Senegal's population (Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie, 2018). While other studies, (such as Perry, 2004; Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016; Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020) have focused on the rural environment where most talibés' parents reside, the focus of my research questions on NGO and government policy and actions made the region of Dakar a more appropriate research site, allowing me to situate myself close to the headquarters and offices of these structures. Within Dakar, the bulk of my interviews were clustered around a few areas as would be expected by those familiar with the city: government offices mainly in Plateau, international institutions mainly in Almadies, and international NGOs slightly more spread out. Many of the local associations I met with were in the two departments in the suburbs of Dakar, Pikine and Guédiawaye, which is also where the majority of Qur'anic teachers' daaras were situated. I also interviewed three participants in the department of Rufisque, to the north of Dakar's peninsula. I had initially planned to leave Dakar to visit NGOs in other cities such as Mbour or Touba but struggled to find contacts in these areas for the reasons discussed in the sampling and access section below. I did however travel to the northern city of Saint Louis, having come across several local organisations running different initiatives.

I was also interested in Saint Louis because I had heard from several interviewees that the situation is different in the north of the country, and wanted to explore this further.



Figure 1. Map of Senegal showing Dakar to the west and Saint Louis on the coast to the north. Image from Wikimedia Commons, by user Amitchell125



Figure 2. Map showing the four départements of the region of Dakar. Image from Wikimedia Commons, by Maximilian Dörrbecker

A final important reason for the focus on Senegal is that I have personal experience of living in Senegal, specifically in Dakar. Prior to beginning my doctoral studies, I had lived in Dakar for 2.5 years working for a Senegal-based INGO, and was therefore very familiar with the city before arriving. This experience, and continued studies since returning to the UK in 2015, also allowed me to speak an intermediate level of Wolof as well as being fluent in French.

4.3 Data collection

The fieldwork for this research took place from October 2017 - August 2018. The primary method of data collection employed was semi-structured interviews. The data gained from interviews was supplemented and triangulated by observations and document analysis including NGO and government documents and news articles.

4.3.1 Sampling and access

As the research concerned the understandings of specific categories of people, purposive sampling was employed targeting the staff of NGOs and state structures. Snowball sampling was used to reach Qur'anic teachers, and other NGOs, through these respondents. As I explain below, snowball sampling was not as effective as hoped and access remained a challenge throughout my time in the field.

In most cases, gaining access to NGO informants was relatively straight forward, particularly for international NGOs accustomed to receiving researchers and with contact details published online. I also managed to connect with several of the local associations through social media channels, as they often did not have an up-to-date website and phone numbers listed were often out of date. The same was true of government structures - for example, the number listed on the sign outside the town hall of Médina, a commune in Dakar in which the mayor has signed - and begun to enforce - a ban on all child begging (the subject of Chapter Nine), went to a bureau de change in another part of the city. However, there were other NGOs that I would have liked to include in the study but for which I was not able to access the relevant people - emails to general addresses remained unanswered and receptionists declined to put me through without knowing the name of the relevant person in advance. I managed to reach some of these people through social connections.

Contact with Qur'anic teachers was always going to be most challenging and turned out to be even more so than expected. I had hoped that NGO staff would be willing to put me in contact with the Qur'anic teachers who they worked with directly. In practice, only one person was able or willing to do this, although others did put me in contact with other NGO workers and local associations, suggesting that it was only the Qur'anic teachers that posed a dilemma for them. There are several potential explanations for this. For many, there appeared to be an assumption that the Qur'anic teachers would not be willing to be interviewed. For example, I met with the Secretary General of the National Association of Imams and Ulemas (ANIOS) who was happy to be interviewed. At the end of the interview, I asked if he could put me in touch with a representative of the National Federation of Qur'anic Teachers' Associations (FNAECS). Unfortunately, he said that he would not be able to do so and explained that there is just one member of the FNAECS leadership who he knows would be open to talking to me, and he was in the middle east for several months as he is also in charge of organising the pilgrimage to Mecca. Others, he said, "sometimes react badly to questions" (Interview. Imam Oumar Diene, Secretary General of ANIOS. Dakar, 25th July 2018). Likewise, Babacar Sidibe, who was assisting and translating for me in Wolof interviews, who himself had contacts who were Qur'anic teachers, also did not want to put me in touch with those

he knew personally. He explained that being connected to a white person changes how others would perceive him - suggesting that the issue was because I am a European outsider rather than the nature of the questions being asked (as he works with a number of local associations on the issue of child rights). This positionality is further discussed below. Finally, among the Qur'anic teachers themselves who I did manage to talk to, few were willing to put me in touch with others. Instead, they directed me back to the President of their departmental Qur'anic Teacher's Association in Pikine. This person was able to put me in contact with four *sëriñ daaras* within his association who were willing to talk to me, and he purposefully selected *daaras* which had experienced varying degrees of engagement with NGOs. This approach does raise challenges related to the role of a gatekeeper in selecting the sample. It is possible that the association president deliberately selected the *sëriñ daaras* to put me in contact with based on the responses that he thought that they would give me, however given the range of responses that these *sëriñs* did give in practice, and the range of *daaras* this allowed us to visit, I am inclined to believe that his selection was more based upon providing access to people that he knew would offer a variety of viewpoints. The feasibility of this being the case is reinforced by the fact that the association president is well acquainted with research procedures, as he is regularly cited in NGO reports and other research.

I also had the impression that current events in Senegal related to the *daara* modernisation project – discussed in detail in Chapter Seven - also discouraged people from putting me in contact with *sëriñ daaras*. At the time of my fieldwork, the bill of law drafted in collaboration with FNAECS through this project had been approved by the *sëriñ daaras* and religious leaders and was waiting to be approved by government and made into law. I felt that certain actors were concerned that I may somehow cause problems through discussion with the *sëriñ daaras*. I particularly had this impression because these access issues extended into my search for documents: two different state structures involved in drafting the bill of law declined to share a copy of the bill, although I was later given it by an NGO contact who had themselves received it from their own NGO partner. There are several possible explanations for the unwillingness of state structures to share the document: it is the result of a very long process, and

considered to be a particularly sensitive subject, besides it could be speculated that those who were speaking to me lacked the permission of their supervisors to share it.

It may be noticed that I do not differentiate between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ *sëriñ daaras* among those I interviewed, regardless of the conditions in their *daaras* or the presence of begging among their *talibés*. In part due to a constructivist stance that considers *both* categories of ‘real’ and ‘fake’ to be socially constructed, this is also in part due to the sampling method used: I reached the majority of the *sëriñ daaras* through Qur’anic Teachers Associations, and, similarly, others through contacts who put me in touch on the basis that they were *sëriñ daaras*. Both paths confirm that those I spoke to are perceived as legitimate *sëriñ daaras* by their communities, even if some (certainly not all) could potentially fit some of the credentials used to describe the ‘so-called Qur’anic teachers’, as discussed in Chapter Five. The latter judgement, as this thesis will argue, depends on the boundaries set around this constructed social category, and the *daaras* I visited were far from the most extreme cases of outright exploitation - by which I mean, even in those where *talibés* beg there was evidence of Qur’anic teaching taking place as well. As no one could (or, perhaps, would) identify any individual ‘fake’ *sëriñ*, this is not included as a separate category of respondent. Some may also question the morality of interviewing those who are responsible for child rights violations (here I include all of those *sëriñs* whose *talibés* beg) - yet as Choi-Fitzpatrick (2017) states in his study of slaveholders in South Asia, too often policies are made which target the behaviours of a group portrayed as perpetrators of rights violations without adequate investigation into the motives, attitudes and beliefs of that group.

As a final point on sampling, it may also be worth noting that the large majority of the participants were male. This was to be expected for the religious teachers and imams, but the gender split was somewhat surprising to me when it came to NGO and government respondents. However this may in fact be representative of the sector in question - when I observed a High Level Planning Meeting (planning for the child protection section of the next phase of the national Strategic Plan), the chair commented on the small number of women in the room, joking that it was acceptable only because the minister (referring to Ndèye Ramatoulaye Guèye Diop who was not herself present) is female.

Despite these challenges in accessing as many participants as I would have liked, I was able to reach a wide range of local organisations, national and international NGOs, government structures, religious organisations, and daaras representing a wide spectrum of experiences for their talibés. I will now turn to discuss this data collection in more detail.

4.3.2 Interviews

Interviewing was selected as the main method for primary data collection. In total I conducted 60 semi-structured interviews with 68 participants:

- 36 NGO/association staff (24 from Senegalese NGOs/associations and 10 from INGOs, and 2 project coordinators for the Zero Mendicité project¹¹). This category includes thematic specialists as well as senior level staff. I have not specified the names of NGOs in order to maintain anonymity
- 10 imams/Qur’anic teachers (including representatives of the national Association of Imams and Ulemas, and of two Qur’anic Teachers Associations [one regional, one departmental level])
- 8 government structure representatives
- 5 UN/development agency staff
- 8 ndeyu daara (literally ‘daara mother’, women who volunteer to provide services such as laundry and cleaning to local daaras, and emotional support for talibés)

It should be noted that these categories are not exclusive - just as I, as a researcher have multiple identities (discussed below), so too do the participants. For example, some of the NGO staff interviewed also hold the title of imam. I have categorised these people according to the context in which I interviewed them.

Categories	No. of respondents	Structures
	8	CAPE
		CNLTP

¹¹ I am not sure whether the project staff are technically employed by USAID or whether a Senegalese organisation was registered for the purposes of the project, so have categorised these respondents separately.

State officials and senior staff of state structures and projects (including one former state official)		Inspection des daaras (MEN)
		Direction de la Protection de l'Enfance (MBGPE)
		Ex-Directeur des Droits des Enfants
		DPDE
		PAMOD
Senior international institution staff	5	OHCDH
		UNICEF
		UNODC
		World Bank
Senior INGO staff	10	
Local/national associations/NGO (including welcome centres) staff	24	
Religious organisation secretary general	1	ANIOS
Bilateral aid organisation staff	1	USAID
<i>Zéro mendicité</i> project coordinators	2	
Sëriñ daara/Qur'anic teacher	9	
Ndeyu daara	8	
Total	68	

Table 2 Table of participants

I have not included in this list people with whom relevant casual conversations were had that may have informed my thinking, but who did not know about my research or consent to be interviewed.

A flexible framework was used to guide the discussions (see Appendix 3), but interview questions were adapted depending on the role of the interviewee both before and during the conversations, allowing me to present themes but maintain the flexibility to follow up “whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee” (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 19). Most of the interviews were around one hour in length. The majority of interviewees were happy for the interviews to be audio recorded digitally with a dictaphone, while a small number preferred not to be recorded, and in a few other cases, conditions were not appropriate for recording (for example, meeting in an office where other conversations were happening simultaneously). Whether or not interviews were

recorded, I took extensive notes to aid transcription, as conditions were rarely quiet enough to ensure flawless recordings. In these notes I also noted non-verbal cues such as when a participant was smiling or shaking their head, or to explain if a silence was due to them, for example, looking at papers or simply pausing. Many participants answered phone calls or made conversation with colleagues who entered their office during these conversations, at which points I would pause the recorder.

The eight ndeyu daara were interviewed in a group, which I had hoped would allow the participants to “discuss, argue and justify their opinions and attitudes” on themes presented (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 26). However, as the women in question consisted of a “naturally occurring” group - they knew each other through their work in the daaras - there were unanticipated issues of hierarchy which seemed to direct the discussion (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300) and I found that there was enthusiastic consensus rather than discussion. Other interviews were conducted with individuals or, in five cases, pairs of colleagues. Most of the participants were interviewed only once, but four were revisited to discuss initial findings and further questions.

4.3.3 *Translation*

Apart from those interviews conducted in daaras with sëriñ daaras, all interviews were conducted in French. The excerpts of interviews quoted in this thesis are translated from French by me, unless otherwise stated. The interviews that took place in daaras were conducted in Wolof with translation and transcription assistance from Babacar Sidibe.¹²

Babacar volunteered himself to work as my translator when I asked him if he knew of any students who might be interested in working with me. Babacar, who I had interviewed in November 2017 in relation to his work with a local association, Art Xale Yi, had already set up several interviews for me in other associations that he or his contacts worked in. He was therefore familiar with the purpose of my research and the kind of questions to be discussed in interviews already. Babacar describes himself as a freelance development agent, he has experience working with international NGOs and

¹² Babacar requested that I use his full name.

various local associations as well as freelance work. I paid Babacar for his time at an agreed rate per interview and reimbursed travel costs. Babacar accompanied me to almost all of the interviews held in daaras, as well as to one NGO contact as I was unsure of how to find the location. For most participants speaking in Wolof I was able to understand the main points being made myself and took notes to be filled in by Babacar's translations. If I was unclear about something that was said, I would ask for clarification from Babacar.

Working with a male translator did come with one drawback when he accompanied me to a Qur'an recital competition where children were individually tested on their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities before the competition began. Because the event took place in a religious building (a Franco-Arabe school), women and men were separated. Nevertheless, Babacar managed to whisper translations of the rights and responsibilities demonstrations across the aisle, and I recorded the relevant parts of the day with my recorder.

Analysis on interviews was conducted using the French recordings and transcripts in order to keep the participants' wordings, with only quotes used in the thesis eventually translated.

4.3.4 *Observation*

As well as conducting interviews, I made field notes based on observations. These notes covered both observations of the physical environment in the daaras in which I met sëriñ daaras, where children were sometimes present, as well as various events that I was invited to attend by NGO and other contacts:

- High Level Planning Session on child protection, attended by representatives of government ministries and structures as well as international institutions and large INGOs
- Talibé health check and awareness raising activity in a daara and the surrounding neighbourhood (Ouest Foire) with local NGO
- Art-based advocacy event organised by a different local association in Grand Dakar
- Qur'an recital competition held in a Franco-Arabe school in Pikine

- Seminar on children’s rights in Islam (led by a local NGO and imams) in Pikine
- Welcome centre recreational activity for talibés and other disadvantaged children in Saint Louis.

My level of participation during some of these observations can be described as “passive” (in the case of being a bystander at public events) but more often “moderate” participation, on the scale adapted from Spradley (1980) by DeWalt and DeWalt (2002, pp. 18–19). That is, in most cases, I was identifiable (and introduced) as a researcher but was mainly present to observe rather than to interact with participants.

In addition to these events, in total I was able to visit 14 daaras (12 in Dakar/Rufisque and two in Saint Louis). The conditions in these daaras varied dramatically. For reasons discussed below, I did not take photos during these visits. Instead, I wrote descriptions upon my return from the daaras. Such field notes can be considered as examples of ethnographic “thick description”, imbued with interpretations of the scene pictured (Geertz, 1973).

4.3.5 *Document analysis*

As well as conducting interviews and conducting observations, in order to add rigour to the study I triangulated my findings through analysis of documents shared with me by NGO and government contacts, gathered from resource centres and libraries, and the media. From NGO participants I was given access to project reports and evaluations, situation reports and strategies, and other documents used within the implementation of projects. From state participants I received official plans, strategies, and reports.

As well as documentation gathered from contacts, I also consulted the *Centre de Documentation* (Resource centre) housed within the National Archives in Senegal. While the archives house colonial era documents, the resource centre is supposed to house post-independence documentation. As, unlike the archival documents, there is no catalogue of what dossiers are available in the Centre de documentation, I followed the archivist’s directions and consulted first the ‘daara dossier’, which contained just 62 documents, all but six of them newspaper clippings which appear to have been added sporadically since 1988. The other six documents were one UNICEF leaflet outlining their programmes on theme of talibés and daaras for 1997–2001, one edition of ENDA

Tiers Monde's *Jeuda* series, one edition of *Njariñu Daara* published by the modern daara Institut Ahmed Sakhir Lo in Boune, and two government decrees, of which one refers to the opening of the Islamic Institute in Dakar, and one refers to the harmonisation of an Arab language school diploma with the French language diploma. I also consulted the 'UN dossier' where there was only one news article briefly mentioning talibés.

I also gathered press and media articles related to talibés. The majority of the articles collected come from state-owned and pro-government newspaper *Le Soleil*, largely because daily editions are available online dating back to 2012. *Le Soleil* is published six days a week (except on holidays) with occasional special issues, and I gathered articles daily for the period of 2017-18 (searching each issue for the same set of terms), as well as identifying dates in earlier years when I was aware that significant events had taken place. As a state-owned newspaper, these articles allowed me to keep track in a timely manner of developments in the government's actions relevant to the issue, for example the introduction of the post of Minister of Good Governance and Child Protection in September 2017 or the approval by the Conseil des ministres of the modernisation bill in June 2018. In addition to articles from *Le Soleil*, I also gathered articles from independent daily newspaper *Le Quotidien*. This was less systematic as only selected articles are available on the newspaper's website. These newspaper articles were also supplemented by articles flagged through Google Alerts established for the search terms "daara" and "talibé". The theme of talibés and daaras broadly appear regularly in the Senegalese media: every week there are a few mentions. Many of these are related to donations made to daaras or activities taking place in a particular daara, while articles related to either begging or modernisation come up less often.

In keeping with the constructionist epistemology underpinning this research, as with other forms of data, documentation – including images as well as text - and news articles are assumed to be part of a particular narrative, representing one construction of reality rather than the reality itself. In the words of Tania Murray Li (2007, p. 123), analysing documents related to particular projects is also useful for the purposes of illuminating gaps: "gaps between one document and the next, gaps between the world conveyed in the texts and the world to be transformed, and gaps between what the programs proposed and what they delivered". The publicly available reports regularly produced

by Human Rights Watch in particular, allow for the examination of what aspects of the narrative are emphasised by international NGOs and which are silenced.

4.4 Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo. I first coded interview data descriptively, allowing me to identify excerpts pertaining to, for example, the three approaches covered in this thesis. I then conducted analytical coding both ‘within’ and ‘across’ these cases (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015), using a combination of codes originating from the literature (allowing me, for example, to identify examples of the different discourses) and new codes emanating from the data itself. I also coded NGO and government documents using the same codes.

In order to operationalise the research question related to problematisation, my analysis was guided by the questions contained within the ‘What is the problem represented to be’ (WPR) approach developed by Carol Bacchi (Bacchi, 2009, 2012). Working from the basis that the policy-making process itself shapes problems, rather than policies being developed to solve problems that exist in a society exogenous to the policy-making process (Bacchi, 2009), Bacchi offers a series of questions to guide analysis:

- “1. What’s the ‘problem’ [...] represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the ‘problem’?
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the ‘problem’?
6. How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?” (Bacchi, 2009, p. xii)

Bacchi does not apply this approach to interviews (because interviews are not “prescriptive” texts in the same way as policy documents (Bacchi, 2021) but has recently developed a ‘sister’ approach to WPR, namely post-structural interview analysis, to

allow the same type of analysis to be conducted on interview data (Bacchi and Bonham, 2016). This approach directs focus towards not only what is but what *can be* said, demands attention to how interviewees constitute themselves as subjects and position themselves against others, and requires recognition of the interviewer's role in shaping the interview text (Bacchi and Bonham, 2016). Drawing inspiration from this approach, rather than following it exactly, helped me to consider questions related to problematisation and discourse.

4.5 Ethics, positionality, and reflexivity

4.5.1 Consent and anonymity

I received informed consent, in writing or verbally when preferred. In the case of the *sëriñ daaras* and *ndeyu daaras*, I went straight to verbal consent as the form was in French, which they did not speak fluently. During the process of seeking consent I explained the conditions of anonymity. Unexpectedly, many of the people I interviewed asked me to use their names when quoting them. Some NGO staff pointed out that as their roles include advocacy work, they have nothing to hide. Regarding the Qur'anic teachers, some interrupted Babacar when he was translating the consent process to ask why I was not going to use their names, and to tell me to do so. I therefore recorded on the consent forms when participants would prefer for me to use their names. In some cases, participants asked me to use their names and then asked me not to quote them on a specific sentence or idea, while others asked me to use their names but make clear they are not speaking in the name of their organisation. Others preferred to be anonymous but have their organisation named. In only one case, the participants asked to see a transcript of the interview before being cited. Interview recordings and transcripts were kept securely and separately from participant's contact information. Participants were given the opportunity to ask me any questions they had both at the beginning and the end of the interview, and were free to withdraw their consent at any time. For clarity, I have not designated pseudonyms to those who wished to be anonymous, but rather simply refer to them by their position. In addition, I have not attributed any quotes that may be damaging to the person speaking, for example criticising their employer.

An unexpected ethical issue related to consent in terms of what people would choose to tell me, a foreign researcher, spawned from the fact that I understand more Wolof than most participants would assume. On several occasions, while interviewing a participant they would be interrupted in person or on the phone and would continue to have a conversation in Wolof which, presumably, they did not realise I would understand. Most times that this happened, the ensuing conversation was not relevant to my study, but on a couple of occasions I overheard something that I could not be sure the participant wanted me to know. None of this information is quoted in this thesis, but, since I could not ‘unknow’ what I overheard, it did inform other questions or was able to be confirmed by other participants.

4.5.2 Reciprocity

I did not pay informants for interviews in money nor in kind. Aside from the *sëriñ daaras*, this was not questioned by respondents except in one case, in which one local NGO in Saint Louis explained before the interview that they have put in place a fee for researchers and other outsiders because they have had many students take photos of their welcome centre and then profit from them. They asked for a sum equivalent to 50 euros. However, when I apologised and said I was unable to offer any funding, but also that I would not be taking any photos, the respondent said it was not a problem as long as I would follow them on social media, which I was happy to do.

As for the *sëriñ daaras*, at the time of conducting the interviews when it was explained to them the purpose of the research and that they would not benefit directly, none objected. Several did ask, when given the opportunity to ask me any additional questions at the end of the interview, if I would keep them in mind if I came across any opportunities for funding. I explained again that I was not connected to any NGO and reiterated the purpose of the research, to which they seemed satisfied. However, it later transpired that Babacar was receiving calls asking him if we had found any funding for them despite our repeated explanations. We also had only one case in which a contact who Babacar called, having received the number from another Qur’anic teacher, declined to be interviewed without payment. I discussed this with Babacar who is experienced in conducting research in this context, and he agreed that it is better not to give money as this may alter the responses. I also felt that as I had not given earlier

informants anything, it could cause problems to give to some and not others, since several of them were members of the same Qur'anic Teachers Association.

4.5.3 *Excluding children*

This research did not include children themselves as participants. This was a conscious decision made before I began field research. There are several reasons for this decision. The first is that this study did not seek to describe the lived experiences of talibé children's everyday lives. There are pre-existing studies which have done this, including NGO reports such as the frequent Human Rights Watch reports (Wells, 2010, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Seibert, 2016, 2017, 2019a, 2019b) and those of other NGOs (Save the Children International, 2021) as well as academic research (such as Ballet, Bhukuth and Hamzetta, 2012).

Rather than uncritically assuming that child participation would be beneficial, therefore, I followed a harm-benefit analysis as outlined by Alderson and Morrow (2011) to conclude that repeating this research about the conditions of talibés' lives would not be adequately justifiable, as participating in such a study would be of little direct benefit and may well put boys' emotional, and perhaps physical, wellbeing at risk. As Chehami (2013b) has demonstrated, there are logistical as well as ethical difficulties in conducting research with current talibés, such as being unable to speak to the boys without the consent of their *sëriñ daara*, who in many cases is the very person accused of violating their rights, and may therefore either seek to control or unconsciously influence the children's responses. Elsewhere, innovative attempts have been made to overcome these challenges in order to include Qur'anic school students' voices in research. For example, in Nigeria, Hoechner (2018) involved Qur'anic school students in filmmaking in order to gain access and amplify the boys' voices. For my study, however, participatory approaches such as Hoechner's would not be appropriate for the research questions to be answered. In the Senegalese context, talibés themselves have no influence over the policies and programmes set up in the name of improving their lives. As Lahti (Thiam, 2014, p. 16) put it, children's voices are "muted" in the "aid frenzy" that surrounds them. Where talibé children are interviewed or included in research, particularly for NGO reports, their voices are instrumentalised for the purposes of the researcher. Given that my research questions were focused on NGO and government policy and actions, I

decided not to include children in the research, thus removing any risk of harm to the talibés.

Despite making the decision not to involve children as participants in the research, before departing on fieldwork I nevertheless obtained a full Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check demonstrating a clean record which would be required were plans to change while I was in Senegal, and because I was going to be around vulnerable children in daaras and welcome centres even if not interviewing them directly.

4.5.4 Reflexivity and positionality

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, I have approached this research from a constructionist standpoint in which social realities are understood to be co-created and (re)interpreted through discourse. This also suggests the belief that the researcher cannot be an objective observer as “one cannot very well taint knowledge if that knowledge is not conceived as existing in some pure form apart from the circumstances of its production” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002, p. 15). Accepting the role of the researcher in influencing or co-constructing interview data, it is necessary to reflect upon my position and bias and their impact for the research findings (Finlay, 2002; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Rather than striving for an unattainable goal of complete objectivity, I have sought to achieve “objectivity about subjectivity” (Brinkmann, 2013, pp. 142–143), making reflexive analysis essential throughout the research process, including both data collection and interpretation (Bailey, 2018). A social constructionist conception of reflexivity requires the researcher to “examine the impact of the researcher and participants on each other and on the research” (Finlay, 2002, p. 535).

For Bailey (2018, p. 6), what participants will tell or show to a researcher is determined in part by the researcher’s “history, personality, values, training, and status characteristics—gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and social class”. Data from interviews in particular can be considered as a “reflection of the social encounter between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Rapley, 2004, p. 16). Though I cannot know exactly what participants thought of me, the conception of me as an outsider was explicitly evident when many participants would employ the word ‘vous’ (you – in plural or polite form) during interviews. Depending on the speaker and the context of what they were saying, they were variously referring to me (as an individual, using the polite

form in French, heard much less frequently in Senegal than in France), to NGO workers, to researchers or students, to westerners or Europeans or Brits or Scots, to people perceived to have money, to non-Muslims, to women, or to white people. At times I was unclear exactly which of these groups or identities was being referenced. It is clear however that there are several status characteristics that position me as an outsider, most obviously the fact that I am a *toubab*, or white person.

While some researchers have identified potential benefits for access of doing research in other cultures, such as curiosity about the researcher leading people to want to participate (Merriam *et al.*, 2001), I felt more keenly that assumptions about my intentions, affiliations or beliefs may have added to hesitations to put me in contact with Qur'anic teachers in particular. These hesitations are perhaps not unfounded: one Qur'anic teacher, who did participate in the research, informed me that he had previously declared that no more white people would be allowed in his daara, but that he would make an exception for me because I had come with Babacar. Although this obvious outsider status can never be removed, I took the steps possible to mitigate assumptions in some small way, such as using traditional greetings and dressing modestly. Although I am not religious, I covered my head loosely when in daaras and other religious spaces, having consulted with Babacar who confirmed that this would be 'better' if not strictly necessary. I intentionally sought out a male, Muslim translator in the hope that this would help to mitigate against some of the traits that may have set me apart as an outsider.

However, it is overly simplistic to say that because I am white and not Senegalese, or Muslim, that I was always seen as an outsider in interviews. Rejecting the insider-outsider dichotomy, Hellawell (2006, p. 490) refers to "a multiple series of parallel" continua along which the researcher is simultaneously more or less of an insider or outsider in different dimensions of research. I reflected during my fieldwork upon how I shared much more in common with some participants than with others, in ways which may have affected the interviews. Of course, in international NGOs, staff are used to international (*toubab*) colleagues, and are generally themselves university educated so are more familiar with research processes. In the majority of local NGOs, most have engaged with international volunteers or colleagues in other bigger NGOs. Reflecting

upon her experiences of conducting research in a hospice as a nurse, Arber (2006, p. 148) describes how one can “feel at home” in a particular professional world that one has come from and is now researching and having to balance dual identities as a result. As my background is in NGO work in Dakar, many NGO participants knew my former colleagues personally, as many of them had worked together in other organisations in the past. This link often seemed to break the ice with these participants. In these cases, I was still not an insider, certainly, but perhaps a less distant outsider.

I also at times felt that I had to manage assumptions based on my different identities depending on the person to whom I was speaking, not concealing any parts of my identity but more or less strongly emphasising it. Whereas NGO workers seemed to open up when they learned I had previously worked for an NGO in Dakar, when speaking to Qur’anic teachers, I found myself taking actions to differentiate myself as far as possible from NGO staff and emphasise my current role as researcher. My main motivation for doing this was to try to ensure that they understood that I could not find funding for their daaras, as discussed in the reciprocity section above, but I also wanted to distance myself from organisations that were not always seen positively among the Qur’anic teachers, in order to encourage them to voice these criticisms freely. One particular strategy that I took to differentiate myself was that I did not take photos of the daaras. This was a conscious decision, motivated partly by concerns around consent (when children were present during my visit) and partly by my desire to differentiate myself as a researcher from the NGOs that many of the Qur’anic teachers described as having visited them, asked their needs, taken photos of the poor conditions which the *sëriñs* believe were used to gain funds for the NGO, and then never returned. Despite this, at times some assumptions that participants held about my beliefs were made explicitly, and other times I interpreted as implied (perhaps revealing my own insecurities as much as assumptions made by others) - such as the assertion that I must believe all children should be in western-style schooling - which may have had an impact on what the participants chose to tell me.

Reflection on my own positionality did not end once my fieldwork was complete. While writing up this thesis I was also working part-time for a small NGO in London, once again positioning me as part-practitioner, part-researcher. This work in the street-

connected children sector means that issues such as the “double bind” in which NGO workers find themselves – forced by the discourse to oversimplify complex issues (Timmer, 2010) – resonate particularly strongly with me. I believe that the repercussions of this position can be sensed throughout the research, as I separate a sympathetic understanding of individual NGO workers (and indeed the staff of government projects) and the constraints they face from a critical view of the structures and processes of the development industry.

To conclude this reflexive analysis, in my relationship with research participants I also identify strongly with what England (1994, p. 243) refers to as the “researcher-as-suppliant”. That is, I explicitly acknowledge - both here and in conversations with research participants and others in the field - that the “knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than” my own and that I, as a researcher, am reliant on the participation of these experts (England, 1994, p. 243).

4.6 Limitations

The sample identified in this research was not representative, and so the views expressed here cannot be generalised amongst all *sériñ daaras* or all NGO workers, for example. The absence of children’s views, while appropriate for the specific research questions addressed by this project, leaves space for future work with the children intended to benefit from the approaches discussed here, building on the work of other such as Boiro and Einarstóddir (2020) who have spoken to children previously returned to their home communities by NGOs.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the research design and reasoning behind the methods used. I have reflected upon my own position as a researcher and the consequences of this for the research, and discussed ethical considerations particular to this study. I now move on to Part Two of the thesis in which I present the findings of the research.

PART TWO

Problematism, discourses and dynamics

The remaining chapters of this thesis draw on the findings of my fieldwork in Senegal to address the research questions. In the next two chapters, making up Part Two, I present findings on the discourses that guide policy and action towards the daaras and talibés, and the dynamics that both influence and result from how these discourses play out on the ground.

CHAPTER FIVE

Victims and Villains: Narratives about talibés, their sërïñ daaras, and their parents

5.1 Introduction

As a simple internet search will confirm, there is far more visible focus among development actors and media alike on talibés who beg than on other street-connected children in Senegal, be they children who sell water and or snacks around transport hubs, children who beg with family members, or children who live full-time on the streets. Likewise, it is immediately clear that talibés have become inextricably linked in the discourse to the practice of begging, with those talibés who do not beg given far less attention. It is, therefore, the category of ‘talibés who beg’ that has become the target for the majority of development activity.

The construction of problems for development intervention necessarily requires narratives to be produced about people’s lives in order to sort them into certain social categories, including victims (who frequently become ‘target beneficiaries’) and villains (who are blamed for the problems to be solved). In this chapter I explore the construction of talibés who beg as a distinct (but fluid) group to be targeted, and the adults who feature in narratives of their lives. Coming from a social constructionist standpoint, this thesis is interested in how categories are constructed in discourse, and in the implications of these constructed categories. As such, it does not seek to definitively answer the question of who is or is not a talibé, or who is or is not a legitimate (or fraudulent) Qur’anic teacher, given that these categories are, like all other categories into which human beings sort each other and ourselves, constructed, reproduced, and reconstructed. Instead, the chapter interrogates the boundaries of these categories, considering who they include or exclude in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of the simplified narratives that underpin them. In doing so, it finds that the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable neither fixed in the same place by

all stakeholders at all times nor made using the same criteria. Attempting to delineate this boundary reveals its porous and capricious nature.

The chapter contributes to understandings of the construction of the victims and villains in the narratives about talibés' lives. Chehami (2013b) has discussed in depth the different functions of various kinds of begging in Senegalese society and how talibés and other street-connected children are perceived. This chapter problematises these categories, focusing on how they are imposed upon children based on assumptions about the form and meaning of begging, and about the role of adults in the children's lives. I draw attention to the "double bind" (Timmer, 2010) of those who work in the sector in Senegal, who recognise the inadequacy of the categories but have no option but to reproduce them.

Turning next to the villain of the narrative, the chapter then builds upon the work of Lahti (Thiam, 2014) who identifies the 'faux marabout' character and the overarching discourses to which these narratives are attached, to discuss how *sëriñ daaras* are differentiated, and how they differentiate themselves, from the supposed imposters. It explains that, again, this discursive differentiation is linked to differing narratives about the practice of begging, and has benefits for *sëriñ daaras* as well as justifying NGO programming as Lahti argued (Thiam, 2014). This is then contrasted with an alternative framing, present in the reports published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) which presents all begging as unacceptable, abusive, and exploitative by entirely dissociating begging from religion.

In the final section of the chapter, I further demonstrate how the oversimplified narratives and dichotomous constructions of victims and villains gloss over the complexities of the issue. I do this by introducing other characters, often absent from or given only a fleeting role in the narratives about talibés, who cannot be categorised as either victims or villains. Firstly, the *grand talibés* are introduced, older boys who have aged out of begging and unknowingly made the leap from 'victim' to 'villain' in the narratives of NGOs as a result. Secondly, I consider narratives about talibés' parents. While the literature (Perry, 2004; Ware, 2014; Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016) claims that parents' agency is minimised in narratives about their children's life in urban *daaras*, I

argue that this is not always this case, and that parents can equally be framed as either actively abdicating responsibility or complicit with exploitative *sëriñ daaras*.

5.2 Construction of ‘talibés who beg’ as victims

This section discusses four categories of children relevant to the topic of this thesis, between which the boundaries are not always clear. These groups are: 1) talibés who do not beg, 2) *fàqman*, children who live full-time in the street, many of whom are former talibés, 3) talibés who beg and (are assumed to) also learn the Qur’an, and 4) boys who beg but do (it is assumed) *not* learn the Qur’an, who are also referred to as talibés. To understand the narratives that exist around talibés who beg (the third and fourth categories), I will first consider who this boundary around ‘talibé who begs’ excludes. While it may seem counter-intuitive to begin by discussing who the talibés are not, this is helpful for identifying where the category begins and ends. This exercise helps us to see that the category of ‘talibés who beg’ is more complex than it may at first appear, in fact covering a wide spectrum of children’s experiences with distinctions between them made based on assumptions made about their begging.

5.2.1 *A focus on begging, excluding talibés who do not beg*

Not all children studying the Qur’an in West Africa, as elsewhere, beg. Today, almost all NGO reports and many media reports about talibés (who beg) begin with such a disclaimer, as if this is all we need to know about the many who study the Qur’an without engaging in begging. Their teachers, too, are often accorded just a brief disclaimer, such as the reminder in Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that the abusive situations documented are “in contrast to the many other Quranic teachers who respect the rights of the children in their care” (Seibert, 2019b, p. 1). Instead, such reports tend to make only fleeting reference – just as I have here – to the fact that not all talibés beg or suffer abuse, before continuing to focus on those who beg.

An emphasis on begging is a defining feature of the discourse through which talibés have been constructed as targets for development interventions and national policies. Begging has been centralised in this discourse to the extent that the term talibé has sometimes been mistranslated as street child(ren) or child beggars (for example in the World Bank’s Toolkit on how to Support Orphans and Vulnerable Children [World

Bank Africa Region and World Bank Institute, 2005]) or, in French, “*enfants mendiants*” (for example, Maillard, 2019). For example:

In Senegal, thousands of children live in a condition of modern-day slavery and are forced to beg on the street daily in order to survive. These children are known as talibés, or street children, and usually are young boys ranging in age from 5 to 15 years old. (Osok, 2016)

That many organisations’ public or (prospective) donor-facing communications do nowadays give passing recognition to the many talibés who do not beg, however, is indicative of the fact that the organisations are not unaware of the complexity but rather are actively and consciously glossing over it. To dwell on these intricacies would require organisations to shatter the illusion of a homogenous group of needy children that is required in order to legitimise their interventions and seek funding (Timmer, 2010).

Clearly, organisations such as HRW whose *raison d’être* is to document human rights abuses would not be expected to concentrate on the circumstances of the many children who are learning the Qur’an in perfectly acceptable conditions. There remains, however, a need to unpack the focus of the development sector on begging in particular, in recognition of the fact that the construction of begging as the ‘problem’ to be addressed is not inevitable. The poverty and extreme cases of abuse of talibés who beg are described in lurid detail in many NGO publications and communications materials, for example in the reports regularly published by HRW (Wells, 2010, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Seibert, 2016, 2017, 2019b, 2019a). This tendency to present the talibés’ suffering in such graphic, sometimes gratuitous, detail is also evident in the media, with both international and Senegalese (where there is often little or no attempt to disguise the child’s identity) press outlets using photographs designed to shock alongside graphic descriptions of abuse. In such reports, other abuses are linked to the practice of begging, and often to the imposition of quotas specifically. As a result, whether a talibé does or does not (or rather is assumed to or not to) beg has become a proxy measure for whether he is living in adequate conditions, treated according to his best interests, or receiving even the Qur’anic education he is assumed to be, not to speak of any additional teaching.

NGOs claim that their focus on ‘forced’ begging, as it is generally described, is legitimate because it is assumed that these children who beg are also subjected to other, less visible abuses. We see this in the response of Mamadou Wane, Coordinator of *the Plateforme pour la Promotion des Droits de l’Homme* (PPDH), a coalition of organisations that, despite the broad focus suggested by their name, works purely on the issue of talibés. Asked why this was chosen as the focus, Mr Wane explained:

[...] this problem for children, children obliged to beg, forced to beg [...] it’s what we call the accumulation of violations of child rights. More than 90% weren’t registered at birth so don’t have recognition of their right to an identity. It’s the children who are obliged to find something to eat for themselves, who don’t have access to healthcare, who suffer terrible mistreatment, corporal discipline, who often, when they don’t bring money are beaten, are chained up. When they want to leave, they flee [stutters]... sexual violence, sexual abuse [...] the conditions in which the children find themselves, they sleep on the floor itself, they can go two months with only one outfit, they walk barefoot. Why, it’s extraordinary! Even when it’s cold, they don’t have blankets. So, it’s an accumulation. If you don’t manage to, if society doesn’t mobilise itself to resolve this problem, there is no point in taking on other problems.

(Interview. Mamadou Wane, Coordinator of PPDH. Dakar, 13th November 2017)

This framing of begging as the visible manifestation of rights violations that are assumed to be occurring beyond the public setting of the street serves to decouple talibés who beg from any form of Qur’anic schooling which is considered legitimate or acceptable in the eyes of development organisations and the state. However, the talibés are also distinguished from other street-connected children, a distinction to which I now turn.

5.2.2 *A focus on talibés, excluding other children who beg*

Just as not all talibés beg, not all children who beg in Senegal are talibés. Another group lurking in the silences of the discourse is all the children who beg or work on the streets but who are not talibés, and so are not the main target group for many of the NGOs and INGOs working in Senegal’s cities. Talibés (who beg) are discursively distinguished from these other categories of children despite the fact that, while on the street, talibés who beg cannot necessarily be distinguished from other begging boys (girls would not be

mistaken for talibés) by observation alone. Necessarily, then, it is the narratives about these children and the form and meaning of their begging that are used to construct them as a distinct group.

While on the street, Imam Diene, Secretary General of the National Association of Imams and Ulemas (ANIOS) described how people, including those who give alms to the children, cannot tell the difference between the talibés and others:

Oh, all the street children are not talibés, but it's difficult to identify them. [...] There are those who come from the sub-region, there are those who come from the regions like Kolda and elsewhere, where people send their children to Dakar, where the children beg, and give them back, send them back money to the village. So them, they're working. But those who are in - the talibés - in the real sense of the word, they have the same get-up, the same age, the same... the same way of doing, because in begging, there is no distinction.

(Interview. Imam Oumar Diene, Secretary General of ANIOS. Dakar, 25 July 2018)

For Imam Diene, those who give money to children who beg are motivated by pity to give to “a child who is dirty, badly dressed, and who... presents as poor”, whether that is because they are “thinking that they are poor people, or rather thinking that they are learners.” Thus, although there are, as Chehami (2013b, 2013a) has identified, several different forms of begging in Islam which provide the almsgiver with different motivations and fulfil different functions, Imam Diene suggests that in practice what a child's circumstances are may not matter too much to most urban residents when they are in the process of donating money or objects to a begging child.

Nevertheless, even though they cannot be distinguished on sight, talibés who beg are constructed as a particular sub-group of children who beg (or ‘street children’) and are represented differently from these other children (who are largely ignored in the discourse) as a result. Staff in welcome centres for street-connected children demonstrated this as they described categories of street-connected children to whom they provide support on a drop-in or residential basis or both. One such category is the

fàqman.¹³ The term fàqman (also sometimes spelled *faxman* or *fakhman*) is derived from the Wolof word for “the leaf which comes off the tree and which flies at the will of the wind” (Samu Social Sénégal, 2007, p. 1) and has been defined as a “child [or] adolescent who lives in the street, engaging in delinquency” (Daff and N’Diaye-Correard, 2006, p. 229). The term is often used interchangeably with the French word *fugueur*, meaning runaway. Although these children – most of them boys – are not currently talibés, many are former talibés who have fled their daara: estimates given from staff in the Welcome Centres I interviewed in Dakar of the percentage of children who pass through their centres who had at one stage been in a daara ranged between 60 and 90%. The fàqman receive far less attention from development organisations than those who remain in the category of talibé. Explaining why talibés who beg are a focus area for their organisation, as opposed to other vulnerable children, including fàqman, one INGO specialist describes how the transition of a child from talibé to runaway ‘street child’ involves succumbing to the dangers they are exposed to in the street:

[...] we saw that these children [talibés who beg] easily fall into deviation, as they could be victim to paedophilia, they could also fall prey to people who do drugs, they can themselves become smokers, they can run away, often they leave their daara, they flee, they become street children.

(Interview. NGO Child Protection Specialist. Dakar, 31st October 2017)

The focus on talibés is therefore framed as a strategy of prevention, stopping these children from transitioning to a group that are framed as being somehow beyond saving.

In making this transition through the porous boundary between these categories, the child becomes the object of a different set of assumptions. While the fàqman is portrayed as engaging in criminalised survival behaviours that fall outside of the law, talibés are excluded from these perceptions and granted a different status:

There are no talibé-thieves, because even if they are begging in the street and whatever, there are, there are - the Qur’anic teachers still have a certain control over their talibés. We help, we have fàqman who are

¹³. The other categories reported in interviews include children who beg with their families and children who get lost in the city.

thieves, yes, but they're no longer attached to anyone.

(Interview. Welcome centre staff member. Dakar, 11th January 2018)

This juxtaposition of criminality and control brings to light assumptions made about the talibés themselves. As Diack (2019) found, even those who intervene to support fàqman often take an ambivalent view of them, particularly of those who are engaged in drug-taking or other behaviours that are seen to make working with them a risk. That fàqman are expected to engage in criminal behaviour is in keeping with assumptions made about street children elsewhere in the world due to their presence, considered to be out of place, on the street (Ennew and Swart-Kruger, 2003). Ennew (2003) has argued that one reason why street children are not protected is because they are often seen as asocial or amoral. While this may be true for the fàqman, in contrast these are not labels typically given to the talibés - quite the contrary. Their embodiment of the Qur'an through memorisation provides them with a different status, that of a 'good Muslim' (Chehami, 2013a) or even, as Ware (2014) uses as the title of his book, as 'walking Qu'rans'. In the next section, however, I will demonstrate that this narrative is no longer applied to all children labelled as talibés.

5.2.3 *Talibés and talibés: differentiated by narratives about begging*

The perception of talibés as inherently moral, as opposed to other street-connected children, comes from the belief that begging among talibés is, or at least *was once*, an accepted, even positive, part of their religious education. As discussed in Chapter Two, the practice of begging has been a feature of the daara experience for many years. While Ware (2004, 2014) has demonstrated that begging has always had an economic aspect, others focus on the perceived pedagogical, character-building benefits. One sēriñ daara interviewed in Pikine explained what he saw as the benefits:

Begging makes it so that a child won't have pride - me, when I was seven, I went to the daara, that's why I can endure all difficulties: isolation, hunger, thirst, fatigue. It allows him to economise for himself, to be educated. That's why I initiated begging in my daara.

(Interview. Sēriñ daara, Pikine. 10th May 2018. Translated from Wolof)

As this *sëriñ* believes in the benefits of begging for children's futures, having experienced them himself, I was interested when he went on to say that his *talibés* no longer beg. This would suggest that a positive, or at least not fully negative, opinion of begging does not therefore necessarily lead to its continued practice. When he clarified with more information, however, it became clear that he conceptualises two different kinds of begging:

Honestly, what those children [the *talibés* who were being targeted by the state's Removal of Children from the Street project] are doing is not nice to see. No one can endorse that because you see children begging in the street until midnight, and we say that we are a Muslim country! My children and my *talibés* used to beg but now, thanks to Allah, they don't beg anymore. There are families in the neighbourhood that give them lunch and dinner. But they still go out first thing in the morning, before 9 am they come back to the *daara* to learn.

(Interview. *Sëriñ daara*, Pikine. 10th May 2018. Translated from Wolof)

This is one example of the distinction that is constructed between what are perceived as different forms of begging. The *sëriñ daara* does not consider his *talibés* 'going out' in the morning as begging at all. When he claims to have seen benefits from begging for children, he is not referring to *all* children who beg, or to *all* forms of begging. Rather, he is specifically referring to those *talibé* who beg under a particular set of circumstances, which are then used to differentiate them not only from *fàqman* and other street-connected children but from *other talibés who beg*. When the *sëriñ* quoted above describes the benefits of begging, he situates the practice as being one element of a child's Qur'anic education, a supplemental activity to memorising the holy book. This experience is contrasted with that of children who remain under the control of a Qur'anic teacher (or at least someone purporting to be a Qur'anic teacher) but who beg all day and who do not, it is assumed, learn the Qur'an as a result.

Children perceived to be members of this latter category, however, are still referred to as *talibés*. Moussa Ndoye, Project Coordinator of the Zéro Mendicité Project in Fass-Gueule Tapée-Colobane (the subject of Chapter Nine), described a day in the life of these children who come into central Dakar from the suburbs every morning at sunrise, dumped at a bus station and left to beg and fend for themselves until sundown:

At Colobane station, from 5:30 or 6:30 am, child talibés coming from the peripheries of Dakar pour out of the Ndiaga Ndiaye [minibuses operated as public transport]. And when they arrive, when they arrive, already they know that, when they get out at Colobane, those ones are going to go towards the town hall in Plateau, others are going to go towards the town hall in Medina, others towards Fass-Gueule Tapée-Colobane. Others towards HLM. Others towards Grand Dakar, others towards Point E, others towards Ouakam, to receive alms in those places. And at 5pm, they will come back to Colobane to get back on the cars and leave, return.

(Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Project Coordinator of the Zéro Mendicité Project in Fass-Gueule Tapée-Colobane. Dakar, 29th July 2018)

As they beg all day, it is frequently assumed that these children, are not learning the Qur'an. For example, Aliou Kebe, a development practitioner with experience working for USAID amongst other organisations,¹⁴ estimated that some 80 percent of children in the streets are incapable of reciting the Qur'an "because they aren't learning, in reality, rather they are dumped in the street" (Interview. Aliou Kebe, development practitioner. Dakar, 26th July 2018).

Nevertheless, as a staff member at the Inspection des daaras (Interview, Dakar, 2nd February 2018) put it, "there are talibés, and *talibés*". Despite the apparent contradiction, it is those children who beg all day and are assumed not to be learning the Qur'an at all that have come to be the dominate representation of a talibé used in development discourse. For many, the term 'talibé' automatically conjures up the image of a child with their tomato tin begging bowl in hand, rather than the writing boards used to learn the Qur'an. This contradiction is familiar to those working in development in Senegal. Aliou Kébé, the development practitioner mentioned above, lamented how people (both, he clarified, Senegalese and Westerners) think immediately of begging and mistreatment when they hear the word talibés. He stressed that talibé should mean someone who learns, and therefore "shouldn't be synonymous with begging, it's that perception that must be taken away, that caricature that we have to take away when we

¹⁴ This is how Aliou asked to be described.

speak about talibés.” (Interview. Aliou Kébé, development practitioner. Dakar, 26th July 2018). A staff member at a centre for street-connected children in Dakar expressed similar objections but, when asked if he would prefer to use a different term, he laughed, saying “no! That’s the reality! Talibé! We can say talibé!” (Interview. Anonymous welcome centre staff member. Dakar, 7th December 2017).

The word talibé is therefore often used as shorthand, even by those who recognise that this confounds categories, blurs boundaries, and perpetuates stereotypes. This is an example of the ways in which NGOs’ discourse is constrained by that of their funders and global institutions, leading to a “double bind” whereby on an organisational level they are required to oversimplify situations despite their staff members being well aware of the complex nature of the problems they are describing (Timmer, 2010). Instead of recognising this complexity, the development industry requires the sorting of people into distinct categories of beneficiaries, who are then assumed to be homogenous within these groups (Escobar, 2012; Ramnarain, 2015). This issue is not limited to the case of the talibés, but instead will be familiar to those working with other street-connected children or indeed any other category of “needy subject”, as Timmer (2010) puts it when writing about the construction of Roma need. Having established a group of people as a category for intervention, particular narratives are inferred about the circumstances of the members of these beneficiary groups that then shape the interventions intended to target them.

The common narrative proclaiming that the talibés seen begging all day are not learning the Qur’an – which is challenged by Ware (2014) - sets this group of children apart from those who are seen to beg as an aspect of their religious education. Those who beg and are assumed to be learning the Qur’an are differentiated from those who beg and (it is assumed) do not, though both are labelled as talibés, and the begging that they practice is not portrayed as equal, or as equally exploitative. This differentiation takes place through a discursive process in which different narratives are applied to bring different meanings and judgments to children’s situations. The narratives about the talibés and their begging are therefore inextricable from the narratives about the sèriñ daaras in their lives.

5.3 Construction of villains: (so-called) *sëriñ daaras*

In the above section, I have demonstrated that the category of ‘talibés who beg’ is itself a fluid construction, and one that depends on narratives not only about the children themselves but about the adults who feature so heavily in their lives. I now introduce the *sëriñ daara*, and his shadow, the faux marabout, often cast as the villain in the discourse are talibé begging.

5.3.1 *Spectrum of acceptability of begging as distinction between real and fake sëriñ daaras*

A study commissioned by the *Agence Française de Développement* describes two types of Qur’anic teacher: “those for whom the purpose is teaching the Qur’an and for whom the collection of alms is a means of survival” and “those for whom the collection of alms is a purpose, and Qur’anic teaching a means of capturing these alms” (Lozneau and Humeau, 2014, p. 46 based on Ghiona et al, 2007). This statement encapsulates the two narratives that exist about *sëriñ daaras*: the former, fitting the ‘vulnerable schools’ discourse, explains begging as the necessary result of poverty; the other hints at the financial motivations that are at the centre of the child trafficking narrative. The question is whether these descriptions really refer to ‘two types of Qur’anic teacher’, or instead present two perceptions of the same people.

Lahti (Thiam, 2014, p. 330) is unequivocal in arguing that the faux marabout “does not actually exist”, pointing out that those who meet the criteria of a trafficker as portrayed in the discourse are considered (legitimate) *sëriñ daaras* in practice. I do not dispute this. However, it is important to recognise that the social category of a ‘real’ *sëriñ daara* and their assumed legitimacy is equally socially constructed. In examining the characteristics of this constructed social category, as with that of talibés who beg, I am not seeking to determine who is or is not *in reality* a genuine religious teacher and who may be an impostor. Rather, the aim is to elucidate the ways in which these characters are conjured through discourse and the consequences of this. In the next section, I do so by interrogating how the boundaries separating fake from legitimate Qur’anic teacher, acceptable or tolerable practice from exploitation, and student from abused child, are constituted, and how they remain inconsistent and mutable.

I referred above to how the question of whether or not a child is assumed to be learning the Qur'an makes a difference to how his begging is perceived. This variable is not only dependent on the time that the individual child may spend begging, but on the *baraka* - divine benediction or spiritual power (Chehami, 2013a) - of the person who is supposed to be instructing him in this endeavour. A fundamental characteristic invoked in the portrayal of the typical faux marabout is that he is not capable of providing children with quality religious education: he is assumed to have poor education (here referring to Qur'anic and Islamic learning, with the absence of any other form of education also being implied) himself, may not have even finished memorising the Qur'an and certainly has no further religious teaching. Time and time again in interviews, male NGO workers emphasised that, with a big *boubou*¹⁵ and a copy of the Qur'an, they could easily call themselves a marabout and announce they were opening a daara, no matter their level of religious knowledge:

perhaps I'm going to get up one morning and then go sit myself under the tree over there, go to see the neighbours to say 'come, I'm going to teach your children the Qur'an'. If I'm well [dressed] with a big string of prayer beads, a big turban, they're going to trust me, they're going to give me their child.

(Interview. Child protection specialist, INGO. Dakar, 22nd November 2017)

The idea that any man who looks the part can easily acquire children by adopting the guise of a Qur'anic teacher relies upon the lack of regulation in Qur'anic education sector, but also the meagre religious knowledge of the average person. A lack of knowledge of religious texts among the general population means that anyone can "say, yeah, Islam said... and come out with assertions - that the children must beg because that allows them to learn humility, modesty et cetera" (Interview. INGO child protection specialist. Dakar, 22nd November 2017). This lends itself to the conflation between cultural norms and religious doctrine.

¹⁵ From the Wolof *mbubb*, a traditional West African outfit consisting of shirt, gown and trousers.

The assumed lack of religious education is fundamental to how the faux marabout is differentiated, in the abstract, because it is only very rarely argued (Human Rights Watch being an important exception, as discussed below), that *all* daaras where children beg are run by fraudulent Qur'anic teachers. Rather, *sëriñ* daaras who require children to beg can still be deemed authentic, but the distinction is that in the daaras which are perceived and presented as legitimate, the children are assumed to be receiving Qur'anic education as well as begging. For example, in several of the daaras that I visited, begging was or had been practiced by at least some of the talibés. Their *sëriñ* daaras were not (or at least, not openly) considered by their peers, who referred me to them, to be fraudsters due to the practice of begging. As shown earlier in the chapter, begging in their own daaras is constructed as a necessity due to the lack of funding provided by the state and by parents, with the added benefit of building character. A lack of religious teaching is therefore a necessary component used in narratives to distinguish between begging as a means of funding a child's religious education and begging with the sole purpose of enriching an unscrupulous imposter. Making this distinction emphasises the importance of Qur'anic teaching above other considerations and serves to legitimise the practice of making children beg if it is a means to the end of gaining a religious education.

Commonly, the further that a child's situation is perceived as being from the way in which begging was practiced in the daaras of the past, the more exploitative it is portrayed as being. For example, one INGO staff member shared his own childhood experiences as a talibé several decades earlier:

Where I was born in [another city], in my neighbourhood daara which was two streets away from my house, every Friday we went to collect alms from the houses in my neighbourhood. I knew all of the houses I went into. Everyone knew that I was the son of such and such. But I didn't ask for money, they gave me biscuits, sugar, sweets... but before... when I went, me and my classmates, when we went to do that, you didn't come saying 'sarax sarax' [the phrase repeated by talibés asking for alms today], you came, you recited what you had learnt, the verses that you had mastered, and you tried to do it well, you see, you tried to use your voice to show that you had learnt well... and when it was done, and if we made mistakes, people said 'you children are learning nothing' and they would

go to see the marabout to say ‘your children know nothing’. So you had to be really careful. And when we recited well, people were proud to know, ‘ah, the son of my neighbour,’ because we were a community, ‘ah, the son of such and such, ah, it’s good, he recites the Qur’an well!

(Interview. Child Protection Specialist, INGO. Dakar, 22nd November 2017).

This image of children bringing pride to their community by reciting verses to their neighbours and being rewarded by sugar and sweet treats once a week is contrasted with that of children wandering the streets of Dakar from dawn till dusk today. The same man puts the difference at least in part down to the nature of the city:

You know that in this fight against begging, people aren’t talking about begging in the villages? They’re talking about the begging that happens in towns, where children are in the street for five hours, six hours, they don’t learn the Qur’an, they are tired. It’s money, they need to bring back money.

(Interview. Child Protection Specialist, INGO. Dakar, 22nd November 2017).

This contrast is often based on an urban/rural divide, with the city inherently seen as more dangerous and exploitative than the village, which relates to narratives of tradition and modernity and the idealisation of the rural daaras of the past. The danger, however, is often portrayed not as lying in the busy city streets nor the risks that the act of begging itself brings to a child’s immediate welfare, but in the length of time spent begging which restricts a child’s ability to learn the Qur’an. For Alioune Sarr, then Director of Child Protection, the very act of migrating a daara to Dakar suggest nefarious motivations on the part of a *sëriñ* daara:

That’s why I tease the marabouts who make children beg, I say - originally, people left the centre to go to the rural zones to learn. All of the marabouts left their homes, they went either to the Fouta or the Saloum. It was there that they had the important religious centres, but now what has happened? It’s become the opposite. They leave the Fouta, they leave the Saloum to go to Dakar. But Dakar, up to now with its layout, it’s not an area conducive to learning the Qur’an, because that’s a learning process that requires a lot of serenity, a lot of quiet, it doesn’t

need a lot of disturbance. Often, it's children who can be distracted by the vehicles, by... in the past, they put them in the zones where one could only see sand dunes and huts, where the environment was - voilà, but today when we see people leave the quiet of the countryside to come to the noise of Dakar, what are they coming to look for? Is it that pedagogy that I was talking about [the traditional practice of begging as a means of learning humility and understanding of others' suffering] that they come to look for in Dakar? It's completely the opposite. There, in the rural zones, when someone had nothing to eat, the marabout had his fields, all the marabouts were farmers and livestock breeders. Voilà. But here in Dakar, there is no land to cultivate, there is no space to raise livestock. So what is there here to eat? Go hold out a hand. Voilà! So it's easy to say to those marabouts, what do you want to look for? Is it knowledge, is it pedagogy? Or what? Quite simply, people come to get rich.

(Interview. Alioune Sarr. Director of Child Protection, MBGPE. Dakar, 5th June 2019)

Mr Sarr's words exemplify the narrative of how the traditional practice of begging, still seen as a way of building character, came to be an exploitative act based on the movement of the marabout and his talibés from the rural to the urban environment for the purposes of profiteering, despite the fact that migration was always a feature of Qur'anic learning, albeit in the opposite direction (Ware, 2014). Again, this relates to the narrative of begging today being a corruption of a previously acceptable practice, due to structural poverty in rural areas leading to urban migration. The narrative however can be used to *both* render acceptable begging under the instruction of those sèriñs considered as legitimate, *and* to make claims of impostors corrupting tradition.

Differentiating current (or urban) from past (or rural) forms of begging has led to a focus in reports and projects on the length of time that today's urban talibés spend begging. The CNLTP (2014) daara mapping and accompanying survey and focus groups, for example, found that 91% of talibés who beg reportedly do so for 1-5 hours a day, with the remaining 9% spending more time than that. It should of course be remembered that, as well as children themselves, these figures come from the sèriñ daaras who are themselves constructing a narrative when they speak about their talibés. In these narratives, the focus on time spent begging may be a way of minimising, and therefore

justifying, their own actions. In my interviews with *sëriñ* daaras, time spent begging was presented as an important factor in distinguishing between exploitative and legitimate begging. Those who themselves ran daaras where children beg particularly emphasised this. They were willing to talk about begging being practised in their daaras, bringing it up themselves in most cases, but most were insistent upon the difference between the begging of their talibés and that of others. Rather than basing this on the pedagogical value of the practice, they put more emphasis on the financial necessity of the practice. Factors used to justify the children's begging included: that their talibés did not beg all day but instead only at meal times or only in the morning, that they did not impose quotas or that the children only begged for food rather than money (the CNLTP (2014) report also states that 51% of talibés who beg do not beg for money but only for food), that the youngest or oldest children did not beg, or that their talibés only begged in the local neighbourhood, rather than commuting into downtown Dakar.

The focus on time spent in the street and on whether a *sëriñ's* talibés collect money or only food are both factors used to differentiate between begging deemed to be necessary and begging deemed to be exploitative, with the latter attributed to a fake marabout. Another factor that is used to discursively distinguish between seemingly legitimate *sëriñ* daaras whose talibés beg and exploiters is how much money they make from the practice. While the legitimate *sëriñ* daara is assumed to be acting out of necessity, unable to provide for the children that his duty requires him to take under his guardianship, others are portrayed as greedy, villainous men. The income to be made from this exploitation of begging is routinely compared to that of a banker, businessman, or government minister, and often presented in contrast to begging in a past era:

The daara, in the beginning, it was an extraordinary model where we forged the personality of the child, to prepare them to enter into adult life, so that was that since the beginning, but that was, that has been perverted over time. [...] It's, it's a whole system in fact that is now very well-established and then there are many things that are around, at the edges of all that, for example there is exploitation, in the daaras. You have 100 children, ask them to bring back 100 francs or 1,000 francs [£0.13-£1.30] each day - it's a salary! It's a minister's salary! It's a minister's salary!

(Interview. Two members of a local child rights association. Dakar, 28th November 2017).

A senior staff member at CAPE (the government's Child Protection Unit) described how "most Qur'anic teachers" use children as "*fonds de commerce*", again claiming "after one year, you're a millionaire." (Interview. Senior staff member at CAPE. Dakar, 6th July 2018). The extent of the profit that can be made at the level of an entire child begging industry, is used to explain why the practice is so fiercely defended by the *sëriñ daara*:

The people who do it [make children beg], they are protecting their interests precisely because there is an enormous profit which comes from the exploitation of child begging. I often give an example which says - if we take the region of Dakar, there was a study which revealed that there are 30,000 children who beg - if we consider that each of these children brings back 500 cfa [£0.65] per day, that will make 15 million cfa [about £19,500] per day. That's enormous! If we consider it over one year, that makes 5,475,000,000 [about £7.1m]. So the people who profit from this begging, it's normal that they defend their business. Because in reality, it's a business. It's a business. So it's the traders, the "profit-makers", they are trying to defend their interests.

(Interview. Project team member, UNODC. Dakar, 29th June 2018)

Not only does this extrapolation drive home the size of the talibé begging industry, the emphasis on profit and business is far removed from the language of religion, necessity, humility and asceticism attached to traditional Qur'anic education. The implication is therefore that it is not the act of forcing a child to beg that calls into question the morals of a (so-called) *sëriñ daara*, but the outcome of profiting from the children's begging, from which assumptions are made about his motives. Together with the assumption that the so-called *sëriñ* is not providing the Qur'anic education that would legitimise children's begging, the focus on profit serves to exclude impostors from the category of genuine poor, in need and deserving of support.

Commonly, this narrative connects the profit made by *sëriñ daaras* to the imposition of the quotas that some children are forced to bring in daily, with the threat of violent punishment if they fail to do so. The focus on quotas may to some extent be due to the specificities of the legal situation. HRW have documented that public prosecutors

require proof of the imposition of a quota to bring forward allegations of “exploitation of begging” (Seibert, 2019b, p. 58). This may in part be due to the terminology used in the 2005 anti-trafficking law, intended to close the loophole that allowed those behind talibé begging to frame the practice as alms-seeking, of which the first clause of Article 3 refers to “anyone who organises the begging of another in order to gain profit” (République du Sénégal, 2005, p. 2. My translation). However, as the Article continues to outlaw anyone who “employs, trains or diverts someone in order to engage them in begging or to exercise pressure upon them such that they beg or continue to do so”, in legal terms it should not be necessary to gain profit or impose a quota in order to fall foul of this law (République du Sénégal, 2005, p. 2. My translation). That this is not the case in practice, however, points again to the continued differentiation between forms of begging.

Narratives centring the imposition of quotas often link such practices to violent punishment for children who fail to comply or meet their targets. Once again, this does not lead to a clear distinction between fake and legitimate Qur’anic teachers, as those who consider themselves and are considered by their peers to be real *sëriñs* usually also use physical forms of discipline - as several of those interviewed referenced. Yet this accepted level of corporal punishment - which does not differ from the wider West African context in which physical punishment is commonplace (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2017) - is differentiated from the extreme forms of violence attributed to the elusive *faux marabouts*. NGO and international media reports about talibés frequently refer to the most extreme practices, almost invariably linking them to the imposition of quotas as demonstrated above. The practices documented are more akin to torture than to the smacking of a child by a parent or guardian, such as chaining, or whipping while in stress positions (for some typical examples, see Wells, 2010, p. 3; Jean-Matthew III, 2014; Lam, 2016). Whether the same boundaries for what is or is not acceptable corporal punishment are shared by *sëriñ daaras* themselves is unclear. Certainly, some accept a level of violent discipline that far surpasses the level deemed palatable in the NGO discourse. For example, when in November 2019 one *sëriñ daara* in Louga was charged for chaining up talibés, along with the metalworker who manufactured the chains and four parents who had apparently

given their consent for the boys to be chained to stop them fleeing, a number of Qur'anic teachers protested in defence of their colleague, some by storming the courtroom in Louga and some by appealing to the Murid Kalife Générale (Ly, 2019; RFI Afrique, 2019). That the perpetrator was considered by the protesting Murid Qur'anic teachers as one of their number, despite the allegations of abuse, demonstrates that abuse alone does not delegitimise a *sëriñ daara* in the eyes of his peers. What the NGOs see as unacceptable may be considered acceptable by *sëriñ daaras*, or alternatively, they may disagree with the arrested *sëriñ's* methods but object to the arrest of any religious teacher because of his status. Meanwhile, while NGOs focus on emphasising the extent of the violence experienced by some talibés in their public-facing communications, once again in practice these extreme images dissolve into the ether as programmes focus on building (legitimate) *sëriñ daaras'* understanding of child rights and pedagogy.

What all of these defining characteristics that are used to differentiate between legitimate and false *sëriñ daaras* have in common is that none of them have a clear point at which an acceptable practice becomes unacceptable. Only at the most extreme ends of the spectrum - where many NGOs choose to focus their attention in communications but not in practice - are a *sëriñ daara's* motivations clear. All of the others that find themselves in the grey area in between can be constructed at once as legitimate teacher and child trafficker/abuser depending on the narrative being applied to them.

This fluidity between categories of legitimate and exploitative has benefits both for the *sëriñ daaras* and for the development actors who intervene in the *daaras*. For the *sëriñ daaras*, the construction of the faux marabout allows Qur'anic teachers - both individually and in their associations - to contrast their own practices, and those of their talibés, with that of the supposed impostor and the children he exploits, emphasising their own legitimacy:

That's because they [children who beg in the street all day] are not talibés, they're infiltrators, because there are those who come from abroad from Mali or elsewhere with children to make them beg. As you know, those who're studying in the *daaras*, they beg between 8 and 9am. That begging is *taribiyah* [Islamic character education], you are educated when you do it, since our ancestors begged, we do it too to follow their path, that's why we make them beg, it's not to make money but so they

can save in the future. But there are those who are not talibés, who don't learn, who come from abroad with their children. Those who do that annoy the government. The government doesn't recognise those who do it, doesn't recognise that there are those who learn and those who don't learn but when they pick them up [under the Removal of Children from the Street approach] they pick them all up.

(Interview. Sëriñ daara, Pikine. 10th May 2018. Translated from Wolof)

The duality of these narratives does not inherently have negative consequences for the groups who are targeted by the policies they bring about. In fact, this serves many sëriñ daaras well, in that they can avoid legal and social sanctions for the begging that goes on in their daaras by differentiating themselves from the others. In all three of the projects discussed in Chapters Seven to Nine, we see sëriñ daaras profiting from the distinguishing of 'legitimate' and 'fraudulent' Qur'anic teaching, either to access material resources or gain a seat at the negotiating table. Equally, however, the duality of narratives serves the NGOs who intervene.

For many NGOs, the practice of begging is a criterion for the inclusion of a daara in project or programme, yet NGOs do not want to be publicly associated with individuals deemed illegitimate or seen to be rewarding child traffickers. Tostan, for example, works only in daaras where begging exists, because in their view, those children being forced to beg are the most vulnerable children (Interview. Staff member, Tostan. Dakar, 31st October 2017). Almost all of the daaras I visited in Dakar and Pikine had some form of infrastructure, such as blackboards and chairs, buildings or roofs, or water tanks, that had been provided by international NGOs and organisations, including most commonly USAID, Secours Islamique France and Plan. To receive such benefits, sëriñ daaras have to keep up the impression that despite the practices of the *other* (fake) sëriñ, *their* children only beg out of necessity and therefore might somehow be prevented from doing so given enough support. This is the vulnerable schools discourse, as identified by Lahti (2014), in practice. The narrative construction of the faux marabout justifies the NGOs interventions and continued support to daaras where children beg as well as learning the Qur'an. For those daaras, of course, to stop (or, more often, to reduce) begging in their daaras would mean that sëriñs are considered a success, no longer in need of this support. On the other hand, the World Bank claims that any daara included

in the modernisation project that they fund will have their participation in the programme terminated if begging is found to be practised. This demonstrates that even in a project firmly grounded in a framing that sees begging as the necessary result of poverty, this narrative can switch fluidly into one which demonises the practice.

The spectrum of acceptability of begging, combined with the dual narratives, facilitates the distinction of fake *sëriñ* daaras from real. In the next section, I explore the theory that the fraudulent *sëriñ* is but an abstract construction that does not really exist.

5.3.2 *Finding the faux marabout: an abstract and elusive construct*

In the previous section, I described the criteria that are used to discursively distinguish between real and fake *sëriñ*s. In practice, however, the distinction is not so simple. Imam Babacar Pouye runs a neighbourhood daara in Rufisque where the talibés sleep locally in their homes, and therefore do not beg for the daara. Although he would like to open an *internat* or boarding daara, he knows that he does not have the funds to do so and refuses to make children beg due to the dangers he believes they face in the street. He recounted what happens when he confronted the *sëriñ* daara of a child found begging who was not learning the Qur'an:

For the *sëriñ* daara who only want to teach the Qur'an, food is their only problem, but others make money on the back of children. Once I saw a talibé begging at Bargny,¹⁶ he couldn't recite a single verse of the Qur'an and he danced while asking for alms [sarax]. I went with him to his *sëriñ*, who insulted me and told me to leave him to beg because he [the *sëriñ*] lived on that.

(Interview. Imam Babacar Pouye, Rufisque. 5th May 2018. Translated from Wolof)

Although the child in the story has not made any progress towards memorising the Qur'an, the imam still refers to him as a talibé, and to the adult responsible as a *sëriñ* daara. This demonstrates that, even in the spoken discourse of *sëriñ* daaras themselves, it is not always clear who can or cannot be considered as a fellow *sëriñ*. Indeed, this imam goes on to say that these people (who make children beg without teaching them

¹⁶ An area outside Rufisque.

anything) should be prosecuted because they “give a bad name to Qur’anic teachers”¹⁷ - not clarifying whether they should still be considered as Qur’anic teachers themselves or not. This confirms the theory that the illusion of the faux marabout disappears when examined close-up.

It is claimed in the literature that no one can or will identify the impostors posing as Qur’anic teachers, preferring instead to keep them as an abstract spectre (Thiam, 2014). To test this assertion, I asked many of those interviewed to tell me about fake marabouts that they knew of themselves. Only one was able to provide an example of an actual imposter: a *sëriñ* in Pikine described how someone claiming to be a marabout but not teaching the Qur’an to the children who begged excessively was chased out of the area. Others answered in a way that seemed to point to the existence of exploitative *sëriñ daaras* rather than confirm there are people masquerading as *sëriñs*. In another corner of Pikine, a different *sëriñ daara* told me that he had known one man, who had tried to join the local Qur’anic teachers’ association, but who had left the neighbourhood when challenged about how he treated children. Omar Ba, Operations Director at GSI, who conducted the mapping exercise in which researchers personally visited every *daara* in Dakar candidly explained that some of the *daaras* that he has seen personally should be shut down immediately due to the conditions in which children are residing, yet explained that the organisation had taken no steps to report them to the authorities, for fear of risking being blocked from other *daaras*. Whether or not these men should be considered imposters – as opposed to exploitative *sëriñ daaras* - is unclear. Others, however, *sëriñ daaras* and NGO workers alike, claimed they did not know any ‘faux marabouts’ personally but remain certain that they exist, giving the character its apparitional nature.

As Lahti (Thiam, 2014) argued, this spectral characteristic means that individuals are able to escape repercussions. Different variations of the narratives around faux marabouts construct them either as impostors operating alone or as part of a wider network. Somewhat conspiratorially, some interviewees alluded to the idea that the fake *sëriñ daaras* are the minions of some higher force or organisation. One welcome centre

¹⁷ "Noom ñuy takkal *sëriñ daara* yi."

employee told me of an “invisible hand” that he believes to be operating at the root of the child begging problem. Asked who this might be, he responded:

... it's those who it's convenient for, isn't it? I can't tell you it's this person or that, because... it doesn't appear as someone who... but, the first [people] that we see, it's the, the... the pseudo Qur'anic teachers, it's them who we see, but them, there are others behind them, others behind them, organisations and all that, who it's convenient for. Me, I don't know them personally and I would like to meet them because if I knew them, I would say to them 'oh, you're really the devil in person, *quoi!* You live off the back of those children! [...] It's difficult to fight against someone you can't see. But what is sure is that they are quite influential people, who are, who can put pressure on the politicians, to have what they want.

(Interview. Welcome centre staff member. Dakar, 7th December 2017)

This narrative reinforces the abstract nature of the ‘faux marabout’, and in doing so also shows how blame can be deflected from individual *sëriñ daaras*, no matter their practices.

However, not all agree with this interpretation. While this idea of someone at the top of the hierarchy acting in their own interests to benefit from maintaining the status quo when it comes to child begging was also supported by Imam Elimane Diagne, President of the organisation *Collectif pour la modernisation des Daara* (COMOD), for him, it is not shadowy child trafficking networks that are responsible, nor an invisible hand or unnameable presence. Recounting an exchange during his tour of the country in order to convince *sëriñs* to support the modernisation bill that would give official status to the *daaras*, after its initial rejection, he said he explained to Qur'anic teachers why they had not been previously made aware of the actual content of the bill: “I said because, there, there are people who are higher up who manipulated you” (Interview. Imam Elimane Diagne, President of COMOD. Guédiawaye, 24th April 2018). These people, he claims, manipulated not only the Qur'anic teachers but state actors. When asked who he was referring to, he was clear: “it's the presidents of the associations, the big associations!” who were deliberately spreading incorrect information among their

members. Although he does not explain exactly why these men take these actions, he refers to explanations of power: “he who keeps information keeps power”.

Like Imam Diagne, a senior staff member of Islamic NGO JAMRA rejected the assumption that those taking advantage of children are necessarily ‘fake’ sërriñs. Asked if all sërriñs whose talibés beg should be considered as imposters, he refuted this and referenced the migration to urban areas before likening the situation to the corruption found in other sectors:

In all corporations - when it comes to police, religious leaders, parliamentarians - in all corporations there are bad apples. Unfortunately in this case there are a lot of them.

(Interview. Senior staff member, JAMRA. Dakar, 6th August 2018)

This framing suggests that the sërriñs of daara where children beg are not necessarily impostors but rather legitimate Qur’anic teachers *as well as* exploiters of children. We can see, therefore, that although the ‘faux marabout’ remains a frequent presence in narratives about talibés and why they beg, he is not omnipresent. I will now turn to the Human Rights Watch reports that present an example of the rejection of this narrative.

5.3.3 *Alternative narrative: all begging is unacceptable*

As explained above, since 2010, HRW has published a series of reports detailing the abuses and rights violations to which some talibés are subject in Senegal’s daaras. For the purposes of this thesis, the reports are notable because HRW stands out as one NGO that has not fully bought into the rhetoric that relies upon the notoriously elusive, villainous, ‘faux marabout’ to absolve the ‘real’ Qur’anic teacher of responsibility for the exploitation of child talibés. Instead, HRW makes no distinction between those whose wards beg to fund their Qur’anic studies and those men who profit from the riches of such exploitation. The 2019 HRW report *There Is Enormous Suffering* states:

[w]hether a Quranic teacher uses the money from child begging for the daara’s expenses or uses it for his own enrichment – living with his family in a separate house while the talibé children live in squalor, as documented by Human Rights Watch in both 2017 and 2018 – or some combination of both, the motivation is irrelevant. The act of forcing children to beg for specific quotas of money qualifies as exploitation.

(Seibert, 2019a, p. 22).

HRW does recognise in its terminology section at the start of the report, with a disclaimer that has been inserted in almost identical wording since the 2014 report, that it is taking a different position to many others (although it limits the use of terms suggesting impostors to *Senegalese* (rather than international/foreign) activists and religious authorities, which is simply not the case):

Many Senegalese civil society activists and religious authorities routinely refer to the abusive and exploitative daaras as “so-called Quranic schools” or “self-proclaimed Quranic schools,” to distinguish them from the thousands of daaras where children do not beg and are well cared for by a Quranic teacher dedicated to their religious education. However, because the places present themselves as “Quranic schools”—and the children do spend some time learning the Quran, even if significantly less than they spend on the street begging—it remains the most appropriate terminology. (Seibert, 2019a, p. iii)

This does however also reiterate how it is only in the most extreme cases at either end of the continuum that there is consensus. HRW’s refusal to engage with the discourse that lays blame on the elusive ‘faux marabout’ does not signal the adoption of the ‘vulnerable schools’ or ‘strategic structural’ discourses that explain begging by talibés as being the consequence of a lack of resources in Qur’anic schools, due to structural poverty and environmental factors. Instead, HRW adopts a rhetoric which conflates those who teach children the Qur’an with those who force children to beg, rarely separating between the two.

In order to justify their depictions of *all* sërīñ daaras whose talibés beg as perpetrators of abuse, HRW is required to reject the legitimacy of *any* talibé begging, detaching the practice from both poverty and religious learning altogether. In practice, this is done through silence and omission. Over the decade that the organisation has regularly been reporting on the plight of talibés who beg, religion has been progressively removed from their discourse. The first of two reports published in 2019 (Seibert, 2019a) does not contain a single instance of the words ‘Islam’, ‘Islamic’, ‘religion’ or ‘alms’. ‘Religious’ does appear, but only nine times in a 70-page report, and ‘Muslim’, just four. The second

report of the same year is similar, referring once to ‘alms’ in relation to an element of the project discussed in Chapter Nine (Seibert, 2019b, p. 23). Reflecting international concerns, the earlier 2019 report is also the first to mention the potential for recruitment into Islamist armed groups (Seibert, 2019a, p. 58). This is in contrast to the 2010 report which went so far as to begin with an 11 page (of the total 103 pages) history of the development of Islam and Qur’anic education in Senegal (Wells, 2010, pp. 14–24), firmly positioning begging in today’s daaras as a corruption of a practice that was at one time legitimate. In the more recent reports, this framing of the problem as a corruption of a tradition has shifted to a discourse that neither acknowledges nor legitimises the religious roots of the practice.

HRW is certainly not representative of the wider development sector in its framing of all begging as exploitative and (almost) all Qur’anic teachers as villains (Thiam, 2014). The fact that it stands out from others serves to demonstrate just how widespread the other approach, that which legitimises some forms of begging and those responsible for it while delegitimising others, who may in reality be the same people, really is.

5.4 Inadequacies of oversimplified narratives

In the final section of this chapter, I introduce two more characters in the narratives about talibés: grand talibés and talibés parents. These two groups serve to further demonstrate the inadequacies of the oversimplified narratives that are imposed on talibés, by demonstrating how these framings fall apart if one looks too closely.

5.4.1 Grand talibés: from victim to villain

Rather than embracing complexities and unclear motivations, HRW oversimplifies the situation, portraying all forced begging as the same issue and focusing on begging as the outcome rather than the motivations of those behind it. Aside from their standard brief disclaimer as mentioned above, all (young) talibés are represented as victims, all marabouts as perpetrators. Yet the weaknesses of this simplistic framing quickly come to light in how HRW presents another character in the cast of victims and villains: the grand talibé. Grand talibés are those who are too old to be forced to beg, but who remain in the daara furthering their studies, often acting as assistant to the sēriñ daara. HRW describes them as “typically age 17 and above” (Seibert, 2019b, p. ii), meaning that some

of these grand talibé are still children. Despite this, their portrayal is entirely detached from the picture of innocent victims employed to depict younger talibés. Instead, mention of the grands talibés, increasingly prevalent throughout the series of HRW reports, exclusively refer to these adolescents as perpetrators of some of the worst instances of abuse and assault, either under the Qur'anic teacher's instructions or when left in control of the younger boys.

The stark contrast between the ways in which older and younger talibés are portrayed demonstrates the silences in HRW's attempts to provide a clear distinction between victims and perpetrators. HRW reports do not make this link explicit, but it is difficult to ignore the unspoken assumption that these youths - many of them still children themselves - will have undergone the very same abuses of which they are now accused just a few years before. While this by no means excuses the abuses perpetrated on the youngest talibés by their elder counterparts, evidence from the field of psychology has demonstrated the replication of abuses over generations whether that be physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Egeland, Jacobvitz and Sroufe, 1988; Coxe and Holmes, 2002; Riggs, 2010). HRW and other critics of the Qur'anic teachers and their assistants are able to avoid facing up to this uncomfortable topic by leaving these assumptions unspoken. The implication that those teenagers abusing younger children are also victims, may even have been some of the very same children who were being abused at the time of the HRW's 2010 report, does not fit well with the clear cut distinction between victim and perpetrator that HRW is trying to construct, and therefore is ignored. As we shall see in the next section on parents, this is not limited to grand talibés, nor to HRW reports.

5.4.2 Between victim and villain: talibés' parents

The (fake) sēriñ daara is not the only villain in stories of talibé begging. The problematisation of talibé begging also relies upon the development of a narrative or, rather, competing narratives, about the talibés' parents. De Moura (2002, p. 357) theorised that despite divergence in the definition of street children as a group, descriptions of how children came to be in the street - their family "background, life trajectories and characteristics" - do not vary. This has largely been the case when it comes to talibés, as many NGO documents and academic articles make assumptions

about parents' motivations. The anthropological studies that have engaged parents (particularly Perry, 2004; Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016; Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020) directly challenge the narratives produced by development discourse. As my research did not involve interviewing the parents of talibés directly, due to the focus of this research on policy making and practice rather than the drivers behind parents sending children to daaras, I make no claim to know what motivates individual parents or to dispute the findings of those who have conducted anthropological research in this regard. What is central to this thesis, then, and what can be drawn from NGO literature and from the responses of those interviewed is how they understand and represent parents' role. Looking at these sources demonstrates that the narrative of naive, impoverished parents is losing ground to an alternative explanation that portrays them as complicit in the exploitation of their children.

Einarsdóttir and Boiro (2016, p. 862) argue that NGOs depict parents as “poor, ignorant, naïve, or negligent”, with Perry (2004) claiming that parents' agency is removed from the discourse around talibé begging, and Ware (2014) criticising NGOs for painting parents as ignorant of the hardships their children face in daaras. The removal of parents' agency is evident in NGO characterisations that stress *either* the influence of (faux) Qur'anic teachers over rural communities, with, for example, older HRW reports describing how parents respect the apparently religious men to the extent that they feel they cannot refuse if he asks for their child (Wells, 2010, p. 85), *or* the hoodwinking of parents by malevolent traffickers. A blog post on the website of NGO Free the Slaves at the launch of a new project in Senegal, for example, reads:

No parent wants to force their child onto city streets to beg, but that's what is happening in Senegal. Many village parents think their children are going to the city for religious boarding school. Instead, heartless traffickers force many kids into begging slavery. (Gessler, 2019)

As this section will demonstrate, however, more recently parents, though they continue to be portrayed as naive or negligent, are increasingly frequently described in a way that puts a greater emphasis on their actions, decisions and complicity rather than removing their agency.

As anthropological studies such as those referred to above shown, in reality parents' decisions are more complex than either of these oversimplified narratives used in NGO reports and documents. In my interviews, there was a striking contrast between the organisational level discourse and the understanding of individual staff members. What was clear from the NGO workers I spoke to, particularly those who work for organisations whose mission includes facilitating the return of children to their families, is that parents' reasons for sending their children to daaras are myriad. Rather than caricaturing all parents as naive and tricked by the marabouts, or all being complicit and profiting from the child's begging, individual NGO workers emphasised the differences between parents. For example, staff members of two different NGOs - one a small welcome centre and the other international but Dakar-based ENDA - described the variations in parents' reactions when a child who had been sent to a daara is returned to them as a result of having fled their daara before arriving at a welcome centre:

[...] when children are returned, often [the parents] truly welcome them. They are happy to receive them because in general they don't know that their child ran away. [...] And when you do the... inform them, they say yes, that they agree to receive them. There are even some who are hurried to come to find them in the welcome centres, because it's when our social workers go to do the mediation that they become... that they become aware of the situation of their child. [...] when] we're talking about mediation, really we explain to them the conditions in which their child arrived. There are even children, when they are returned, the people return them with the clothes that they had in the street, [which are] sometimes bloody because they were beaten, or it's disgusting because they have gone three months without a shower. Voilà. So, we generally take all that and take them along. That lets us give [them] to parents so that they understand the situation in which their child found themselves. Now, there are parents who are more stubborn, who, when the child is returned, they take him back [to the daara]. There are those who do that. But often, it's linked to the fact that, often it's parents who, with the system of *confiage*.... I have my boy, I give him to my cousin for life, voilà, I give him to my cousin for life, to adopt him if he wants. And often it's when it's the cases like that, when [the child] is returned, parents tend to return [him].

(Interview. Biram Ndiaye, Programme Manager, ENDA. Guédiawaye, 8th March 2018)

[...] each parent reacts in their own manner, eh? There are parents who are going to try to scold the children, tell him that ‘yes, you have dishonoured me, why did you run away?’ you see? Because, maybe the parents passed by there themselves, so they are going to want their son to pass by there too. So they can even say to us ‘what are you humiliating me for?’, you see? What are you humiliating me for, that’s one of the possible reactions. There are other parents who say that they are shocked, they never knew that their son was capable of running away, of staying in the street. There are those who are going to ask the question, ‘why did you run away?’ because, in confiage, the fact that the parents entrust their child to a Qur’anic teacher, it’s a relationship of trust first.

(Interview. Anonymous staff member, welcome centre. Dakar, 7th December 2017)

These words highlight the heterogeneity of parents’ reactions rather than homogenizing them. In explaining the logic behind parents’ initial decision to send their child to an urban daara, both speakers refer to the concept of confiage. Confiage, from the French verb *confier*, to entrust, is a term used in francophone Sub-Saharan Africa to refer to practices that fall under the umbrella of child fostering, though some bear little semblance to formalised fostering practices. One study found that in Senegal, almost a third (32%) of households either foster children in or out (or both) (Beck *et al.*, 2015).

Entrusting children to a Qur’anic teacher is just one form of these widespread practices that share the common factor of a child being raised in a household that is not that of his or her biological parents, nor the only practice to be labelled by external observers as child trafficking, often with narratives centred on the corruption of traditional practices (Howard, 2011). The relationships are built on trust and family connections. Relationships between parents and the Qur’anic teachers to whom they entrust their sons may date back for many generations, with the Qur’anic teacher being either a relative, sometimes distant, of the family or perhaps the descendant of a good friend of a paternal ancestor:

Us here in Africa, in Senegal particularly, we have a term that we call

koléré. Koléré that means... [...] for example, if your grandfather Duncan Macleod was with my grandfather, my grandfather Blaise Diagne, if they were friends, our parents are going to be friends, us too, we are going to be friends. So it's... those links, even if we're not of the same religion, the same origins, we will continue to keep those relationships alive. So, I can decide, ok, me, my son, I'm going to send him to you so that you can educate him, I can even say "I give you my child". You too, you can have your child, you can say, that one there, our families have been friends for centuries, so I'm going to give him my child, I know he's going to educate my child well. So it's like that that it happens, between the religious families who teach the Qur'an and religion, and their disciples. So when you are disciples of a religious family, you received your education in that family, no matter your level of success afterwards, you will want to send your child to go learn, or to do his education, there.

(Interview. Anonymous staff member, welcome centre. Dakar, 7th December 2017)

The concept of *koléré*, which is elsewhere translated using terms including "*fidelité*" (loyalty) and "*reconnaissance*" (gratitude) (Diome, 2013) and "a blend of friendship, gratitude, and mutual tolerance" (Vandewiele and Philbrick, 1983, p. 918), explains the deep and longstanding connections between families which underlie practices of *confiage*. This is clearly in contrast with depictions of malicious (*faux*) *marabouts* as strangers who sweep into villages to pick up boys from unsuspecting parents. It does not however necessarily preclude parents from being unaware of conditions in a *daara* today, even if they do have familial links.

While *some* of the parents mentioned by the NGO workers above are presented as naïve, another narrative does not silence or ignore parents' agency, as was Perry's (2004) critique, but rather centres parents' responsibility. In this narrative, a parent's ignorance of the harsh realities of their child's life in an urban *daara* is not naivety but negligence. For some, such as this CNLTP staff member, distinctions between those who were aware of the conditions of their child's life and those who were not should be irrelevant, and neither a lack of awareness nor structural poverty should be alleviating factors to diminish parents' responsibility for their child's mistreatment:

when one has, when one makes children, one must be responsible for

those children. So, to be aware or not [of the fact their children beg], I don't ask the question, because from the moment where you have your children, and you facilitate their departure, you are in complete irresponsibility, because even if those children are... entrusted to other people in good conditions, their parent has the responsibility to know what's happening. So the responsibility is already at the level of parents who have children and who... who... who throw them away! We don't speak about poverty because Senegal is not the... not the only poor country in Africa, there are neighbouring countries where this phenomenon either doesn't exist or is very watered down. So, we fall back to trafficking, it's the desire to exploit individuals to... to have money.

(Interview. CNLTP staff member, Dakar, 22nd January 2018)

In this narrative, the emphasis on parental responsibility highlights the choices available to parents, firmly positioning their decision to send children to daaras as a conscious choice, even if the decision is presented as, at best, misguided. Agency is recognised even though those producing such discourse disagree with the decisions and actions taken. Parental responsibility - or the abdication thereof - was repeated frequently in interviews with those from all backgrounds, be they civil servants, NGO workers or religious actors, but not necessarily from the same perspective. While NGO workers and government officials based their comments on parents' legal responsibilities or indeed in the language of child rights, religious actors ground this responsibility in terms of the teachings of the Qur'an rather than the national or international law.

This alternative framing of parents as culpable alongside or even above exploitative *sëriñ daaras* is also increasingly used in NGO reports, particularly by HRW, as well as state rhetoric. In contrast to earlier reports portraying parents as naïve (Wells, 2010), the HRW reports in 2019 called for legal action to be taken against parents who return their children to exploitative daaras after the child has been returned home under the state's Removal of Children from the Street project or similar NGO initiatives (Seibert, 2019a, p. 67, 2019b, p. 76). The state has not yet taken up these recommendations, but, as discussed in Chapter Eight, has taken steps that make clear that the responsibility for children found begging and taken from the streets of Dakar during the second phase of the Removal from the Streets project lies with parents as much as with those who

directly force the child to beg. Parents of children removed from the street, once found, were in this phase of the project told to come to Dakar themselves to collect their child.

Narratives of parents' culpability can go beyond accusations of their 'abandoning' them to exploitative circumstances (Seibert, 2019a, p. 67). Others claim that some parents are not only negligent but actively complicit, profiting from the exploitation of talibés alongside the (so-called) Qur'anic teachers. Imam Diene of ANIOS, for example, suggested that some parents profit from the system, not only by having one fewer mouth to feed or hoping to be repaid in the afterlife for educating their sons, but in money or in kind. Most who referred to any profit that parents may make from their child's begging did so in a fashion that implied negative perceptions of this outcome, situating the parents as collaborators with unscrupulous exploiters, for example:

And parents, who have many children, abdicate their responsibility, give him [the *sëriñ*] their children. There are even those who are organised, "I give you my child, after a few years, you give me something". Because the child becomes a business! He becomes a business, and if he brings in 50,000, then 15,000, you must send it to me, me too, it's my child, so I can live.

(Interview. Imam Oumar Diene, Secretary-General of ANIOS. Dakar, 25th June 2018)

That this quote comes from an imam is not irrelevant, as this confirms that it is not only secular or international NGOs that frame parents as being complicit. One of the same 2019 HRW reports cited above makes brief reference to such financial benefits for parents to render them culpable (Seibert, 2019a, p. 64), citing a team member of the Zero Mendicité project funded by USAID and UNODC in two areas of Dakar (the focus of Chapter Nine). However, another staff member of the very same project, when describing these practices to me, did not actually perceive them as negative. Moussa Ndoye explained an alternative economic system in which children are able to get money to their parents without their *sëriñ* daara knowing, via a *ndeyu* daara (women who provide food and services such as laundry for talibés in their local daara). He also refutes the common assumption that all talibés who beg are detached entirely from their parents:

It's not all of the children who have [links with their parents], but sometimes - that's why we classified children. Because if you put all of the children in the same bag, you distort things. It must be ensured that, made so that the link between the child and the family, his own family, is possible. And there, many [people] will tell you that yes, children don't see their parents anymore, even though that's not totally true. There are Qur'anic teachers who don't know that the children go out sometimes, there are those who meet their parents elsewhere, without the Qur'anic teacher knowing. Why? Because there is sometimes another economy of begging that develops, that develops without the knowledge of the teachers.

(Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Coordinator of the Zero Mendicité programme. Dakar, 29th July 2018)

Here, Mr Ndoye recounts stories of boys who make money lifting bags in the market, as well as begging, before returning only the minimum quota demanded to their Qur'anic teachers, and giving the rest to a ndeyu daara who holds it and records how much he has, acting as a bank. Then, parents with links to their children "come to see the ndeyu daara, with the agreement of the child, for her to give them part of the sum, so the mother can buy a bit of merchandise in Dakar to sell [...] in the village." (Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Coordinator of the Zero Mendicité programme. Dakar, 29th July 2018). In this framework, the parents are not complicit with the sēriñ daaras but working with their child without the sēriñ's knowledge. They may not have abandoned their children but are still profiting from their begging.

These contradictory narratives of parents' responsibility, complicity or naivety form another piece of the puzzle that makes up the alternating discourses to explain talibé begging. The effect of these different narratives is not to remove parents' agency as was argued by Perry (2004) but rather serves to detract from the culpability of sēriñ daaras while reinforcing the idea of the 'fake' Qur'anic teacher in the abstract. When parents are framed as naive, they have been tricked by an impostor posing as a religious teacher. When parents' responsibility is emphasised, such as in the Removal from the Streets project, this too deflects responsibility not only from sēriñ daaras, who are seemingly left with no choice but for the talibés to beg since the parents are not paying for their children's education, but from the state.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how over-simplified narratives construct groups of victims and perpetrators that fit with the competing problematisations of talibé begging. The chapter did not seek to definitively delineate who is or is not a talibé, a Qur'anic teacher, or a faux marabout, but rather to shine a light on the conceptual confusion with which such terms are laden. The construction of 'talibés who beg', excluding both those talibés who do not beg and other children that do, is linked to the process by which it is decided which child is or is not deserving of aid or intervention. Although the act of working towards the memorisation of the Qur'an is a central tenet of defining who is or is not a talibé, it is also often stated, by many of the same people using the term, that children who are exploited and spend their days begging are not in fact talibés because they do not study the Qur'an, due to the time that they are spending begging as well as the categorisation of the adult in charge as a fake or so-called marabout, who himself may lack the ability to teach the Qur'an. Despite the discomfort of individual NGO staff members, 'talibé' in international (franco- and anglophone) development discourse has come to be synonymous with boys who beg. Talibés are simultaneously differentiated from other children who beg by their status as Qur'anic students *and* assumed not to be learning the Qur'an due to spending time begging. The children in these grey areas at the edges of the categories defy simple solutions. On the contrary, to focus on these children and the complexities of categorising them brings to the surface the uncomfortable conclusion that one man may be both *sëriñ daara* and child trafficker.

I have demonstrated how the narratives that explain talibé begging are in fact more concerned with framing the adults who dictate the paths of their lives, including their presence in a *daara*, and whether or not - or for how long - they beg. Blame is often attributed, as Lahti (Thiam, 2014) argued, to a slippery, shadowy construction of the 'faux marabout' from which *sëriñ daaras* can explicitly distance themselves despite their shared practices. Several factors are used to construct a distinct category of a 'fake' or 'so-called' Qur'anic teacher in the discourse: the religious knowledge that he holds (or does not hold) and that he provides (or not) to his talibés; the profit that he gains through the imposition of quotas on begging talibés (rather than the simple imposition of begging); and the abuse that he inflicts upon the children in his care or control. Often

reference is made to the act of migration to a city or to Senegal from other countries, making explicit the construction of such a person as an outsider. In applying these criteria, the practices of the fraudulent marabouts – be they an organised network or individual bad apples - and their talibés, are differentiated from those of those sèriñ daaras seen to be legitimate and their talibés. Even though both sets of talibés may beg, their begging is not understood equally.

The presentation of the (so-called) Qur’anic teachers in the discourse can be considered similarly to dualistic conceptions of other groups in other problems explained using competing narratives, for example, the black and white presentation of female drug users as "either villains or victims", explained away by narratives blaming “pathology and powerlessness” respectively (Anderson, 2008, p. 2). When this begins to be unpacked, it becomes clear that there is no clear division between one group and the other, with the boundary shifting to fit the wider framings employed by the speaker. The growing focus in HRW reports on the abuses perpetrated by the grand talibés, some of whom are still children themselves, shows the cracks in the oversimplified constructions of victims and perpetrators.

Because the talibé problem cannot be sufficiently explained as either one thing (structural poverty coupled with traditional practices) or another (child trafficking due to the corruption of tradition), neither of these narratives nor the discourses in which they are situated has succeeded in gaining dominance over the other. Instead, there is a circular co-dependency inherent in the “dance between discourses” (Thiam, 2014). Just as the narrative of child traffickers posing as Qur’anic teachers depends upon the perceived legitimacy of begging alongside Qur’anic teaching, so too does the legitimacy of these actions by ‘real’ Qur’anic teachers depend upon the construction of the illegitimate impostor against which they are able to contrast their own practices.

The effects of all of these questions are not limited to the discursive realm. Different diagnoses of the problem, with their different narratives and attributions of blame, lead to different prescribed solutions, and indeed dictates both who should be responsible for taking action and who should benefit from such actions. Policy making always requires decisions about who can be included as the target or beneficiary of a proposed intervention and in the case of projects targeting daaras, begging is often the condition

for either exclusion or inclusion. To a certain extent, the daara modernisation approach offers an alternative to the focus on begging in the discourse around talibés. It frames ‘the talibé problem’ not in terms of exploitation but as the problem of children not receiving adequate education – or at least, not enough of the type of education required to be included in national statistics. However, begging remains linked to this problematisation because, more often than not, begging is deemed to be exploitative when it is assumed to prevent a child from learning the Qur’an due to the time spent in the street. The government’s interventions aimed at either street children or at modernising daaras are both said to be targeting talibés, yet the children that they affect (or would affect, if implemented) are not necessarily the same groups of children, or those living in comparable situations. In the next chapter, we will see how the two alternative discourses have resulted in different structures which do not necessarily coordinate effectively.

CHAPTER SIX

Cooperation, competition and engaging sèriñ daaras

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated how differing problematisations of talibé begging each employ opposing constructions of social groups as targets for intervention or for blame. In this chapter, I turn to the structural impact of these contradictory problematisations and the different global discourses to which they are each connected (Thiam, 2014).

The chapter contributes by exploring the implications of these competing discourses. It argues that the discourses both perpetuate and are themselves shaped, at a local level, by a fragmented landscape of institutions, structures and organisations each bringing their own solution to the problem as it is perceived and competing for funding and power. This has led to tensions between actors both within and external to the state, as frustrations over the lack of cooperation simmer despite the many attempts made to better organise the sector. The chapter also contributes to the literature on vernacularisation of rights, by examining the use of an Islamic argument, grounded in religion, to engage sèriñ daaras and promote awareness of child rights. It connects the two themes by focusing on how this vernacularisation relies upon the dual discourses and their alternative framings of sèriñ daaras.

The chapter thus begins by examining some of the state structures that have a significant mandate to intervene with or on behalf of the talibés. It considers two structures that are fundamentally grounded in distinct framings of the problem, each inherently linked to a different global or external discourse: the *Inspection des daaras*, tasked with modernising daaras and bringing them into the national education system in line with the Education for All agenda, and the *Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes, en particulier des femmes et des enfants* (CNLTP – National Taskforce against Human Trafficking, especially of women and children), which perceives talibés who beg as victims of child trafficking. However, as the ‘talibé

problem', does not fit neatly into any one of the development sector's pre-constructed silos, attempts to solve it are ultimately divided between a multitude of ministries and taskforces, including structures with a child rights or child protection mandate that typically have a more ambiguous framing of the issue. A lack of coordination between these structures, including those specifically set up with the intention of harmonising approaches, was a common theme of my interviews, resulting in disparate actions. This discordance is not limited to the state, as the chapter demonstrates. The same story is recounted in reference to the plethora of NGOs and associations with interventions targeting talibés or their daaras, and between these non-state actors and the state.

I then demonstrate how, despite the commonly lamented lack of coordination between structures, engagement with Qur'anic teachers and religious leaders in particular is a common theme, yet this too leads to frustrations among the staff members of the various structures who seek to intervene. Finding parallels with anti-FGM/C behaviour change work, the chapter recognises the limits of an approach focused on persuading sèriñ daaras to support child rights, and the contradiction of the discourse that underpins this approach.

6.2 Fragmentation of state structures

You have, at the level of the Ministry of Justice, the [CNLTP], you have the Directorate of Education targeted at social protection which looks after children in conflict with the law [...] you have plenty of structures, you have CAPE which was at the presidency before and which is now at the level of the Minister responsible for Child Protection - with all that, we really should have reached zero children who beg.

(Interview. Mamadou Wane, Coordinator of PPDH. Dakar, 13th November 2017)

Within the national Senegalese state, there are a number of structures established specifically to confront 'the talibé problem' as well as those whose mandate covers the wider group of children perceived as vulnerable, or indeed all children. Multiple state structures are tasked with protecting children and their rights, yet these structures fail to be inclusive of all of the children in Senegal to the same degree, with, for example, children who beg typically left out from safeguarding and rehabilitation centres unless

they come into conflict with the law (Ndène, 2017). While the establishment of structures specifically focussed on these vulnerable groups of children can be perceived as an attempt to tackle this exclusion, this chapter demonstrates how such structures are themselves tied to international discourses and priorities, and dependent on international funding for which they must compete. In their mapping of child protection systems in various West African countries Krueger, Thompstone and Crispine (2014, p. 51) find that in Senegal, “the proliferation of issue-specific committees and programmes has happened without full consideration of the capacity of the system to absorb such initiatives”, as a result of the dominance of the international development community over national welfare systems and the promotion of particular thematic issues and approaches by the former. Talibés who beg are targeted, either specifically or as the core of a wider target group (such as ‘street children’) by many such issue-specific initiatives which are directly related to the siloed thematic priorities of the global development industry, such as Education for All and ending human trafficking, and thus which may attract funding from the related international institutions and initiatives. Some, such as interministerial committees, are presented as attempts to reorganise the sector or coordinate its initiatives, yet these too rely on particular framings of the problem and therefore come with preordained approaches as solutions.

6.2.1 Issue-specific structures connected to different problematisations

Two structures within the Senegalese state that each embody a different narrative about talibés are the Inspection des daaras (daara inspectorate), created within the Ministry of National Education (MEN) to lead efforts to modernise daaras including the development of an official curriculum, and the CNLTP under the Ministry of Justice. These two structures are clearly related to the two discourses identified by Lahti (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019) that problematise the talibés either as pupils of sites of religious education in need of modernisation, or as victims of child trafficking.

On one hand, the Inspection des daaras is the result of the connection of the ‘talibé problem’ with the global education discourse, with its related targets of school attendance and educational attainment under first the Millennium Development Goals and later the Sustainable Development Goals. The Inspection was officially established

in 2004, an act which Mamadou Wane described as “the first indicator of the political will of the state to modernise” daaras (Interview. Mamadou Wane, Coordinator, PPDH. Dakar, 30th June 2018), but it took until 2008 for staff to be assigned (Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018). The Inspection was opened because “it was felt necessary that all children go to school, but there are children whose parents have chosen religious education, the daaras” (Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018). The decision can therefore be considered as acceptance on the part of the state of several factors that should not be taken for granted: firstly, that daaras are a legitimate form of education and that children in daaras should be considered as in school; secondly, that parents have the right and agency to choose the type of education they want for their child, in keeping with parents’ “prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948, p. Article 26); and, thirdly, that the state has to play a role in both providing and regulating religious education. Lewandowski and Niane (2013) also point to the initial creation of the inspection as evidence of the Wade administration attempting to curry favour among the brotherhoods. As discussed in Chapter Two, however, Wade’s reforms to the education sector were largely the result of international pressure to achieve primary education targets, and the recognition that children receiving religious forms of education would have to be counted as in school in order to do so. In recent years, the Inspection has taken a leading role in the drafting and redrafting of the bill of law concerning the status of daaras intended to bring daaras into the national education system and a curriculum for modern daaras.

The CNLTP, on the other hand, grounds its activities in a discourse that sees talibés as victims not of an under-resourced but valid and valued religious education sector, but of malicious child traffickers. Administratively attached to the Ministry of Justice, the taskforce is intended to have a coordinating role, being made up of members from various ministries as well as civil society and religious actors (according to the CNLTP website these include two representatives of non-state actors though it is not specified to whom this refers, and one representative each from the association of imams and oulémas, the Qur’anic teachers associations, and the Catholic church) (Cellule

Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes, en particulier des femmes et des enfants (CNLTP), n.d.). Yet, despite the aim of coordinating across structures, its focus on child trafficking, and reliance on funding from the UNODC, required the CNLTP to frame the talibé problem in a specific way.

Like the Inspection des Daaras, the CNLTP was created in name several years before its mandate was specified and funding provided, this time by the UNODC. Although, according to a representative of the UNODC in Dakar, it was a “happy coincidence” that the UNODC gained funding from the governments of France and Monaco to work on trafficking in Senegal around the same time that the CNLTP was being established, the UNODC played an indispensable role in the operationalisation of the CNLTP, as before they paid for computers and vehicles, “it was a structure that had been put in place on paper, but which had no resources.” (Interview. Project staff member, UNODC. Dakar, 29th June 2018). As well as giving the CNLTP the ability to function, this funding reinforced the discourse framing talibés as victims of child trafficking specifically. The UNODC representative interviewed claimed that over the 2-3 years from 2012, the UNODC, through awareness raising communications campaigns “succeeded in installing the question of trafficking in the national public debate, because it was not very well known”, thus contributing to shaping the discourse around talibés in Senegal by linking the question of begging - “very old and very anchored in the Senegalese mentality” - with the new, unfamiliar discourse of trafficking (Interview. Project staff member, UNODC. Dakar, 29th June 2018). The CNLTP therefore demonstrates how such initiatives, even when their intention is to coordinate across competing priorities, are both necessarily shaped by and continuously reinforcing a discourse that projects a specific framing onto the talibés and daaras.

6.2.2 *Child protection and child rights in the Senegalese state: a sector in flux*

The Inspection des daaras and the CNLTP are far from the only structures involved with daaras and talibés. While the problematisations of talibés underpinning the Inspection des daaras and the CNLTP are inherent in the structures’ *raison d’être*, for other structures with a wider mandate the construction of talibés (who beg) as a target group and the problem of which they are deemed to be victims is not as self-evident. Whether they are labelled as students in precarious positions or as exploited trafficking victims,

narratives about talibés who beg are centred on their vulnerability. As such, they are one target group of state structures dealing with child protection or upholding child rights. In the Senegalese state, structures in this sector are in an almost constant state of flux, with departments and their mandates being shuffled between ministries that are regularly renamed or restructured. For example, the ministry dealing with family and women, which has contained structures such as the *Direction pour la Protection des Droits de l'Enfant* (DPDE) since the latter's creation in 2002, has undergone no less than six restructurings since 2007. In this time it has been titled: *Ministère de la famille, de la solidarité nationale, de l'entrepreneuriat féminin et de la micro finance* (2007-2009), *Ministère de la famille, de la solidarité nationale, de la sécurité alimentaire, de la solidarité nationale, de l'entrepreneuriat féminin, de la micro finance et de la petite enfance* (2009-2012), *Ministère de la femme, de l'enfant et de l'entrepreneuriat féminin* (2012-2014), *Ministère de la femme, la famille et l'enfance* (2014 - 2017), *Ministère de la Femme, de la Famille et du Genre* (2017 - 2019), and, since April 2019, *Ministère de la Femme, de la Famille, du Genre et de la Protection des enfants*. The frequent relabelling of the ministry may reflect changes in government priorities over the years (Tosun, 2018), which may in turn be the result of external pressures (Mortensen and Green-Pedersen, 2015). The inclusion of issues relating to children and childhood within this ministry, whatever it is named, risks limiting these concerns, and those specific to talibés, to the realm of 'women's issues' (Chant and Jones, 2005). Other ministries, however, have also had a stake in the field of child protection, including the Ministries of Social Action (now combined with the Ministry of Health), of Justice, and of the Interior (through the *brigade des mineurs* within the police force). This is not to mention the issue-specific structures established both within and outside of these various structures. In 2008, the *Cellule d'Appui à la Protection de l'Enfance* (Child Protection Unit, or CAPE) was established under the President's Office with the role of coordinating the various ministries responsible for different aspects of child protection under one national strategy (Ndène, 2017).

However, during the time of my fieldwork, child protection had become the mandate of the short-lived Ministry of Good Governance and Child Protection (MBGPE). The MBGPE was formed just as I was beginning my fieldwork in Senegal in September 2017.

The CAPE had been moved to sit under this ministry, while the DPDE remained within the Ministry of Women, Family and Gender. As well as the vague goal of delivering "policies aiming to reinforce good governance", the MBGPE's mandate was to:

ensure respect of children's fundamental rights and their protection against mistreatment and all forms of exploitation including those linked to begging. It guarantees good integration of young children in familial and social life.

It is responsible for policies regarding abandoned children, street children, and children threatened with marginalisation. It implements actions making it possible to give a decent living environment to these children.

(République du Sénégal, 2017. My translation)

The creation of the MBGPE and consequent restructuring was significant because it signalled recognition, on the part of the state, of the lack of coordination between state actors in the child protection sector. Concretely, it was intended to allow, according to a senior staff member of the CAPE (Interviewed 6th July 2018), all structures working on child protection issues to be positioned under the same ministerial umbrella in order to harmonise their approach. However, the MBGPE only existed until April 2019, when another reshuffle following the presidential election saw the somewhat incongruent pairing of Good Governance and Child Protection divided once again. Responsibility for child protection (including CAPE) has now been shifted back to the newly retitled Ministry of Women, Family, Gender, and Child Protection (Gouvernement du Sénégal, 2019). Nevertheless, at the time of my fieldwork, there was a sense of optimism among some of those I interviewed, including NGO workers and state representatives alike, that the new ministry would bring greater collaboration. A member of staff at a welcome centre, for example, described how "the difficulties of coordination with the structures, between the NGOs and the state structures that are intended to protect these children" were "heading towards changing a bit because now they have made one sole ministry, and it's very good because we couldn't find each other." The Ministry of Good Governance and Child Protection, he hoped, "seems to be a bit more coherent in terms

of strategy and of federations and associations” (Interview. Welcome centre staff member, Dakar, 11th January 2018).

6.2.3 *Competition and inadequate cooperation between state structures*

Despite the optimism of some in the sector, others were – rightly, as it has since turned out due to the fleeting existence of the ministry – not convinced that the MBGPE would solve the coordination problem, where many previous attempts had tried and failed. As well as efforts to coordinate the child protection (and child rights) sector more generally (such as the development of a National Child Protection Strategy in 2013 which included attempts to decentralise child protection to regional committees in each *département* [République du Sénégal and UNICEF, 2013, 2015]), in an indication of the state’s self-awareness of the silo problem, in recent years various attempts have been made to better coordinate the actions of the different ministries that each hold a piece of the puzzle of the talibé problem in their mandates. Like the laws intended to protect talibés, these plans have often gone unimplemented for several years, such as the *Programme d’éradication de la mendicité infantile* (Plan for the eradication of child begging) 2013-2015 (Direction des droits, de la protection de l’enfance et des groupes vulnérables, 2013), created under the framework of the SNPE but which, according to Aminanta Niang Ly of the DPDE (formerly the DDPEGV or *Direction des droits, de la protection de l’enfance et des groupes vulnérables* - Department of Rights and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Groups), remained unimplemented due to “several bottlenecks” until President Sall personally insisted on the launch of the Removal of Children from the Streets project in 2016 (Interview, Dakar, 8th June 2018). These attempts are not limited to plans and strategies, but include the establishment of committees and structures. For example, an Interministerial Committee for the Fight Against Begging in Urban Areas was established in July 2016 to coincide with the launch of the Sall government’s attempts to remove children from the street (Le Service de Communication de la Primature, Gouvernement du Sénégal, 2016). Yet as Mame Couna Thioye, Child Rights Programme Coordinator of RADDHO, described when asked if she has observed a good level of coordination amongst the various state actors (including but not limited to the key players listed above) and between the state and NGOs these attempts have failed to solve the issue of inadequate collaboration. She elaborated on the “problems of

coordination, of collaboration” that continue to be encountered by civil society actors trying to work with the government:

The problem of coordination of national institutions, even if they have put in place an Interministerial Committee for the monitoring of the National Child Protection Strategy... The coordination of institutions - the absence of coordination... or the weakness in the level of coordination, poses problems for civil society actors. Because, when you convoke a meeting, where for example the DESPS - the Directorate of Reform Schools and Social Protection comes, the Directorate of Protection comes, even the Directorate of Social Action comes, etc. Each of these institutions - and the Directorate of Human Rights - each of these institutions brings initiatives on begging, and each of these institutions wants its position. And we have difficulties collaborating with them. Honestly, we have difficulties. Because they say that they want to provide action, we participate, we need information. And often they don't want to share this information. And the Minister of Social Protection, of Reform Schools and Protection, says that everything that is *prise en charge* [care and management, payment of expenses] of children pertains to his domain, it's him who must control... it's the Directorate that must control the welcome centres, the *prise en charge*, everything relative to the *prise en charge* of children in situations of vulnerability etc. The Directorate of Protection of Child Rights says everything that is child protection, it's him, and today they've created a directorate for the protection of child rights but, equally, there is a Directorate for the Promotion of Child Rights¹⁸

(Interview. Mame Couna Thioye, Child Rights Programme Coordinator, RADDHO. Dakar, 2nd July 2018)

As well as a lack of coordination and collaboration, Mame Couna Thioye's words point to the competition that exists between state structures vying for control, and by extension resources. Where structures rely on external funding to conduct time-bounded projects, policy becomes fragmented. As Mr Wane of the PPDH describes, the

¹⁸ After the April 2019 restructuring, it appears that the Directorate for the Promotion of Child Rights has also been disbanded. (Gouvernement du Sénégal, 2019).

same dispersion that is felt between ministries and government structures exists between donors:

We are still in [a state of] institutional dispersion, even if there is a strategy and all, and that's - in my opinion, it's several things. Even the donors, too, well, they play the game! All these projects, sometimes they're embedded in the Ministry of Justice, another is taken over there, funding is dispersed, et cetera. [...] If there were... a group of donors for child protection, to even, in my opinion, to nationalise, harmonise, funding. [But] in bilateral cooperation, each one has their thing. Frankly, it's not just the government, huh? And we, frankly - because it's the most difficult - protection is more difficult than education, it's more difficult than health, protection it's really... firstly, in my opinion, these children, who have no access to education, who have no access to health care. It's also, it's also ideological, it's also cultural, it's difficult. That has nothing to do with vaccination campaigns, or construction of classrooms.

(Interview. Mamadou Wane, Coordinator of the PPDH. Dakar, 30th June 2018)

As Mr Wane highlights, the institutional dispersion is the result not only of a lack of cooperation but due to funding being distributed into issue-specific silos by international or bilateral actors, for which child protection – and the practice of talibé begging on which his work focuses – does not neatly fit. To access a particular funding source, each structure must adopt the discourse of its donor, problematising the daaras in the same way to legitimise particular approaches. This applies to the structures ostensibly set up with a coordinating role – like the CNLTP – as it does to others with a more circumscribed mandate.

This lack of coordination between state structures not only fails, despite the many plans in place, to lead to effective action, but is believed by some to create the opportunity for exploitation of talibés by leaving space in which those seeking to profit from child begging (be they sèriñ daaras or imposters posing as such) can operate.

[...] the problem is that, in the government, this question of children isn't treated in a uniform manner. Each person has their little piece, and they drag it out! The Minister of Justice has its authorities, who manage trafficking, exploitation of children, but if you go to the Ministry of

Governance, of Good Governance and Child Protection, they too have their services of protection, of promotion of child rights etc. And each one has its services, and each service has a little piece that it is working through, believing that they are solving the problem. But if there is no coordination at the level of the government, there is no clarity. There is the national taskforce that depends on the Ministry of Justice, who has its services for everything that is OIM and others for the region. What coordination is there between the different actions? You go to the departmental level, there are services of social action, who believe that it is something that they must take into account, there is the Ministry of Education who has a part and who must lead on the modernisation of daaras law. There are four or five Ministries, each with its prerogative related to child protection. So that, as well, that contributes to the haziness that there is.

(Interview. Aliou Kebe, development practitioner. Dakar, 26th July 2018)

This is despite the operations of the MBGPE at the time of our interview which, as described above, were intended to coordinate these myriad actions among the competing elements of the state.

Although the government is well aware of the problems of coordination between state structures, as evidenced by the various attempts to address these concerns, there are also benefits to the state of this institutional dispersion. The fragmentation means that each structure is able to, in the event that its initiatives fail, perhaps inevitably, to make much impact, blame either another structure specifically or the same lack of coordination critiqued by those outside the state. No one structure has the power to coordinate the sector, meaning too that no one has the responsibility to do so.

6.3 Beyond the state: NGO cooperation and competition

It is not only the state that is subject to the forces that create institutional dispersion. The image of a fragmented landscape of issue-specific initiatives, each tied to a distinct narrative, does not only apply to state structures but also to the plethora of NGOs and associations that include talibés within their mandates. Although NGOs largely speak the language of collaboration and cooperation, there are fault-lines along which tensions among NGOs and between NGOs and the state bubble to the surface.

6.3.1 *Tensions among NGOs and between NGOs and the state*

Beyond the state, NGOs too adopt particular framings in order to gain funding, and they too disagree over the most effective approaches, including how to interact with both the state and the *sëriñ daaras*. The tension between NGOs and the state is therefore not only one-way. Just as the NGOs have their frustrations with the state, state officials too find themselves frustrated by how some of the NGOs work, lamenting that they do not always align themselves to the national strategy:

There are some that... what they do isn't in line with state policy. So... when it's like that, we don't get involved. Because there are NGOs who can ask us this or that but when... what we do is we direct them towards the departmental [child protection] committees, so that they try to work with those departmental committees. In any case, for those who intervene in certain zones, at the central level, there are some who we work with directly, but for most of them we ask them to integrate into those frameworks. Because us, when we report to international organisations like... for the CRC, for the African Charter, the efforts that they recognise are those that have been done, that have been led, through those frameworks. Or at least following the logic of the government. But for the others that come, that intervene in a dispersed way, we... we don't get involved. And when we see that some, as some too think that they can, that they have an approach of 'street child' intervention, who think that they can leave children in the street and help them, for us, that's not our vision. For us, a child's place is not in the street. So when it's like that, necessarily... collaboration doesn't work, because those ideals are not the same, practices are not the same.

(Interview. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE, Dakar, 8th June 2018).

This concern about NGOs' approach is in line with previous studies (Diack, 2019) that have reported that Senegalese police disapprove of NGOs and services being provided directly to children on the street, rather than in centres. Aminata Niang Ly's comments also point to the impact of the misalignment between different constructions of the problems that these children face.

While Aminata Niang Ly sees the lack of collaboration with NGOs as coming down to differences in understanding and approaches, the CNLTP representative went further.

He presented NGOs as being led by a preoccupation with funding, which ultimately leaves space for accusations of their aims being led by external powers:

We see that more and more, there are a certain number of NGOs, voilà, their approach is everyone with their own path [...] It seems to me, if we... we have the same objectives, it would be more effective to work together. Unfortunately, for example last week, a certain number of NGOs contact us [the CNLTP], often they try to get support so they can get funding. In any case some build trust and then once they have obtained their funding, or if they don't need that letter, carry out the programme alone. Today, on that issue, the NGOs have done many good things, but to make them more credible, and to better capitalise on them, it seems to me that they need to do it in the name of the state, or with the state, because if not, it's there that we see the arguments that can be posed [...] about concepts that come from the West [...] can resurface, because the state isn't necessarily associated, it's not the one who... for me, I think that the right path is that we are together, with the state as leader. [...] the problem is complex enough that each one can play its part [...] on the basis of discussion and understanding. But, well, we saw that some sometimes have... agendas. To such a point that we have advised certain NGOs to ask themselves if they really want to see an end to this problem one day

(Interview. Senior staff member, CNLTP. Dakar, 22nd January 2018)

The perception referred to here of some NGOs, particularly large international organisations, as being driven by Western concepts and profiting from funding without supporting daaras is indeed common. How NGOs try to counter these arguments that their concepts come from the West will form the basis of the second half of this chapter. First, I turn to the relationships between NGOs.

NGO approaches range, amongst other things, from advocacy efforts (both national and international, such as the submission to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child made by RADDHO and the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria (see ACERWC, African Union, 2014) to material support (either consumables or infrastructure, or teachers, intended to contribute to modernising the daaras), returning (and, in rhetoric if not in practice (Einarsdóttir and Boiro, 2016; Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020), reintegrating) children to their families or daaras to their areas

of origin, or behaviour change work targeting, variously, the local communities where children beg, their areas of origin, the *sëriñ daaras*, or some combination of these groups.

In several of the *daaras* I visited, the *sëriñs* pointed out various improvements to the building and told me which NGO or international donor (most often USAID, *Secours Islamique Française* or Plan) had provided the improvement - roofs, chairs, blackboards, water pumps and mattresses are among the common features. Other organisations, more often local, provide donations of clothes, shoes, food and medicines. Other NGOs arrange for medical check-ups to be provided in the *daaras* themselves, treating talibés' skin infections and wounds. These donations may be in complement to other elements either expanding the curriculum (usually by the provision of French teachers) or attempting to persuade the *sëriñ daaras* to abandon or reduce begging. This exemplifies the discourse which constructs begging as the result of a lack of resources or understanding of the effects of the practice. Some NGOs such as World Vision and Tostan, work with *daaras* in rural areas to attempt to stem the flow of talibés to the urban centres, while others support *daaras* already in the cities where children beg. Whether the projects offer short-term emergency support or attempt to set up the *sëriñ daaras* with an alternative source of income to finance their *daara* in the long term, they come from a fundamental assumption that begging is the result of necessity, not profit-seeking on the part of the *sëriñ daaras*. Begging is therefore the justification for successive programmes, regardless of the programmes' results. Indeed, although these programmes continue to gain support and funding, their lack of impact on the number of talibés seen begging in the streets is widely recognised, including by Yves Olivier Kassoka, a UNICEF child protection specialist:

It was that [the goal of reducing rather than eliminating begging], before, because, ok, reducing begging, it's a progressive strategy towards putting an end [to it]. But what we noticed is that that there are more and more child beggars. So, it's not an option which... which is sustainable. Above all it's a game of hide and seek. I have given resources to Qur'anic teachers to reduce begging but [he sighs loudly], but they continue to exploit children.

(Interview. Yves Olivier Kassoka, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF.

Dakar, 25th May 2018)

This dilemma is not simply a matter of strategy but the extension of the conflicting discursive problematisations into practice. As discussed in Chapter Five, underpinning strategies of reducing or eliminating begging are the different understandings of how this talibé begging should be perceived. While attempts to eliminate begging sit well with narratives of child trafficking and exploitation, a focus on reduction in hours spent begging signals an assumption that the practice is grounded in necessity.

At the other end of the spectrum are those NGOs who choose not to support the daaras directly at all. A notable absence in the long list of INGOs who work with talibés is Save the Children, as Save the Children Senegal (the country office – now part of Save the Children International – as opposed to the West Africa Regional Office which is also situated in Dakar) has stopped working directly with daaras altogether. According to Ahmadou Gning, then Child Protection Manager, this is because of an agreement reached with Save the Children Sweden, one of the country office's main sources of funding, which forbids Save the Children Senegal from doing so. Ahmadou described the logic behind this decision as being due to the perception that despite NGO actions in the daaras over the years, the Qur'anic teachers persist in making children beg, and so the actions are seen as ineffective. Furthermore, Save the Children Sweden's position is that working directly with the daaras, or providing material assistance to them, is in a way promoting the daaras, and while they are not *against* daaras, they prefer to stick to advocacy work aiming to improve conditions (Interview. Ahmadou Gning, Child Protection Manager at Save the Children Senegal. Dakar, 16th July 2018). This demonstrates that the way in which begging is understood becomes central to how talibés are constructed in the gaze of external actors. In this process, the external donor is basing a decision to intervene (or not) based not only on need but, as mentioned in Chapter Five, on the perceived worthiness of talibés who beg and their *sëriñ* daaras. Save the Children therefore provides an example of how the ways in which an external actor or donor defines the issue of talibé begging and the groups involved in it have repercussions beyond the discursive realm.

The tension between the two viewpoints of those who see the need to directly intervene and those who take an advocacy-based approach is often, though not always, felt

between smaller local or national organisations and large, international organisations. A staff member in a locally run welcome centre, for example, called into question the results of the communication events held by international NGOs and institutions:

There are NGOs like Save the Children, UNICEF, all of them but... we meet at many events, and I see that they're spending a lot of resources, a lot of money on those events. And I ask myself, what is the direct impact of that on the children? You see? So you spend a lot of money but if it's always communication that's... that leads to nothing! And me, as I see it here, if you give me 10,000 cfa and I buy shoes for a child... that's concrete [...] I'm not saying that what they're doing isn't good, but I don't see the impact that it has. And that's been happening for years, but the problem still persists [...] Now, what I'm telling you is a bit sensitive, people are going to think that you're against [the NGOs], that you're criticising - no, I'm asking a question, and I want a response, to say that, ah yes, that NGO is there for so many years, and they've spend so many millions here, and that has had a result... but that's not often the case.

(Interview. Welcome centre staff member. Dakar. 7th December 2017)

These contrasting approaches lead to a lack of collaboration between NGOs that the same person describes as a “cacophony”, drawing attention to the power dynamics between international and local NGOs:

Given that there are many NGOs who come from different regions, who all want to act, to innovate or to work in the childhood domain. Each comes with their programme. And the strongest try to impose their programme on the weaker, because when you give funding to one organisation that is in their domain and you tell them, voilà, those are the terms of reference, it's like that that you have to do it, you are imposing on them your vision in fact, even though, in principle, for me, that should come from the bottom towards the top.

(Interview. Welcome centre staff member. Dakar. 7th December 2017)

Like the institutional landscape, therefore, the non-governmental landscape is one marked by fractures and a lack of cooperation. In this context, *sëriñ daaras* – not the *talibés* themselves – are often the intended targets of NGO programmes and projects. In the next section, I consider how NGOs work with this group.

6.4 Engagement with the *sëriñ daaras* through vernacularisers

In this section I explore how development actors engage *sëriñ daaras*. The majority of NGO projects work with *sëriñ daaras*, either as beneficiaries of material goods, or as the targets of child rights trainings and seminars. The *sëriñ daaras* I interviewed had different relationships with NGOs, from no involvement to longstanding partnerships. When NGO workers speak about their projects with *sëriñ daaras*, they frequently tell a common tale: initial hesitance or outright resistance on the part of the *sëriñ daaras* is converted to enthusiasm and gratitude through projects that utilise an ‘Islamic argument’ grounded in religion and delivered by experts respected on both sides to convince *sëriñ daaras* to support their perspective. Before delving into this approach in more detail, I turn first to the perceptions of NGOs among the *sëriñ daaras*.

6.4.1 *Relationships between development actors and sëriñ daaras*

The experiences of one *sëriñ daara* (who was mentioned in Chapter Four for his statement that he no longer lets white people in his *daara*) who had previously participated in an INGO project that funded a French teacher for two years encapsulate many of the frustrations encountered by *sëriñ daaras* in their dealings with NGOs. First, there were problems of a lack of understanding of the context, because the first teacher employed was female, and he believes that “Islam does not allow that a woman put herself in front of talibés of 14 or 15 or 20 years old to teach in a *daara*, and sometimes in an indecent outfit”. After the end of the project, when funding for French teaching was withdrawn, although he would have liked to continue French lessons “because the world evolves”, he could not pay the teacher “since we beg even to eat,” demonstrating the lack of sustainability of NGO projects related to the typical funding cycle in which the organisations operate. Since then, he has received occasional visits and donations from other NGOs, “usually foreigners brought here by a Senegalese person”. The worst come, take pictures, ask about his needs and never return; those, he says “do it for their own interests, not for ours”. Those who bring donations, he says, never provide what he needs:

They called us to tell us what they wanted to do but they didn’t ask us our needs first. And I told them all the time that the *daaras* all have difficulties but they’re not the same. Among these difficulties there are

those which are immediate, those which can wait, those which can be solved a little, and those which cannot be resolved. So if you come to help a daara you need to ask them what they need most and they'll tell you their immediate needs in relation to your capacities – but they don't do it. There are those who come with mats when what you need most is medicine, those who come with rice and sugar when you need toilets, or even those who come with other things when what you most need is dormitories for the children. [...] If they had asked me, I wouldn't ask them for something to eat or drink but medicine, a shower, electricity and a building, those are my needs.

(Interview. Sëriñ daara, Sicap Mbao, 6th June 2018a. Translated from Wolof)

This sëriñ daara, therefore, has been left frustrated by his interactions with NGOs, who at best failed to ask his opinions or meet his needs, and in some cases left him feeling that he and his talibés had been exploited. He is not the only one to hold such feelings. “There are many NGOs that beg in the name of daaras,” stated Imam Babacar Pouye, a sëriñ daara in Rufisque, as he described how others in his regional Qur'anic Teachers Association, where he is secretary general, “have been deceived several times” by NGOs that “come to take photos, promise them funding, make requests in the name of daaras, and put the money in their own accounts.” The result is that the sëriñ daaras now “refuse to let them in when they come to ask them questions or do censuses” (Interview. Imam Babacar Pouye, sëriñ daara and secretary general of the Qur'anic Teachers Association of Rufisque, 5th May 2018. Translated from Wolof).

This reluctance to engage is a common theme arising when NGO workers – and staff of state-led projects – discuss their work with sëriñ daaras. Yet NGO workers often rationalise the hesitance of sëriñ daaras to engage with their projects by referring to colonialism. They recount that some sëriñ daaras see NGOs, particularly international NGOs, as a new type of external interference that is against Islam:

The reluctance that we had [at the beginning of a project centred around the modernisation of a daara near Tivaouane] was particularly from certain members of the marabout's family who said ‘well, listen, you are... they're going to “*toubabiser*” - in quotes - your daara [where toubab is a white person]. Those people, they are paid by the whites to destroy

religion.’

(Interview. Child protection specialist, INGO. Dakar, 22nd November 2017)

Some suggest that this argument is instrumentalised in the service of drumming up objections among influential religious leaders to the interventions that have external backing.

There is the marabout lobby. These Qur’anic teachers are well networked - so they have the ear of those religious leaders, to tell them that ‘those people there are in the process of - of fighting Islam! You see, their donors are infidels, they’re Americans, they’re English, they’re French!’ All that.

(Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Project Assistant. Zero Begging project, Medina, Dakar. 1st August 2018)

While these claims may well be true for some *sëriñ daaras*, as shown above there are also those who were open to engaging with NGOs but have personally had bad experiences.

Despite their good intentions, NGOs can exacerbate these tensions by failing to accord adequate attention to the religious and cultural beliefs in their projects. Tensions between NGOs or institutions and the *sëriñ daaras* they intend to work with can be fired up by an inattention to details or a lack of understanding of the specific context in their projects, something of which many NGO workers are aware:

details can blow up the whole process [...] if UNICEF is badly seen in Touba it’s because on the Day of the Talibés, they brought footballs. According to them, a football is nothing, but it’s symbolic – some Qur’anic teachers think football is a problem!¹⁹ [They say] ‘and what’s more you didn’t ask us our opinion, you brought footballs, you called the children from their work to play games all day, they no longer study’ – ok, they exaggerated – but that is to say that the frictions are deep if we neglect certain details

¹⁹ Another interviewee told me that some *sëriñ daaras* believe football was invented by infidels kicking around the head of a prophet.

(Interview. Omar Ba, Director of Operations, GSI. Dakar, 26th June 2018)

According to Omar Ba of Global Solidarity Initiative (GSI), some Qur'anic teachers balk as soon as they hear the term 'NGO', as "even the idea of an NGO is loaded. For them it's... it's almost an insult." This, because as he continues, "we can't come as an NGO and say that we're not an NGO" means that each organisation finds itself trying to prove "what makes us different from other NGOs who came and... who we don't agree with" (Interview. Omar Ba, Director of Operations, GSI. Dakar, 26th June 2018). For many, this means presenting their work with *sëriñ daaras* as collaborative. The remainder of this chapter therefore turns to the examination of this collaboration, its purpose and its mechanics. I demonstrate how NGOs commonly use what they term an 'Islamic argument' to convince *sëriñ daaras*, imams and their followers of the aims of their interventions. Somewhat paradoxically, it is only through this religious discourse that NGOs are able to dissociate begging from religion.

The approach also feeds into the perception of NGOs by the *sëriñ daaras*. Omar Ba of GSI remarked that for Qur'anic teachers, "the state approach is based in repression. The NGOs' approach is based on giving lessons." While NGOs may frame their approach as one of collaboration, working *with*, *sëriñ daaras*, there is no denying that the workshops and seminars are intended to persuade *sëriñ daaras* of the NGOs' argument. He admitted that his own organisation's work with Qur'anic teachers - in which GSI is working with a group of Qur'anic teachers to "do what the state won't manage to do" and define the criteria for what counts as a *daara* - can be considered a type of "blackmail", as the religious teachers are persuaded to participate by the knowledge that knowing what counts as a *daara* is a step that needs to happen before GSI will roll out programmes to support the *daaras*.

6.4.2 *Child rights and the Islamic argument*

With so many NGOs employing rights-based language in their public facing communications about the *daaras*, I asked many interviewees if or how they use child rights in their work. However, the majority of respondents seemed to dismiss the subject as unimportant or uninteresting. Instead, many NGO workers explained how rather than talking about rights, they use the language of religion to spread the same messages in an attempt to change the practices of *sëriñ daaras* through seminars and

trainings. The approach relies on a construction of the *sëriñ daaras* as ignorant, led to mistreat children by misinterpretations or a lack of understanding of the religion that they themselves teach, and unaware that they are violating children's rights in doing so. Such supposed misconceptions are countered by employing specialists able to move between the secular discourse of development and local interpretations of Islam. Given that I have not myself studied the Qur'an or Islam in depth, I do not seek here to draw conclusions about how child rights actually relate to the teachings of the religion. Rather, I am interested in the process whereby NGOs rely on an Islamic argument to convince *sëriñ daaras*, and the assumptions and contradictions that this brings to light.

An Islamic argument is used by NGOs to promote child rights ideas among the *sëriñ daaras*, including but not limited to promoting the abandonment of begging. By connecting rights to verses of the Qur'an, the intention is to counteract assumptions that child rights will be perceived as external ideas that do not fit well with the local culture, and often to circumvent the language of child rights altogether because "for [the *sëriñ daaras*]... child rights are rights against parents, or in any case against the Qur'anic teachers with whom the child had been entrusted (*confié*)" (Interview. Omar Ba, Director of Operations, GSI. Dakar, 26th June 2018). In the case of talibé begging, the Islamic argument inherently involves the dissociation of begging from religion, which finds parallels in behaviour change work around 'harmful traditional practices' such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Organisations such as Tostan frequently seek to persuade communities, including religious leaders, that the practice now labelled FGM/C is a harmful *traditional*, not religious, practice, that as such should be abandoned (Easton, Monkman and Miles, 2003). The same can be said of talibé begging. NGOs, in their dealings with *sëriñ daaras* and externally, frequently accept and adopt the framing of talibé begging as a traditional practice in Qur'anic schools, intended to provide education in ascetism, humility and resilience yet seek to dissociate the practice from the religion itself. This step is necessary, of course, because if they hope to keep *sëriñ daaras* and the brotherhood leaders on side, NGOs must not - and cannot - criticise religious practice.

The themes raised here are thus unsurprisingly reminiscent of some of those raised by Østebø and Østebø (2014) in their research based on anti-FGM/C workshops in

Ethiopia, in which they question NGOs' "instrumental" use of religious leaders in workshops and trainings, arguing that such practices are based on oversimplified understandings of power relations. They demonstrate how such trainings can fail to bring about the intended results even if NGOs are able to claim success following the performance of agreement by religious leaders who are paid to participate. They also show how the target communities intended to accept the message of religious leaders who agree with the NGO can object either to the individual style of a particular religious leader, or to the perceived co-option of religious leaders who echo what Østebø and Østebø term the "monological" discourse against FGM/C. Particularly relevant to the present research, however, is that, as Østebø and Østebø (2014, pp. 91-92), describe the purpose of these workshops is not to have a real theological debate but to perform a "strong preset agenda" in which religious leaders who have not accepted the anti-FGM/C discourse are ultimately expected to come around to the point of view of those who have, and any resistance to this standpoint is minimised or portrayed as ignorance. Similarly, in the NGO discourse around working with *sëriñ daaras*, the 'Islamic argument' is presented with the implication that the *sëriñ daaras* who violate children's rights – be that through begging or violent discipline – have misinterpreted their own religion. This discourse is necessary because the alternative would require development actors leading such workshops to slip out of the discourse constructing *sëriñ daaras* as well-meaning, if vulnerable and misguided. Take as an example the description given by Biram Ndiaye as he recounted the first experience that ENDA organised to raise awareness of child rights among thirty Qur'anic teachers:

We did the traditional speeches to start. We also asked that they pray so that the workshop went well. And when we finished, they asked to speak, and they told us 'before we go [further], you must tell us why you have asked us to come here, I hope it's not to speak about... When someone hits a child, he presses charges - I hope you haven't brought us there to talk to us about those things? We want you to tell us concretely why we are there, if it's that, you tell us, if it's something else, you tell us.' Well, luckily, I had two facilitators. One, he taught Arabic, so it's someone who has mastered the Qur'an, the hadiths. And, he's inspector of teaching so he's a major pedagogue and another who had really been, who was one of the first to be trained on the rights of the child, who had worked a lot

on that. [...] At the end, there were marabouts who cried. Who cried! The ambiance was so good, but also they understood things so well, they were *gênés* [embarrassed, bothered, unsettled], some were *gênés* by our behaviour from the start, because we hadn't told them something that wasn't said in the Qur'an.

(Interview. Biram Ndiaye. Programme Manager, ENDA. Guédiawaye, 8th March 2018)

This excerpt follows a familiar pattern in the stories of NGO workers who have been involved in such events: the *sëriñ daaras* are at first reluctant or even resistant, but through a process involving respecting traditions such as opening with prayers and relying upon an argument grounded in the Qur'an, by the end of the meeting the same *sëriñ daaras* are convinced, and repentant.

Employing the Islamic argument in their behaviour change strategies also allows NGOs to refute the accusations of their goals being led by Western interests and those of their donors and being in opposition to Islam and Qur'anic education. This is particularly clear in the case of Christian NGO World Vision,²⁰ where uniting imams and pastors – who had never sat in a room together before – to work together and employing an argument based on the Qur'an apparently allowed them to overcome accusations of proselytising even in Medina Gounass, a religious town known for its conservatism in the southern Velingara department.

In this approach, where we develop modules based on the Qur'an, it's an imam who works with us who... who gives the guidelines, the instructions, in relation to the Qur'anic verses. Me, I can't allow myself, as a Christian, to say to an imam 'voilà, here's what the Qur'an says' [...] But the imam [who works with World Vision] is trained in the same way as us [...] and in each right that we bring up, there really are surahs that allow us to say 'voilà, here's what the Qur'an says about such or such right'

(Interview. Senior project team member, World Vision. Dakar, 14th

²⁰ Christian in the sense that the organisation's underlying ethos is Christian, while recognising that there may be a high proportion of Muslim staff in World Vision Senegal, even if those interviewed were themselves Christian.

December 2017)

Although the World Vision employee associates the reliance on an imam to link rights to the Qur'anic verses with his Christian faith, this is a common feature of many NGOs ways of working with religious leaders. In the next section, I examine the role of these individuals in between secular and religious worlds in more detail.

6.5 The role of vernacularisers

All of the examples cited above share the commonality of each employing experts who can move between the (largely) secular NGO world and that of the religious leaders. As with the experience recounted by Biram Ndiaye, the trainings and workshops led by NGOs inevitably rely upon individuals who can operate in both the discourses of child rights and religion. This can include literally speaking another language - Arabic, in particular - but more broadly requires the ability to interpret and find commonalities between the religious world view of the Qur'anic teachers and the secular world of NGOs. Those intermediaries such as the facilitators described by Biram Ndiaye, act as vernacularisers, building cultural legitimacy (An-Na'im, 1994; Levitt and Merry, 2009) by bridging the gap between the secular doctrine of international rights law and Islamic teachings, which, as several interviewees described, can be interpreted as containing similar sentiments when it comes to how children should be treated. Many of these projects depend on activists who can move seamlessly between the worlds of NGOs and religious leaders. Various participants in my research either filled this position themselves or referred to the importance of others who do for their ability to convince the Qur'anic teachers. This is not, of course, to say that other Senegalese staff are not religious, mainly Muslim, but that the credentials and connections of religious scholars who are aligned to NGOs are a necessary element of NGO programmes.

Having these individuals who can operate in and who are respected in both the secular and religious communities opens doors that might otherwise be closed to organisations. GSI uses their National Director, himself a respected religious scholar and member of the Mbacké family that has retains a particular power within the Murid brotherhood based in Touba, to facilitate their work (including conducting a census of daaras in Touba) and that of their partners, with Omar Ba of GSI claiming that UNICEF is only

able to access the religious city because of this individual connection. He described that even with this connection, the Qur'anic teachers in Touba were still at first suspicious:

They said, ok, they know him, they know it's a serious guy and all that, they said to us, but what proves to us that you're not there sent by the state, or whatever lobby, to trap us?

(Interview. Omar Ba, Director of Operations, GSI. Dakar, 26th June 2018)

The advantage of having a personal connection was to “oblige them to listen to us”, hearing the NGO out when they explained their intended approach and projects, a privilege not accorded to many NGOs seeking to work with daaras in Touba.

Despite the common narrative promoted by NGOs of the repentant *sëriñ* daaras moved to tears and vowing never again to violate a child's rights, some doubt that such sessions are as successful as the NGOs claim. For Alioune Sarr, then Director of Child Protection in the short-lived MBGPE, those who have a strong religiously grounded belief that suffering is necessary to learn the Qur'an will not change their ways following arguments based on human rights even if they claim to have done so:

someone who is convinced [of the need for suffering], profoundly convinced of this religious foundation, it's a religious belief - to not say Qur'anic, yes. But that one, you explain to him that it's forbidden in the Convention of the Rights of Child, the Constitution forbids this. He's going to listen to you but... you haven't convinced him. He won't do it anymore in public, but in private, the children are going to suffer! You [come] with all your treaties, the NGOs will parade, they're all going to say yeah, the marabouts are convinced now.

(Interview. Alioune Sarr, Director of Child Protection, MBGPE. Dakar, 5th June 2018)

Again, this is similar to the performative acceptance of anti-FGM/C discourse while continuing to support the practice as demonstrated by Østebø and Østebø (2014) with religious leaders paid to participate in anti-FGM/C seminars in Ethiopia. Begging presents a particular sticking point. Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, NGOs are primarily motivated to intervene in daaras where begging is practiced, talibés' begging may not be overcome by these trainings and seminars. As Imam Babacar Pouye

described, along with the use of physical punishments, the practice of begging in daaras is one such thorny issue that continues to be a source of contention between sèriñ daaras and the NGOs, even among those who accept the other 'lessons':

75 percent of them [the sèriñ daaras] don't accept [the rights of the child as NGOs describe them]. Only 15 percent accept. In Islam, we are all in agreement, the Prophet indicated more than 12 fundamental rights. Where they don't agree with the NGOs, it's when they talk about begging, because many [of the sèriñ daaras] practice begging. When they say children must not work, must not beg, we're going to have differences, but for the rights like *droit à la vie, droit à la santé...* we're agreed.

(Interview. Imam Babacar Pouye, sèriñ daara and Secretary General of Qur'anic Teachers' Association of Rufisque. Rufisque, 5th May 2018. Translated from Wolof)

For NGOs, however, there is no need to account for this resistance that may challenge success stories. Resistance to the teachings of NGOs and their partners can easily be explained by invoking the faux marabout construction. While those who disagree may individually be assumed to be stubborn or conservative, as an abstract group they are delegitimised altogether by the imposition of the faux marabout label. This creates three groups, those who have been convinced, those who are ignorant and yet to be convinced, and those who are not real Qur'anic teachers at all. The widespread use of the Islamic argument therefore depends on the contradiction between the discourses: to justify and fund these endless seminars depends on the belief that ignorance, not only of children's rights but of religious texts, is at the heart of the problem. Yet at the same time, the continued exploitation despite many years of such programmes must be explained by laying blame elsewhere.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the range of actors - state structures, national and international NGOs and institutions, and others - who each intervene based on a particular, if not always well-articulated, construction of 'the talibé problem', and the interactions between them. Within the state, in some cases, the narrative employed by a particular structure is unsurprisingly connected to their *raison d'être* - the CNLTP, for

example, sees the issue as one of child trafficking, while the MEN sees it through the lens of education, limiting them to a particular, preordained set of solutions but connecting them to international discourses and funding sources. Among other structures, a greater acknowledgement of the complexities translates into disparate actions that are perceived as uncoordinated by those within and outside of the state. Even when structures are set up to coordinate actions, despite the best intentions of those working within them, these structures themselves ultimately become another contender competing for funding and power. Much energy is put into developing plans that go unimplemented when adequate funding is not allocated.

Beyond the state, there are also clear tensions between organisations that have adopted different approaches. While many smaller organisations support *daaras* with direct donations, and so are criticised for perpetuating the issue, the larger or international organisations are often seen as either ineffective or, worse, exploiting the issue for their own fundraising aims. If the NGOs tend to see the state as uncoordinated and overly influenced by religious lobbies, state actors are frustrated by NGOs acting outside of the state strategy who they depict as preoccupied with funding concerns. The same critique is made by *sëriñ daaras* themselves, who each have or are aware of experiences that have left them feeling exploited or abandoned.

Many NGOs have adopted a behaviour change approach based on the ‘Islamic argument’ – grounding ideas often seen as Western or external, such as child rights but more specifically Western norms of childhood, education, and child-raising, in Islamic knowledge and beliefs – in a similar fashion to campaigns to accelerate abandonment of practices such as FGM/C. Though their precise content varies, these initiatives share the narrative of ignorant or misinformed (rather than malicious) *sëriñ daaras* being brought around to the NGOs’ point of view by explanations of how they have misinterpreted religious teachings, which requires the involvement of experts who can transverse the boundary between NGO and religious teachers. In this way, although the explicit use of child rights discourse may be minimised, NGOs are able to vernacularise the content of these rights. Doubts remain over the extent to which acceptance of the teachings of these workshops may be performative, as begging and other violations of *talibés’* rights continue. There is, however, no need for NGOs and their donors to reckon

with these critiques, as the slippery construct of the faux marabout is available to take the blame for continued rights violations.

Moving into Part Three of the thesis, I examine how the dynamics set out in this chapter – a lack of cooperation, competition between intervening actors, and a logic of, perhaps performative, engagement with *sëriñ daaras* - play out in three different projects that each seek to improve the lot of talibés in different, and sometimes contradictory, ways.

PART THREE

Case studies

In the final part of the thesis, I apply the findings on discourse and dynamics set out in Part Two to three approaches each involving a variety of development actors: daara modernisation, the Removal of Children from the Street, and the Zéro Mendicité project focused on local government. These chapters draw on project documents and government plans as well as my interviews to demonstrate that although the projects begin from different justifications, they find themselves trapped in the same dynamics.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Come, we’re going to draft a law!”: The Daara Modernisation Approach

The daaras who keep their distance risk being swallowed up by modernisation. That’s maybe a law, maybe a law of nature, or a law of modernity, or a law - I don’t know what law, but one cannot stop progress. It’s not possible. One cannot stop progress.

(Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des Daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the daara modernisation approach, which seeks to regulate daaras, their curricula, and conditions, and which has gathered momentum since the establishment of international targets on universal primary education. The daara modernisation approach includes three elements: the broadening of what children learn in a daara beyond a religious education focused on the memorisation of the Qur’an; the improvement of conditions in daaras; and the establishment of a legal framework to regulate daaras and bring some (but not all) into the public education system, thus allowing them access to funding. Although regulation is the eventual objective, the modernisation project has adopted a collaborative approach, involving negotiation between state and non-state development actors, including both NGOs and international institutions, on one hand, and Qur’anic teachers and religious leaders on the other. This collaborative approach resulted in Qur’anic teachers’ associations approving a renegotiated bill of law, having rejected previous versions, which would allow daaras meeting a certain set of criteria to gain official recognition. However, the content of the revised bill and the fact that, four years later, it has not yet been passed into law by the government demonstrates the limits of such an approach.

In this chapter, I focus on this collaborative process. The main contribution of the chapter is to highlight how, by engaging with the daara modernisation agenda in

negotiations over the content of the bill of law and calling for the bill's adoption, Senegal's Qur'anic teachers have not only been able to influence how the state appropriates and reinterprets global education norms (Charlier and Panait, 2018) but also to take advantage of the "dance between discourses" (Thiam, 2014) that alternatively problematise the daaras as sites of exploitation and as vulnerable schools to negotiate for their preferred outcomes.

I will first introduce the approach and its background, before turning to the process of collaboration. I consider two themes from my interviews that demonstrated a continuing hesitance about the modernisation approach: what should be taught in a modern daara (and how), and whether modernisation of the form advocated by the state should be obligatory for all daaras. These concerns demonstrate that the absence of overt organised resistance to the modernisation endeavour overall does not necessarily mean that *sëriñ* daaras are now fully on board. Rather, they continue to contest the mechanisms of the development project, including the privilege of secular over religious expertise, without rejecting the idea of modernity itself. Finally, I turn to the content of the bill of law that was eventually approved by the FNAECS in December 2016 and the *Conseil des ministres* (the Cabinet) in June 2018, focusing on the near complete silencing of begging in the approved draft as a result of negotiation with *sëriñ* daaras.

7.2 The modernisation approach: one vision of modernity for daaras

In this section, I introduce the modernisation approach, firstly by discussing how the projects that exist today promote just one possible understanding of modernity, before returning briefly to the history and aims of the modernisation approach and describing the current official projects.

7.2.1 Which modernity?

Before discussing the history of the state's modernisation project, it is first necessary to understand that this vision of modernity is not the only one possible. Modernisation in this context does not refer to modernisation theory of economic growth and industrialisation that dominated the study of development economics in the 1950s and 1960s, minimising or outright dismissing the role of religion in a country's economic growth (such as Rostow, 1960) but conversely is the result of recognition of the

centrality of religion in the lives of Senegalese Muslims today, reflecting, to some extent, local interpretations of what modernity means and what it should look like. Nevertheless, the assumption that secularism accompanies modernity is central in objections to the modernisation project. In his study of the education reforms that allowed the teaching of religion in secular schools and set the stage for the integration of daaras into the formal system, Charlier (2002, p. 107) describes the reform of religious education in the name of modernity as a paradox. Yet this is only a paradox for those who subscribe to modernist theories that assume that religion and modernity are incompatible concepts, rather than those which see that religion and tradition coexist with modernity (Ellis and ter Haar, 2004). By creating modern daaras, the state is explicitly aiming to create a hybrid form that brings together the preferences of parents who are attached to a Qur'anic (rather than other forms of Islamic) education with elements of the secular curriculum. This creates a dual aim, of both valorising the memorisation of the Qur'an and transforming how a child achieves this goal.

This tension, between valorising Qur'anic education and transforming it, leads back to the question of what the aims of daara modernisation are. While some may object to any change to how daaras function at all, others object specifically to the type of changes intended by the state and its partners. For some in the latter category, the very word 'modernisation' raises objections, as modernisation is perceived as inherently implying Westernisation – or *toubabisation* (where *toubab* means white person) – and changing the specific character of the traditional forms of education provided by the daaras into something imposed from the outside:

I don't like the word 'modernisation' of daaras. It's updating (*réactualisation*) of daaras, taking into account the social environment of today's world. So it's necessary to move with the times while keeping the essence of Qur'anic teaching.

(Interview. Senior staff member, JAMRA. Dakar, 4th August 2018)

Such objections are in keeping with the tension discussed by Charlier *et al* (2017), who argue that the modernisation projects bring to the fore a tension between two kinds of modernity: Western and Islamic. For those imams and *sëriñ* daaras who are in favour of modernising Qur'anic education, adapting traditions does not necessarily have to mean

moving towards secularism or a Westernised curriculum. They believe that religious education and participating fully in modern aspects of life do not have to be mutually exclusive. Imam Diene, Secretary General of the Association of Imams and Oulemas (and also, it may be relevant to note, an orthodontist, who began his own education in a daara before eventually completing his secular studies at university in Canada) described his vision for a modern education for talibés. He started by insisting that the place for children is no longer in the street, before continuing:

In the modern world, talibés should even learn French, even English, set a watch, know how to use a tablet... because the boards from which we learned the Qur'an, [...] they've become tablets! Before, it was manual, it was - but now it's electronic! From my mobile phone, I can read the Qur'an, whichever verse I want, I can write in Arabic, as I want. I can send a message, as I want, to any corner of the world. You've seen how fast it is? [...] And if we stay in tradition, we'll be very behind. All of the students now must learn the Qur'an, even from tablets. The world has evolved so much that it has come to that step.

(Interview. Imam Oumar Diene, Secretary General of ANIOS. Dakar, 25th July 2018).

This vision of modernity is not entirely distinct from that of the state, as it continues to reference literacy in a colonial language as a marker of modernity. However, it places more value on religion and the potential for modern technology to be used for learning the Qur'an.

Imam Diene was not the only person to be enthused about this prospect. A child protection specialist from one INGO described how the son of the owner of the daara that they had supported to modernise had been trying to persuade his father to allow the children to have access to the internet - something the sèriñ daara had previously turned down when suggested by the NGO - so that the children could read the Qur'an on the computers. They were looking at how computers could be set up that would let the children do this and nothing else (which would still teach them the basics of using a computer, essential for many occupations available to young Dakarois)(Interview. Child Protection Specialist. INGO, 22nd November 2017). These innovations epitomise a hybrid vision of modernity that marries traditional values - the importance of

memorising the Qur'an - with the realities of the world today. This goes far beyond, and does not necessarily include, the inclusion of French language - which will always be seen by some as the language of colonialism. Instead of 'toubabisation', these innovations offer a way to harness modern technologies to advance the primary aim of the daaras in facilitating Qur'anic memorisation.

These examples are intended to show that the state's vision of modernity, in which the colonial language and other secular subjects are inserted into the Qur'anic education system, is not the only one possible, and further that those involved in the process are aware of this. Instead, however, the type of hybrid form promoted by the official modernisation project, the history of which I now turn to, is focused on meeting universal targets for primary education. This creates a conflict between differing visions of what a modern daara can look like, even among those who are not inherently against the idea of change in the daaras, but has also left space for *sëriñ* daaras to influence the shape of the state's vision.

7.2.2 *Background to the project*

As discussed in Chapter Two, the idea of modernising daaras has intermittently been on the agenda of the Senegalese state, NGOs working in Senegal and religious organisations since at least the 1970s, though it is much more recently that the terminology of modernisation has been applied. Projects in the 1990s spoke not of 'modern' daaras but of '*école coranique rénovée*': renovated (reformed, refurbished, updated) Qur'anic school[s] (Nguirane and Badiane, 1995, pp. 13–14. My translation), or of "community daara", keeping a focus on "the sacred principles of Qur'anic teaching, but also with respect for child rights" (Mbodj, 1995. My translation). Such projects did not seek to create a hybrid model akin to that proposed since the 2010s, nor to reposition daaras either within or as pathways into formal education. On the contrary, it was then considered necessary:

[...] in the establishment of refurbished Qur'anic schools, to dare to resolutely turn our back on certain beliefs according to which there is no education of value except for that which is enclosed by four walls: education for all does not mean school for all. The other face of non-formal education, literacy teaching for young people and adults, shows that we have understood that truth for a long time. (Nguirane and

Badiane, 1995, p. 19. My translation)

These 1990s efforts did, however, already exhibit signs pointing towards the mechanisms of today's approach:

Instead of coercive measures, we use the weapon of dissuasion by resolute assistance brought to those who, among the Qur'anic teachers, are conscious of their responsibilities vis-a-vis children, and accept to stay in their [rural] region with the families of origin of their disciples (Mbodj, 1995. My translation).

This logic of rewarding those who act in a manner seen as acceptable by the state and funders - and ignoring, rather than sanctioning, those who do not - continues to underpin the modernisation project today.

Following the Wade government's announcement of reforms to the education sector in 2002, the focus of efforts targeting daaras was at first on expanding the curriculum through a UNESCO and UNICEF-funded trilingualism project whereby children in 80 daaras targeted in Thies, Diourbel, Kaolack and Dakar regions would learn French, Arabic, and a national language (varying by region) as well as basic numeracy and vocational training (Dieng, 2010). While this may seem to be a first step into state intervention in the daaras, and a radical shift away from the policy of effectively ignoring the Qur'anic education sector that had been established as the norm by the point of Senegal's independence, this is not quite the case. Instead, after having set out the reforms that made it possible, the state did not have much input into this project (D'Aoust, 2013). The project aimed to create 'modernised daaras' that were intended to offer improved conditions for talibés as well as extending the curriculum. However, many of the 80 daaras intended to benefit dropped out of the project due to a lack of support to provide the curriculum, and a critical mid-term evaluation found conditions to be barely improved and continued hostility to the approach from certain religious families as well as talibés' parents (D'Aoust, 2013; Charlier, Croché and Panait, 2017). This failure led to recognition that modernising the daaras and reducing talibé begging needs to mean more than broadening the curriculum, as explained in an interview with a specialist in UNICEF's Child Protection department:

... at [the stage of] analysis, [the trilingualism and professional training

in daaras approach] had not reduced the number of children who are still in the street, who are exploited, it had not changed the conditions in the daaras in general. So, there was a progressive evolution, today, towards the discourse that sees to it that we modernise the daaras, we organise the daaras, we revise the content of trainings in the daaras and integrate other dimensions, and also make the link between daaras and formal school. [...] There is also support that is given towards... let's say work to inform, raise awareness of Qur'anic teachers so that children are protected, the children in the daaras, against abuse, violence, mistreatment, and so there is a respect among their members, but this framework is in the making. So the option is really to make it so that the child who is in the daara, his right to the education is respected, his right to health, to leisure, to early learning activities, to information, is respected. So that he benefits from the same rights as other children who are in formal education.

(Interview. Yves Olivier Kassoka, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF. Dakar, 25th May 2018)

This evolution did not happen immediately. Although the trilingualism approach fell to the wayside, the focus on expanding the daara's curriculum was sustained in the projects of large international organisations. From 2008, USAID funded a project under the umbrella of 'basic education' which sought to prepare talibés in 350 daaras to enter primary school or pass the primary school completion exam (Charlier, Croché and Panait, 2017). Like its predecessors, this project was criticised for reasons including a lack of state ownership, the level of autonomy given to the sēriñ daaras in deciding the content of the curriculum and the precarious working conditions of volunteer teachers (Charlier, Croché and Panait, 2017). Although these projects led to little success, they were the precursors to the state's current modernisation projects and coincided with the 2009 establishment of the Inspection des Daaras within the MEN, signalling the embedding of this approach in the state.

7.2.3 PAMOD and PAQEEB

Currently, the state's modernisation approach encapsulates two main projects: *Projet d'appui à la modernisation des daaras* (Project Supporting the Modernisation of Daaras or PAMOD,) and a component of the *Projet d'Amélioration de la Qualité et de l'Équité de l'Éducation de Base* (Improvement in Quality and Equity of Basic Education Project or

PAQEED). Both projects exist within the framework of the PAQUET-EF (*Programme d'amélioration de la qualité, de l'équité et de la transparence, Secteur Éducation-Formation*, or Programme of Improvement in Quality, Equity and Transparency, Education and Training Sector; herein simply PAQUET), which has set out Senegal's education policy since 2013, and which was updated in 2018 to cover the period 2018-2030 (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale *et al.*, 2018). PAMOD has been largely financed since 2011 by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), with the state's contribution limited to 20% of construction costs. The project's main objectives include the construction of 32 new daaras which will be public - state-run and free to parents - and another 32 daaras which will be constructed or renovated and equipped but will continue to be run by their existing sēriñs. These daaras are referred to as 'non-public', apparently because of objections being made to the term 'private' by the donor:

they are private daaras - we say 'non-public' so as not to upset the IsDB, who is an international donor but still public, it's public money which should be destined to public structures, which means they didn't like the qualifier 'private daara' much.

(Interview. Mamadou Mbodj Diouf. Project Coordinator, PAMOD. Dakar, 4th July 2018)

The 32 public daaras are described as model modern daaras, where the government's modern daara curriculum will be piloted, while the existing teachers in the non-public daara will receive training in pedagogy as well as management. According to one staff member in the Inspection des daaras, which spearheads the approach, the original plan was for PAMOD to build 100 public daaras, but this was reduced in order to avoid accusations from sēriñ daaras that the state plans to replace privately-run daaras altogether (Interview. Staff member, Inspection des Daaras. Dakar. 8th February 2018). The PAMOD project also involves the construction of a 17-story building in the Plateau area of downtown Dakar as *waqf* (endowed in the name of God) in order to contribute to the sustainability of the project by way of renting out the building. As buildings that are made *waqf* cannot be repurposed, sold or given away, this would ensure some level of income for the project for years to come, just as *waqf* endowments have done for many welfare and development projects such as hospitals and schools for centuries in

other contexts (Deneulin, 2009). The construction project was planned to cost 10.2 billion FCFA and expected to raise an income of 2-3 billion FCFA per year once constructed ('Un immeuble objet de waqf: Un bijou de 10 milliards 217 millions FCFA', 2019).

Meanwhile, another component of PAQEED, financed by a World Bank loan, aims to bring 100 existing traditional daaras up to the standards of a modern daara and to test a curriculum that has been developed by the MEN and *Partenariat pour le Retrait et la Réinsertion des Enfants de la Rue* (Partnership for the Removal and Reinsertion of Street Children, or PARRER – a now defunct coalition of actors) in these private daaras. This curriculum consists of eight years of education, beginning when the child is five years old. The first three years are dedicated purely to the memorisation of the Qur'an. Following this, in the fourth year, the child will begin to learn Arabic and French languages, and begin other school subjects taught in primary schools, as well as continuing the memorisation of the Qur'an. By the fifth year, it is deemed that the child should be able to have completed the memorisation of the Qur'an, but he (or she) will continue this if he has not finished, as well as the other subjects. In the final three years, he will complete the primary curriculum in French and Arabic, allowing him to sit official exams which will allow him to continue to *collège* with pupils who attended secular primary school (as explained during an interview with a senior staff member, Inspection des Daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018).

This approach is grounded in the education-based discourse in which daaras have come to be considered as schools, or at the very least legitimate educational establishments, even if they do not live up to international standards of what a school should be and do which are fundamentally based on Western models of education (Thiam, 2014). Such a conception of daara as school is necessary to justify the introduction of the elementary school curriculum into daaras. As described in Chapter Two, this is at odds with the position which the state has taken towards daaras since the colonial administration position them outside of the formal system and outwith the definition of a school. The embedding of daaras in the national education system therefore involves a change in the limits of the state's mandate, or, as the MEN puts it, "the diversification of the educational offer with the aim of adapting the offer to the demand" (Ministère de

l'Education nationale, 2016, p. 24. My translation), presented as a direct response to low school enrolment rates.

The aim to bring daaras into the national education system, allowing their funding as well as regulation, require changes to Senegalese law as well as a revised curriculum. Daaras have never been part of the national education system in Senegal, having been set apart by colonial administrators in an attempt to invalidate them. Since 2010, steps have been taken towards developing the *projet de loi portant statut des daaras*, or the bill of law regarding the status of daaras, which would, if passed into law, allow for the regulation of daaras by the state, as well as bringing daaras into the state education system and thus mandating their funding. The next section focuses on the process of collaboration that led to agreement on this bill – not yet passed into law – between the state and Qur'anic Teachers' Associations.

Date	Event
May 1978	Conference on Qur'anic Teaching held, organised by the MEN, Islamic Institute of Dakar, cultural and scientific institute IFAN, and the Federation of Islamic Associations of Senegal.
5-9 th March 1990	Jomtien Conference and declaration of Education for All
26-28 th April 2000	World Education Forum and announcement of Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All
2002	Reforms to Senegal's education system announced by President Wade
2002-2005	UNESCO Trilingualism project
2008 - 2013	USAID Basic education project
2009	Inspection des Daaras established within Ministry of National Education
1st December 2010	'Framework Agreement for the Promotion of Daaras' signed between Qur'anic teachers and MEN
2011	BID commits to refurbishing 32 daaras and building 32 daaras under PAMOD
2012-2015	26 private daaras refurbished under <i>Projet d'Amélioration de l'Environnement physique des daara</i> (PAEP, Improvement of the Physical Environment of Daaras Project, part of PAQEEB) in the <i>cités religieuses</i> , particularly in Touba
23rd October 2013	Initial modernisation bill unveiled, intended to be put to parliament in January 2015
28th November 2013	PAMOD officially launched

December 2013	Rabbita rejects bill
2014	100 daaras engaged in PAQEEB for modernisation
May 2015	Government withdraws proposed bill
July 2015	FNAECS formally rejects bill and drafts own proposition
2015-2016	Consultations on bill
29 December 2016	FNAECS signs agreement approving revised bill
March 2017	Rabbita and others reject bill again
June 2018	Cabinet approves the bill, but does not put it to a parliamentary vote.

Table 3. Timeline of key events in the history of the modernisation project and the associated bill (Charlier & Panait, 2017, 2018; D'Aoust, 2012; Hugon, 2015, 2016; Panait, 2017)

7.3 Engagement and resistance

Collaborative engagement with Qur'anic teachers has been built into the modernisation approach throughout the last decade, including in the project documents for PAQUET/PAQEEB. The 2013-2025 PAQUET framework makes explicit the government's perceived need "for a strong political commitment to find a concerted solution with the religious authorities concerned" as a solution to the problem that "to date, no consistent policy has been defined and implemented to upgrade the daaras and provide bridges between them and the schools of the formal system" (Ministère de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de l'Entrepreneuriat féminin *et al.*, 2013, p. 17. My translation).

The collaborative approach is typical of projects led by international institutions and NGOs, who lack the coercive power of the state but instead impose their prescribed solutions to the problems they, as 'experts', have identified, through persuasion (Li, 2005). Yet, as Li (2005) recognises, these collaborative relationships involving NGOs and international organisations working and negotiating with those whose behaviour projects intend to change are still reflections of power imbalances. The interventions are still designed externally, and although the sërriñ daaras are brought into the process, they are not always positioned as the experts. Instead, the aim of the collaboration was to change their minds and secure their cooperation towards the preordained goals of the state and its partners. In the case of daara modernisation, the Senegalese state is involved, and at some stages can be seen as leading the project, yet has shied away from coercive tactics. As well as recognition of the need to build the legitimacy of modern

daaras within the population if they are ever to attract parents to send their children, this can perhaps be understood as acknowledgement of the havoc created by brief attempts to apply the 2005 anti-begging law (as discussed in Chapter Two). Thus, while there are certainly power imbalances at play, these are not one-way, and the power held by the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations should not be ignored. In order to prevent the same resistance from reoccurring, the proposed law regulating daaras would have to be supported by enough of the country's Qur'anic teachers and religious leaders.

In this section, I will discuss the process by which the bill was negotiated, situating this collaboration as a response to earlier resistance from *sëriñ* daaras. I will explore some of the reasons given for the *sëriñ* daaras' reservations about the modernisation project, which to some extent persist today. Opinions among *sëriñ* daaras regarding the modernisation project are diverse, but themes can be drawn from my interviews that point to concerns about the curriculum and pedagogy on one hand, and the sustainability of funding, which in turn influences whether or not modernisation should be optional or obligatory, on the other. With collaborative engagement the prescribed remedy to this reluctance, I then demonstrate the limits of this collaboration, including the acts of resistance that occur even within the engagement of the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations.

7.3.1 *Collaboration as the result of resistance*

As shown in Table 3, the bill's history predates the development of its first draft in 2013. In 2010, the government signed a 'Framework Agreement for the Promotion of Daaras' with members of the *Collectif national des associations des écoles coraniques du Sénégal*, an organisation that later become known as *Fédération nationale des associations d'écoles coraniques du Sénégal* (FNAECS, National Federation of Qur'anic Schools Associations of Senegal) (Hugon, 2015; Charlier and Panait, 2017). This agreement paved the way for the development of a draft bill.

Presented by the state in October 2013, with the intention of reaching the National Assembly by January 2015, this first bill of law caused much debate in Senegalese society. The original bill was accompanied by four decrees, regulating the conditions for opening and inspection of daaras, the necessary qualifications to be a teacher or director in the daara, the terms and conditions of grants and awards to be given to daaras, and finally

the creation of a national consultative council related to daaras. This first version swiftly found opposition among the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations. According to Elimane Diagne, himself an imam and Qur'anic teacher as well as the president of the organisation *Collectif pour la modernisation des Daara* (COMOD), as soon as the president began to talk about a law, the FNAECS spoke out, posing a threat both in terms of influence over the electorate and as a direct spiritual threat to the president:

And even the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations said to their members to... to refuse, to recite Qur'anic verses so that the president would not obtain a second mandate. Even that misfortunes would happen [to him], to put... the President of the Republic was afraid! He even retreated!

(Interview. Imam Elimane Diagne, President of COMOD. Guédiawaye, 24th April 2018)

Thus, although representatives of FNAECS had signed the 2010 accord with the state that led to the initial draft, they never the less rejected the content of the first bill, though not as strongly as another association, Rabbita, also known as the League of Qur'anic Teachers which unites Murid daaras specifically, and is itself a powerful member of FNAECS (Hugon, 2015; Charlier and Panait, 2017, 2018). While FNAECS rejected the content of the law, but not the principle, offering to document their own vision of how modernisation should take place, Rabbita went further. Under Serigne Mbacké Habibou, on 26th December 2014, Rabbita denounced the bill of law as an attempt to “bury” daaras and being against Islam (Charlier and Panait, 2017, 2018). Although a month earlier the government and the spokesman for the General Khalife of the Murid brotherhood had announced that the Khalife supported the modernisation project, it was widely believed that he had not been told the state's true objectives (Charlier and Panait, 2017). The stronger reaction of Rabbita to the bill is not surprising, given that the association is based in the city of Touba, a holy city for the Murid brotherhood where secular state primary schools have been banned by the Murid authorities since the leadership of a former General Khalife, Serigne Abdou Lahat Mbacké (1968-1988) (Panait, 2017).

The state's reaction to this rejection was to withdraw the first bill in May 2015 (Charlier and Panait, 2017), before embarking on a mission to build support for the bill among

stakeholders around the country, eventually redrafting the bill through a collaborative process of negotiation. This ultimately led to FNAECS signing an agreement to approve its content on the 29th December 2016, only for it to again be rejected by Rabbita and other associations the following March (Charlier and Panait, 2017). Nevertheless, on 6th June 2018, the bill was approved by the government's ministerial council, but has never been put to a parliamentary vote, and so has yet to become law. In the remainder of this section I explore the process of engagement in more detail.

As the main objection that the FNAECS had to the first draft of the bill was that they had not been sufficiently included in its development (Hugon, 2016), a national consultation was carried out to build support, explain the aims of the project and engage *sëriñ daaras* around the country. This process of “finding a concerted solution” involved a range of state and non-state actors, including NGOs as well as the Qur’anic Teachers’ Associations, with forums organised at a departmental (county) level to bring together all of the Qur’anic teachers in the local associations to discuss the content of the law and what it means, seeking to dispel the idea that the government plans to close down *daaras*. In this process, the *sëriñ daaras*, or at least those who are members of the associations, are framed as equal partners, rather than as villains or the violators of children’s rights:

... that’s the debate that we had with the Qur’anic teachers, because we don’t stigmatise them - ‘you violate children, exploit them’ - we discuss with them. And we [were one of] the institutions that accompanied the Qur’anic Teachers’ Federation to have a position document on the law concerning the *daaras*. [...] We were all there: the Qur’anic teachers, the parliamentarians, the networks of parliamentarians against violence towards children, [...] the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Family, UNICEF, Plan, Save [the Children], World Vision... all these organisations were there to say that, when it comes to this bill of law, we need to create a consultation, a dialogue. We supported the Qur’anic Teachers’ Federation financially and technically.

(Interview. Child protection specialist at INGO, Dakar, 22 November 2017)

This collaborative approach was seen as the solution to overcoming mistrust of the state's motivations on the part of both Qur'anic teachers and the wider population. In its strongest form, this mistrust stems from a fear that the state wants to shut down the daaras altogether, while others fear the state taking control over the sector. Although none of the sēriñ daaras I interviewed expressed this sentiment strongly, this fear, or rather the assumption that this fear is widespread, is in part why the state has taken this collaborative approach rather than imposing regulation without consultation. The approach is explicitly intended to distance the present-day project from policies imposed by the colonial regime intended to shut down or repress the daaras which may have been at the root of some of the fears about the bill:

The [Qur'anic teachers'] reluctance was justified by the fact that... the Qur'anic teachers were afraid that the daaras would be closed. [...] They were afraid that the daaras would be closed. They... They had the feeling as well that even though the objectives might not be the same, that is to say the objectives of the colonists and the objectives today are not the same, but they had the impression that the methods were the same. [...] Even though... we, like I told you at the start, we had a participatory approach, that is to say that actually we said to them come, we're going to draft a law!

(Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018)

As discussed in Chapter Two, the French administration attempted various methods of repressing, co-opting and ignoring the daaras of the time, in fact creating so many contradictory policies that it may be difficult for the present-day state to find any viable action that could not be considered reminiscent of one or other of the colonial approaches. At the same time, that some sēriñ daaras reportedly fear that the modernisation project is a step towards the state shutting down certain daaras is not necessarily connected to the colonial experience in all cases, given that the media has cited government ministers in saying exactly that. An edition of *Le Soleil* in August 2015 quotes Niokhobaye Diouf, then Director of Rights and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Groups:

The state is not going to engage in a power struggle with the minorities

who are not in agreement. The state will be strong enough to close the daaras of those who oppose the law. There would be no point in creating the inspection des daaras that isn't going to inspect them. If the National Assembly votes for the law, it will be applied in all its rigour.

(Niokhobaye Diouf quoted in Cisse, 2015. My translation.)

Although this statement implies that the approval of the Qur'anic teachers and the religious leaders would not be required for the government to enact and apply a law, with hindsight we know now that more than six years later, no version of the bill has been put to the assembly for a vote, not to mention being passed into law or implemented.

A country-wide consultation was therefore conducted, during which an Arabic translation of the original bill was shared so that the Qur'anic teachers who do not speak French were able to read and understand its content. Following this consultation however, there was still no consensus among the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations: some who had given their support retracted it, others continued to complain that they had not been adequately consulted (Interview. Fulbert Dioh. Programme Manager, CAPE. Dakar, 6th July 2018). The bill then moved from consultation to negotiation, with international NGOs coordinating the process:

We were involved, the second time. The first time they called us to set up a consultation framework, after [the bill] was finished and introduced. At the time of redoing it, they added in certain things which we the Qur'anic teachers did not agree with, since we had told them to let us see it before introducing it. We caused a stir to show our disagreement, and they gave the bill back to ChildFund. They [ChildFund] brought together the Qur'anic teachers in Touba to draft the bill of law wanted by the daaras.

(Interview. Imam Babacar Pouye, Secretary General of the Qur'anic Teachers' Association of Rufisque. 5th May 2018)

Through resisting the bill – 'causing a stir' – the Qur'anic teachers were therefore able to assert their power. By this point, the aim, at least for the FNAECS (if not some of its members such as Rabbita), was not to reject the project entirely, but to gain a seat at the negotiating table, allowing them to influence the content of the bill and therefore

the direction of state policy. Later in this chapter, I demonstrate how the associations were able to continue asserting their power from within the process of collaboration. Firstly, however, in the next section I will discuss the more specific concerns that lie beneath this resistance.

7.3.2 *Professionalisation and the contested curriculum*

The modernisation of daaras involves changes to their curriculum, pedagogy, and the status of those who teach in them. Reframing the daaras as schools and formalising the Qur'anic teaching sector also includes reconstructing the *sëriñ* daaras as teachers (Thiam, 2014). Although the term *maître coranique* is generally translated into English as Qur'anic teacher, the men holding this position have not really been considered as teachers. It is often held that this is because of the situating of the daara as outside of the definition of a school by the colonial and post-colonial governments. Yet there is little to suggest that *sëriñ* daaras have wanted to be considered as schoolteachers, a profession that their position long predates in Senegal. Traditionally, *sëriñ* daaras typically had another profession alongside their teaching, and thus, another source of income. Alioune Sarr recounted an anecdote with one elderly *sëriñ* daara who himself objected to the professionalisation of his role:

I once met an old Qur'anic teacher [...] who told us that his Qur'anic teacher, once upon a time he told them, he once called them all and showed them his ID card. [He told them to] look at the profession that is there. They looked, they saw 'Profession: Farmer'. And they said to him, but why are you showing us that? Everyone knows it. He said [...] one day, we will be before God and I'll have to prove that on the earth I had a profession. I was a farmer. That was to tell him that the status of Qur'anic teacher, it wasn't a profession.

(Interview. Alioune Sarr. Director of Child Protection, MBGPE. Dakar, 5th June 2018).

Incidentally, this traditional set-up, whereby the *sëriñs* had professions that provided a source of income other than the daara, is often forgotten when critics label certain *sëriñ* daaras as 'so-called Qur'anic teachers' for having another source of income such as running a *butik* or corner shop.

The reframing of *sëriñ daaras* as schoolteachers is part of a shift to the vocabulary of Western forms of education used in global education discourse. We see this again in the vocabulary used in official project documents. The PAQEED Project Information Document written in 2013 describes the aims of the daara-related objective as:

Subcomponent 2.2: Grants for results to selected Koranic schools based on an agreement; The project will support 100 interested and motivated Koranic schools by providing resources to finance the rehabilitation of the infrastructure, additional French teachers' fees, learning material and incentives for the headmaster. In return, the schools will commit to adjusting the curriculum and achieving learning results as measured by indicators measuring the level of proficiency in reading and mathematics. (World Bank, 2013, p. 6)

The language used in this document, with its terminology of 'headmasters' and proficiency indicators seems somewhat incongruous with the valorisation of traditional Qur'anic education which is claimed to underpin the modernisation approach. In these documents, the incorporation of Qur'anic teaching is portrayed as a means to the end of increasing the numbers of children achieving global targets in reading and mathematics; success is not measured in whether a child successfully completes their religious education.

Although the modernisation project claims to valorise Qur'anic teaching as a legitimate form of education, it does so only when this teaching takes on a form that is closer to Western norms of what learning, by what pedagogy, counts as education. Examination of the images in a promotional brochure published by the MEN in 2016 provides further evidence of how the daaras are expected to change (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2016, pp. 27–28). This brochure presents three images illustrating the types of daaras included in the PAMOD project.

Images redacted

Figure 3. Comparison of traditional and public modern daara (MEN, 2016)

The first is a photo, captioned '*Daara traditionnelle*', in which 80 or so boys aged from about six to mid-teens kneel on the dusty ground, some clutching books or papers. There is no Qur'anic teacher pictured and the structure they are in does not appear to have four walls, although pillars suggest a roof. Directly next to this photograph, a computer-generated image of a bright, white, two storey building surrounded by a paved path, a lawn and plants, strikes a stark contrast to the first image. Outside the building, photos of people have been superimposed on the mock-up: a man in an impressive, white boubou with a prayer mat rolled under his arm grins at the scene, while another man in a Western-style suit strolls past with a laptop bag. Two women are walking towards the building, both wearing hijabs, one in a traditional Senegalese dress and the other in loose fitting trousers and tunic. Four figures of men or older boys are walking just outside the building, and a small girl – the only child present – stands holding the hand of another woman, both wearing hijabs. This image represents the '*Daara moderne publique*'. On the next page, some of the figures photoshopped into the public daara mock-up make a reappearance in the image representing a '*Daara moderne non publique*'. This time, we see a one-story building with the words '*bloc administratif*' on a sign. The same two women are strolling into the building, followed by a third woman in a burqa. The man with the laptop is still walking by, while the presumed Qur'anic teacher has been replaced with another with an even bigger boubou and a bigger grin to match. We also see three young boys, smiling in brightly coloured boubous.

Image redacted

Figure 4. Non-public modern daara (MEN, 2016)

Just above this image of a grinning marabout, in the text of the document, the reader is told that:

Thanks to the establishment of a climate of trust following the inclusive and participative approach of the Government, the constraints and challenges related to the modernisation of daara are being progressively lifted. Ultimately, the integration of daara in the education system will significantly improve the gross enrolment rate of Senegal (Ministère de l'Education nationale, 2016, p. 28. My translation).

The daaras presented in these images share little or no resemblance to some of the traditional daaras I visited. I detail them here as they represent the vision of modernity desired by the state. The brochure demonstrates not only the clear link between the modernisation project and the explicit aim of raising the enrolment figures as required by the international community, but also demonstrates that in order to become 'modern', a daara needs to change more than its curriculum.

Nevertheless, the proposed curriculum remains a point of contention. As described above, the hybrid form of education to be offered by modern daaras brings together Qur'anic memorisation and secular school subjects. The state's approach hinges on the

assumption that both *sëriñ daaras* and parents (and, to a lesser extent as they are rarely mentioned by policy makers and almost never recognised as having agency, children themselves) will accept the proposed curriculum with all of its secular additions as long as the memorisation of the Qur'an is given priority. Yet there certainly remains a proportion, of unknown size, of both religious leaders and parents in Senegal who are opposed to the widening of the *daara* curriculum, viewing the introduction of other subjects as an imposition of Western knowledge in conflict with religion. A *sëriñ* in Pikine explained this belief among his peers:

In my opinion, those who still refuse [the widening of the curriculum], it's because of how they were trained and how they saw French teaching [*jàngale tubaab*] and everything that comes from white people [*waalu tubaab*]. In their beliefs they see those who come from the government or who learned in French school as fighting religion, and to change that belief will be difficult. They don't want to have any link with Europeans [/the French], what they want is to teach the Qur'an and *xamxam* [religious knowledge], then let children go to do other things. That [belief] exists in parents, it exists in *sëriñ daaras*, those who I know want their children to learn the Qur'an, *xamxam*, and sharia. They don't want to add anything else.

(Interview. *Sëriñ daara*. Pikine, 10th May 2018 A. Translated from Wolof)

This particular *sëriñ* does not himself share these views. In fact, his own *daara* began teaching French in 2003 with the support of the INGO Plan, and he has continued to employ someone to teach French on Wednesdays since that project ended. However, his comments on the opinions of some of his colleagues point to how, for some *sëriñ daaras*, even if they are happy to receive funding and to have their premises inspected, it is when it comes to the content of the curriculum, to be standardised and regulated by the Inspection des *Daaras*, that there is reluctance to engage in the modernisation endeavour. Speaking about the members of the regional-level Qur'anic Teachers' Association in Rufisque, Imam Pouye described this diversity of opinions:

Some agree with the project and with the plan, but it's the content [of the curriculum] where there are differences of opinion. Some think that the syllabus will be heavy, that there is too much French and that that could be a blockage for [the memorisation of] the Qur'an. Others think

it will work out.

(Interview. Imam Babacar Pouye, sēriñ daara and Secretary General of regional Qur’anic Teachers’ Association. Rufisque, 5th May 2018. Translated from Wolof)

His words confirm the sentiment of another sēriñ interviewed in Pikine:

We [the sēriñ daaras] don’t agree with them [the state and NGOs] giving us their curriculum. What we want is for them to let us develop the curriculum and they help when they can. Those who have studied the Qur’an can’t accept that someone who hasn’t learned it develops the curriculum. Those who learned French believe in French law. But we believe in the Qur’an, we believe in the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Since they didn’t learn that, they could bring a curriculum that is against the Qur’an or Islam, and we wouldn’t agree with that.

(Interview. Sēriñ daara. Pikine, 10th May 2018 B. Translated from Wolof)

It is clear from these excerpts that the resistance to the curriculum is not only about its content but about who has had the power to develop it. Any input from external sources – including Senegalese state officials who did not themselves pass through a daara or who do have religious expertise – is met with hesitation, at best. Once again, these fears do not necessarily signal the rejection of modernisation altogether, but are more concerned with claims-making over who has the power to control what happens within the proposed modern daaras, and thus with valorising their own expertise and religious knowledge. This is an example of the types of resistance to development that are not resolutely anti-development (as Escobar (2012) focuses on) but rather are “concerned with access to development, with inclusion and participation, [...] with renegotiating development”(Pieterse, 1998, p. 363), setting the stage for the process of renegotiating the bill of law and its terms.

7.3.3 *Modernisation by choice or obligation, and financial implications*

Despite some misgivings about the curriculum and professionalisation, the eventual acceptance of the bill of law shows that many sēriñ daaras do (or did at the time of approving the bill) support the goals of modernisation. Nevertheless, another point of contention is whether modernisation, as it is framed by the state projects, including the

proposed requirements under the bill of law, should be obligatory. This debate is also linked to the question of whether the state is able and willing to fund its modernisation plans in a sustainable manner.

At present, the state is under pressure from groups with diametrically opposing beliefs on whether daaras that resist modernisation and do not improve their conditions to meet the standards set out by the inspectorate should be supported or suppressed. On one hand, there are those who believe that engagement with the state's intended framework should be optional for *sëriñ* daaras, allowing those who do not agree with the reforms to simply opt out rather than actively resisting. For Imam Oumar Diene of ANIOS:

Either you want to be taken care of by the government and you are a Qur'anic teacher, considered like the French teaching staff, and you are sent to a daara where you give classes, or, you want to set yourself up privately, you have a project and NGOs assist you in that project. You have somewhere for the children to sleep, you have somewhere - you have a cafeteria, a little infirmary, and can take care of catering. Either it's the parents who pay or it's NGOs who support you, and good will. So, the daaras are starting to modernise themselves.

(Interview. Imam Oumar Diene, Secretary General of ANIOS. Dakar, 25th July 2018)

The danger with this approach is that not all these options are or will be available to all daaras. Even if the bill is eventually passed into law, the goal of the state's modernisation project is not currently to provide funding for all the daaras that exist, or even all of those that find themselves able to meet the regulations. For the others, advocating for a reliance on NGO support or expecting daaras to modernise themselves without the regulation of the government is essentially a continuation of the current situation, whereby many daaras receive short term support, which has not succeeded in reducing the numbers of children having to beg. Awareness and experience of unsustainable project cycles and funding sources may have influenced the Qur'anic teachers who fear being forced to modernise due to a distrust of the state's ability to finance its promises. If on one hand, laying claim to funding is one of the principal motivations for supporting the modernisation project, on the other hand, some remain cautious that this support

will not be adequate or ongoing. As one sërîñ, who runs a daara in Sicap Mbao, Pikine where the talibés do beg, put it:

[modernisation is] the ability to cover one's food, water, healthcare, electricity, even to build a dormitory. [If the government] gave us what we need to meet our wives' and children's needs, paid us like they paid the directors of schools, if those conditions are met, *inchallah*, I'm in agreement with modernisation. But if that's lacking [...] if they only build a building and say you're modern, I don't agree [...] So I'm ok with modern daaras, I want [/like] that, but it's necessary to pay the costs of teaching and the teachers.

(Interview. Masamba Cissé, sërîñ daara. Sicap Mbao, Pikine. 6th June 2018. Translated from Wolof).

Likewise, another Qur'anic teacher in Pikine was concerned about the durability of the state's approach to modernisation. While he agreed that a solution should be found to stop talibés having to beg, and he was happy for the curriculum to be expanded, he worried that the state would take responsibility for accommodating and feeding children and paying teachers, but that this "will not last more than one or two years" before support is withdrawn (Interview. Qur'anic teacher. Pikine, 27th May 2018. Translated from Wolof). This concern is understandable, not least when we consider how many of the daaras in Dakar's suburbs have received short term aid or improvement projects from NGOs over the years. Couching the modernisation endeavour in the language of a development project, reliant on support (loans, in fact), from the World Bank and other international institutions necessarily brings to mind all of the constraints of the project cycle. Sërîñ daaras are not ignorant of these constraints, perhaps drawing lessons from their experiences with development projects in the past that have often funded equipment, French or numeracy teachers and even food and supplies for the length of a project cycle before withdrawing support.

Concerns about the inadequacy of any potential funding relate to both the perceived will and the ability of the government to finance its plans. According to Mr Kamil from the World Bank, the real question is not whether daaras should be modernised, but whether modern daaras should be made public or privatised. One problem facing those who would argue for either the full nationalisation of all daaras or for grants to be given

to all of the daaras that currently exist is the sheer volume of resources that would be required to do this. With 43% of the population of Senegal under the age of 15 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018), the government already spends 5.3% of its annual budget on education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). For some, the fact that none of this budget is spent on the daaras is seen as a form of discrimination against those who have chosen religious forms of education over secular school:

Each person made their choice and the government gives preference to some [secular school] by giving them money, constructing buildings, paying the teachers and even giving a bit of money to students, over others [daaras], doing nothing for them.

(Interview. Masamba Cissé, sërĩñ daara. Sicap Mbaou, Pikine, 6th June 2018. Translated from Wolof)

This sentiment is not limited to the sërĩñ daaras. Mame Couna Thioye of RADDHO stressed the shared responsibility of parents and the state for providing a child's education, minimising the responsibility of the sërĩñ daaras:

... these children, even if their families don't have the means to ensure their education, even if the Qur'anic teacher to whom they have been entrusted doesn't have the means to ensure their education - as for them, they don't have, in any case, the duty, to take care of their education. In this case, it's the state who should come to the aid of those families, to allow them to ensure the education of their children. In any case, for us, it's an issue of shared responsibility, and all the actors at a given level have a role to play.

(Interview. Mame Couna Thioye, Child Rights Programme Coordinator, RADDHO. Dakar, 2nd July 2018)

These comments, either explicitly or implicitly, and perhaps in the case of the sërĩñ, unintentionally, reflect a child's right to an education, including education that develops respect for their cultural identity and values (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, Articles 28-29), and a parent's right to choose what kind of education their child receives (UN General Assembly, 1948, Article 26). The promise of funding from the state is therefore acknowledgement of Qur'anic teaching as a legitimate form of education, yet, as demonstrated above, it comes with conditions that fundamentally

diverge from the current situation in many daaras. When discussing modernisation, sēriñ daaras who support it do not speak of these regulations. Instead, they focus on the financial benefits.

However, despite rhetoric that claims to support a universal education policy and the valorisation of Qur'anic education, there is no evidence that the government would be able to expand this to the extent necessary to take in all of the children in Qur'anic schooling in the short term. Biram Ndiaye, of ENDA, demonstrated this during an interview, pulling out a calculator while explaining the number of children in the city of Touba, Senegal's second biggest city situated in the region of Diourbel, alone. According to his figures, there were at that time an estimated 127,800 children in 1,524 Qur'anic schools in Touba. He calculates this to be the equivalent of 4,230 primary school classes, or 700 new primary schools. This, he says, is why the government cannot take on the project of modernising - and funding - all of the daaras that exist:

There was an old Minister of Education, he said 'yes, it's necessary to modernise, but equally it's necessary to improve the traditional daara. The person who has a space already prepared [*ménagé*] in his place, who teaches some 20 kids the Qur'an, we can leave him, maybe improve.

(Interview. Biram Ndiaye, Programme manager, ENDA. Guédiawaye. 8th March 2018)

As the aim of the modernisation project is not to finance all daaras in Senegal, likely not even all of those whose sēriñs want to be regulated, those concerned with the practice of talibé begging have asked what effect the project will have on daaras where large numbers of children currently beg. As noted in Chapter Five, one of the characteristics used to set apart a fake sēriñ engaged in exploiting children from a 'real' Qur'anic teacher is the fact of profiting from the children's begging to a large extent, with these men claimed to make more than politicians or businessmen. It is debated whether the government has the funds available to provide grants to all of the daaras whose sēriñs claim to be willing to meet the criteria to receive formal accreditation and legal status at all, but most recognise that in any case the grants will not be able to match up to the income to be brought in by begging. This also poses a dilemma for the Qur'anic teachers who claim that the children in their daaras beg out of necessity - if the sums coming in

from the government do not cover their needs, they will need to make up the shortfall elsewhere.

The questions of *which* daaras were to be engaged in the state project and therefore to receive financial support and how they are selected was also a source of contention among some *sëriñ* daaras, who felt that rather than starting with support to the most well-established daaras and those near the top of the brotherhoods' hierarchy, the state should be supporting those at the bottom who are struggling through poverty. Several of the *sëriñ* daaras I interviewed brought up this point, with Imam Gaye highlighting that none of the 64 PAMOD daaras are in Dakar. Another *sëriñ*, who did in principle support the modernisation project argued that these small daaras give children a better Qur'anic education:

It's in the small daaras that they should have started because those are weak and it's there that teaching happens. It's the small daaras that bring out knowledge, their teaching is not the same as in those [big daaras run by religious families] at all. For those grand marabouts teaching almost isn't important. In the small daaras, those who teach and the parents don't have the means [to cover the children's costs]. (Interview. anonymous *sëriñ* daara, Pikine, 10th May 2018. Translated from Wolof)

Thus, making funding available on a national level is not the only criteria to maintain the support of Qur'anic teachers, there is also the question of access to funding. As the state does not currently intend to fund all daaras, this question ultimately links back to fears that those that are not supported will eventually be shut down. Countering these concerns has been the motivation for the state to engage in negotiations with the *sëriñ* daaras over the bill of law intended to regulate their daaras.

While these concerns around the availability and adequacy of funding lead some to believe that modernisation should not be obligatory, either due to support for the daaras being able to choose themselves or due to fears about the feasibility of all daaras adhering to the proposed regulations, for other stakeholders, rather than inviting *sëriñ* daaras to opt in, the state should be imposing restrictions and sanctions on *sëriñs* who do not take steps to modernise according to the state's criteria. For Imam Elimane Diagne, the state should not be giving Qur'anic teachers the choice of whether or not

to be 'modern'. His concern is not only with the children living in daaras whose sēriñs are not prepared to modernise today, but with the potential impact on future generations:

Of course the Qur'anic teachers will receive the papers and sign them because the state said ok, if you take these, you sign, you have a modern daara, really, that can be supported by the state - grants, tomes, electricity, and so on. You're going to benefit from that. But if not, the state will do nothing for you. So you have the inspector who is next door, he never passes to say bonjour to you, because you, you don't want to be a model - but no, you have children! You have children. And if you have 20 children, and you ruin their education, 20, these children, tomorrow they are going to be fathers and mothers of families, and so on. [...] After ten years, you will have how many? So the state must impose [its rules]. [...] So it is necessary to be like this, like that. Here are the rules of the game. If you want, ok, you open a daara. If you don't want the rules, you open nothing.

(Interview. Imam Elimane Diagne. President, COMOD. Pikine, 12th April 2018)

This sub-section has reflected on the dilemma for the state over whether modernisation should be optional or enforced. For either of these options to be feasible, the support of the population and the majority of sēriñ daaras would be required. However, before the state can be accused of not imposing its rules, the bill must first become law. Having now discussed some of the main points of contention, I shall now explore how the sēriñ daaras have used their power to influence 'the rules of the game', as Imam Diagne put it, through resistance *within* the collaborative negotiation process as they modified the content of the bill.

7.3.4 *Qur'anic Teachers' Associations, disinformation and delay*

In this subsection I discuss the engagement of FNAECS and its members in the process of renegotiating the bill of law. As will be shown, although this process is generally considered a success because of the outcome of gaining approval for the bill, there were opportunities for resistance within the process.

Before turning to resistance, I will first introduce the collaborative process as being itself the successful outcome of resistance, albeit flawed. One of the issues with the collaborative approach is who is included in or excluded from this process. The collaborative process demonstrates the engagement of *sëriñ daaras* as legitimate stakeholders, if not equals. This process is not open to all, however, and requires the religious actors to organise themselves into associations in a way that mirrors the machinery of development. The *sëriñs* were engaged through the structures of the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations - particularly the Federation and Rabbita. In order both to resist and to engage with the process, therefore, *sëriñ daaras* were required to organise themselves into associational forms familiar to the development industry.

As Hugon (2015) has shown, FNAECS, the National Federation of Qur'anic Teachers' Associations which operate at regional and departmental levels mirroring local government, and others such as Rabbita initially spawned from resistance to the global development agenda and the government's attempts to take control over the *daaras*. Not all Qur'anic teachers belong to these associations, and others also exist. Rabbita had been established after the arrest of a Murid *sëriñ daara* in 2000, while the Federation was only created in 2010 with the objective of speaking "with one single voice to the administration and international actors" (Hugon, 2015, p. 93). This ambition to present a united front has not been entirely successful, as evidenced by the differences between the responses of FNAECS and Rabbita (which is itself a powerful FNAECS member) (Hugon, 2015). As Charlier and Panait (2017) point out, it is impossible to say to what extent the opinions voiced by the spokespersons of the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations are representative of the *sëriñ daaras* as a wider population, given that no census exists.

Not all Qur'anic teachers belong to the associations, although one NGO consultant and Imam I interviewed stated that the large majority of the *sëriñ daaras* around the country are now members. According to an NGO report, FNAECS represents "the more intellectual group among Koranic masters" (Norris, 2013, p. 15). One Qur'anic teacher I spoke to, who was much younger than the others and did not have his own *daara*, instead teaching in that of his uncle, had not even heard of the Association in his area, despite that being one of the most active (Interview. Qur'anic teacher. Yëmbël, Pikine, 27th May 2018). Nevertheless, the fact that engagement takes place through these

organisations demonstrates how the development sector has shaped the terrain for both the collaboration and resistance of the Qur'anic teachers. Yet this reliance by the state and global development actors on these organisations as ways to diffuse information and promote the project's aims brings its own challenges and opportunities for resistance of other forms. The majority of the other sēriñ daaras I interviewed belonged to the same departmental branch of the association, in Pikine, under the leadership of Imam Kéba Gaye, who has worked with many NGOs and is well-known as a committed ally for child rights activists.

While the associations are seemingly cooperating with the process of negotiation and are seen to support the idea of the law, within the associations, resistance can manifest either in the form of information not being passed down through the hierarchy or incorrect or incomplete information being intentionally spread instead. In the opinion of Imam Elimane Diagne, who was involved in the consultation phase of the redrafting process, the fact that those on the ground, at the base of the hierarchy of Qur'anic teachers were not aware of the content of the original bill and thus were against it due to the limited information they were receiving from above was no accident. He holds the presidents of the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations responsible for failing to pass on the correct information to their members, keeping the power of information for themselves:

If you don't pass down the information, the members who are at the bottom have no information. And if they are loyal to the president [of their Qur'anic Teachers' Association], they are there, they only listen to the president, so if the president says that the state wants to destroy the daaras, they think that it's true. He says go out, protest; they go out and they protest. Recite the Qur'an so [the government] retreat; they recite the Qur'an! Do something; they do it.

(Interview. Imam Elimane Diagne, President of COMOD, Pikine, 24th April 2018)

He went on to explain that the members of the associations at the bottom of the hierarchy often say that they know the content of the bill, but when asked for details, cannot say how many articles or chapters it has, or tell him what is in it, instead claiming "oh, it's quite simply to close the daaras!" when asked about its intended purpose. These

comments demonstrate how engagement with the process of collaboration by those at the top of the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations hierarchies does not necessarily preclude them from frustrating the progress of the approach.

Even after the tours and consultations, it remains the case that not all *sëriñ daaras* are aware of the precise content of the bill. Asked about what he thought the term modern daara referred to, one *sëriñ daara*, who is a member of his local Qur'anic Teachers' Association, explained how little he knew of the state's intentions, stating "We've heard the name but we don't know what it means exactly. It's up to them [the people who talk about it] to explain to us what it is." (Interview. Anonymous *sëriñ daara*. Sicap Mbao, Pikine, 6th June 2018 B. Translated from Wolof). This *sëriñ's daara* could be one that may well fit the regulations to be certified if the bill of law was ever passed: there is no begging, French and Arabic are already taught (after learning the Qur'an, similar to the proposed modern daara curriculum), and parents already cover all costs. The daara was permanently housed in the compound of a mosque and classrooms featured blackboards and desks. In effect, the daara would already be considered 'modernised'. This goes to show that engaging *sëriñ daaras* through the associations puts the responsibility for sharing information onto the leaders of the associations, which in turn reiterates the power retained by those at the higher levels of the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations, upon whom the success of the modernisation project depends, and includes only *sëriñs* who engage with the associations in the process.

Indeed, this mis- or disinformation is not the only way in which the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations engaged in the process of collaboration may not have fully cooperated with the state's aims. Even the act of engaging with the negotiation can be considered resistance to the overall aims of the modernisation project, as it resulted in the delaying and frustrating of the process. As mentioned above, the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations were able to hold up the process by rejecting successive drafts of the bill intended to regulate their daaras:

Why has it dragged on such a long time? Yes, because they always wanted to negotiate, to negotiate and it's the same reasons why the bill has taken a long time, because each time they wanted to move forward, the Federation rejected the bill. And each time they rejected it, the bill didn't

move forward. It's just recently that they had a seminar where the Federation validated it. Now we hope that that will pass in the Assembly.

(Interview. Project staff member, UNODC. Dakar, 26th June 2018)

However, since the bill was validated and then approved by the Conseil des ministres in June 2018, and has yet to be put to the assembly to be passed into law, the *sëriñ daaras* cannot be fully to blame for the lengthy (and ongoing) process. Nevertheless, the content of the bill itself was changed in subtle but important ways through the process of collaboration, as will be discussed in the next section.

7.4 “There are no perfect laws”: the modernisation bill

The engagement of *sëriñ daaras* in the redrafting of the law, and all of the forms of resistance involved in that process, had repercussions for the content of the eventually approved version, with wider repercussions for the discourse around *daaras*. During the discussions about the content of the revised bill, Qur'anic teachers and religious leaders were given a great deal of space to negotiate, which can be considered either as evidence of the state's willingness to find a compromise, or of the power of religious leaders over the Senegalese state (Cruise O'Brien, 1992, 2003; Villalón, 1995; Mbacké, 2005; André and Demonsant, 2013). According to Keba Gaye, President of the Departmental Qur'anic Teachers' Association in Pikine, at this time they were told that the only thing that could not be changed in the current project was the state's will to modernise the *daaras* (Interview. Imam Keba Gaye. Pikine, 26th April 2018). This flexibility was confirmed by the Inspection des *daaras*, for whom the eventual content of the law seems to be of less importance than the process of negotiation undertaken to arrive at agreement:

So we discuss, and if we agreed on something, we write [it]. But that is what ultimately led us to be a bit more flexible, because a law, even if it isn't perfect - anyway there are no perfect laws, there is no human work that is perfect - a law, even if it isn't perfect is better than the absence of a law. Isn't it? Yes! Afterwards, we can see how to improve it. So we were very flexible, we discussed honestly.

(Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des *daaras*. Dakar, 8th May 2018)

I do not wish to stray too far here into legal (or religious) debates over the conceivability of perfect law, or whether an imperfect law is better than no law. However, in this specific context it is impossible to ignore comparisons to the inadequacies of the existing legal attempts to protect talibés who beg, given the history of the loophole in the Penal Code and the fact that the 2005 anti-trafficking law has been applied to prosecute adults who have exploited talibés on only a handful of occasions since its approval (Seibert, 2019b). With this in mind, I now turn to the content of the bill.

7.4.1 Silencing begging and repercussions for discourse

Upon examination of the 2014 and 2017 drafts of the bill,²¹ it is certainly remarkable that after several years of objections and negotiations, only a very small amount of the text was changed at all, and the only substantial change was the removal of begging. Most of the other changes are limited to subtle rewordings or updates such as replacing a vague reference to the Millennium Development Goals in the earlier draft with the Sustainable Development Goals in the later version. This outcome seems to confirm that, just as objections to the revised curriculum are as much about ownership as they are about content, the initial resistance to the bill on the part of sèriñ daaras and religious authorities was not principally, or not entirely, due to its content but rather to the perception of having been excluded from its development on the part of religious leaders and teachers.

Significantly, however, one of the small changes that has been made is to remove, almost entirely, any mention of begging from the bill. Most notably, while several of the 19 articles present in the earlier draft were slightly reworded in the process of gaining approval from the Qur'anic Teachers' Associations, the only article to have been removed completely in the later version is the one that pertained to sanctions for begging:

Article 16. - Those in charge of 'daara' in which the learners practice

²¹ It may be worth noting here that I received the text of the second version of the bill of law from NGO contacts, after senior staff members of the Inspection des Daaras delayed and ultimately declined to share it. I do not wish to read too much into this, as it may be simply an instance of following protocol with the Inspection, but it is curious that as of December 2021 I am still unable to find the text of the bill online, suggesting it is not publicly available or at least not easily accessible.

begging are liable to sanctions prescribed by the applicable laws and regulations. (République du Sénégal, 2014. My translation.)

In fact, in this 2017 version, there is just one mention of begging, in a list of risks and difficulties facing the modernisation project in the bill's preamble:

However, despite the efforts made by the daara actors, the realisation of the State's ambitions for the sub-sector faces major risks and difficulties, notably:

- a precarious environment marked by physical and sanitary insecurity of children in many daara;
- the diversity of curricula;
- the uncontrolled proliferation of 'daara';
- the lack of *prise en charge* [support, management] of the daara;
- the increase in begging and in situations of mistreatment of children.

(République du Sénégal, 2018. My translation)

This bulleted preamble in fact reveals further compromises: the fourth bullet writing support into the bill is new, perhaps reflecting increased recognition of the state's responsibility, while a reference to "an international context marked by the rise of extremism" has been removed from the earlier draft (République du Sénégal, 2014. My translation), demonstrating recognition of the *sëriñs'* wish to dissociate the latter from their daaras. Yet it is the near elimination of begging from the bill that exposes the paradox: on one hand, removing begging suggests the understanding that begging does not take place in the legitimate sites of Qur'anic education to be supported under the terms of the law; on the other, removing begging from the conditions leaves space for the practice to continue. Despite the appearance of collaboration, therefore, the Qur'anic teachers' engagement with the process of renegotiation and strategic resistance within this process resulted in at least partial victory, with the almost complete silencing of the issue of begging within modernisation policy.

As we have seen in Chapter Five, many of the numerous NGOs working in daaras in Senegal are primarily concerned with the practice of begging, as many select their partner daaras based on the presence of begging with the goal of reducing or eliminating this practice in the name of child protection and children's rights. The compromise of removing begging from the bill therefore poses a dilemma for NGOs who had been

advocating for the law, amongst other interventions. Some NGOs have been notably critical of the removal of all articles related to begging from the law. In a blog post on their website, Anti-Slavery International, for example, wrote that their “fears have been confirmed” by the exclusion, doubting the government’s will to end talibé begging as a result of their agreement to remove begging (Mathewson, 2017). These concerns provide evidence that the development NGOs have been approaching the daara modernisation project with different aims to those of the sēriñ daaras. While NGOs, for the most part motivated by the desire to intervene due to children’s begging (Perry, 2004), have engaged with the modernisation project as a means to the end of eliminating begging, sēriñ daaras have actively sought to separate the two issues.

This separation was justified by an Inspection des Daaras staff member, who puts the diminution of begging in the bill, and the modernisation endeavour generally, down to the question of the partitioned mandates of the different structures that have responsibilities related to talibés and daaras:

It’s true that some [of the NGOs] were a bit frustrated when they didn’t see begging, but begging isn’t... begging, it’s not us who are responsible for eradicating, putting an end to begging. There is a law that the Minister of the Interior must apply, the justice et cetera, that’s not us.

(Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des Daaras. Dakar, 8th May 2018)

This separation is the result of the underlying discourse that has endorsed the modernisation of daaras as the appropriate remedy to a problem diagnosed at the international level: that talibés are not receiving an education that is in keeping with global norms and standards of education. Although the issue of begging might be the crux of the problem for many NGOs, the *raison d’être* of many NGO projects, in this framing, begging takes a back seat.

However, these efforts to separate the issues, and the near silencing of the topic of begging in the approved draft of the bill, does not mean that there are not implicit assumptions among development actors and the state that modernising the daaras would reduce talibé begging. Although begging is minimised, it is not entirely absent from the modernisation project documents. For example, both the “persistence and

increase in begging” and the “development of child labour and exploitation” are recognised as threats to the modernisation project in a ‘SWOT’ analysis (a tool to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in or to a project) of the approach in the 2018 update to the PAQUET framework (Ministère de l’Éducation nationale *et al.*, 2018, p. 59. My translation). Instead of tackling begging explicitly through the project, there is a hope that the project will indirectly reduce begging:

Because the modernisation of daaras is also sort of to fight against poverty. Because most of the daaras are in precarious situations. Incidentally, that’s why the learners in these Qur’anic schools go out in the street to beg. So modernisation is an educative response but it’s also a response to the social phenomenon as well. We think that, by modernising the daaras and by putting the necessary inputs into them, that’s going to reduce begging. That is to say that the children, the learners, won’t have time to go out to beg, they’re going to stay to study. Besides, the curriculum won’t give them time to go to beg. So we think... we don’t think... it’s difficult in Senegal to say ‘I’m forbidding begging’. It’s forbidden by the law, but you see, in reality, people are in the street, they’re begging. For the learners in the Qur’anic school, we think that the modernisation of daaras is going to change their living conditions, their environment, their curriculum, to such a point that they will no longer feel the necess- the obligation, the necessity to go to beg, they are going to stay to study. And to be well looked after, well treated in the modern daaras, you see?

(Interview. Senior staff member, Inspection des Daaras. Dakar. 8th May 2018)

This perspective rests on contradictory assumptions. It is first implied that Qur’anic teachers who send their pupils to beg are doing so out of necessity, which has been discussed in Chapter Five. Contradictorily, the Inspection staff member then also seems to suggest that the children beg because they have time to do so, rather than out of either necessity or exploitation, which seems to minimise the issue, in stark contrast with the portrayals of children’s suffering painted by the NGOs. In either case, there is no suggestion in the Inspection des daaras staff member’s words that the children who are begging are not the same children who are learning the Qur’an in the daaras which

are to be modernised, which removes the spectre of the child-trafficking ‘so-called Qur’anic teacher’.

Engaging with the state and its partners supports the construction of the members of Qur’anic Teachers’ Associations as legitimate providers of religious education who are in need of state funding to provide better conditions and higher quality education for talibés – as they are framed in the “vulnerable schools” discourse, as labelled by Lahti (Thiam, 2014), that underpins the modernisation agenda. The removal of begging could be understood as the result of the doubts over the state’s ability to fund the daaras, as described earlier. If the sēriñ daaras engaged in the modernisation project believe that the outcome will be adequate state support for modern daaras, and fully accept the ‘vulnerable schools’ discourse’s assertion that begging currently takes place in daaras due to a lack of state funding, there should be no reason to remove begging from the bill, which is intended to allow the state to provide this funding. In order to remove begging from the bill, however, and thus to reinforce the construction of talibé begging as a separate problem to that of the quality of Qur’anic education, while simultaneously preventing the state from bolstering its legal framework against begging, requires the use of the alternative discourse that breaks the link between daaras and begging.

It becomes necessary at this point to bring back in the other partner in Lahti’s (2014) ‘dance between discourses’, the child trafficking discourse, as the impact of silencing begging in the modernisation project also has repercussions for this discourse and how the two interrelate. The engagement of sēriñ daaras in the process, and the outcomes of this renegotiation for the bill of law, also rely on this alternative problematisation of child begging among talibés as child trafficking, in which Qur’anic teachers, or, as is often suggested, people assuming the label of Qur’anic teachers without actually teaching the Qur’an, are framed as unscrupulous villains exploiting children for profit. It is the existence of this alternative problematisation which enables the dissociation of begging from the modernisation discourse centred on improving the quality of education in the daaras. By silencing the issue of begging in the modernisation bill, sēriñ daaras have been able to reinforce the claim that it is not them who are responsible for child begging, but an unspecified someone else. The renegotiation of the bill therefore demonstrates how sēriñ daaras have been able to skilfully adopt and resist different

elements of the contradictory discourses around talibé begging in order to assert their power and influence state policy.

7.4.2 *Failure to enact the bill*

This discussion of the negotiation of the content of the bill and the process to reach this point is, to a certain extent, moot, because as of the end of 2021, more than three years after it was approved by the Conseil des Ministres in June 2018 as my fieldwork was coming to an end, the bill still has not been put to a vote before the national assembly. The concerns of 2017/18 do perhaps shine a light onto why this may be, with reluctance clearly lurking among some sēriñ daaras, and concerns about the sustainable financing of the approach were the law to be passed. In my interviews, respondents also raised doubts over the political will to pass the bill, particularly as at the time the political sphere was already gearing up for the 2019 presidential elections.

According to the Team Leader of the PAQEED project at the World Bank, the law shows political will even if one “can say that the bill is not sufficiently ambitious” (Interview. Hamoud Abdel Wedoud Kamil, Team Leader, World Bank. Dakar, 25th June 2018). However, he was speaking in June 2018, days after the Conseil des Ministres had approved the bill, and it should not be assumed that his view would be the same given the lack of progress since. At the time, many of the NGO workers that I interviewed, mostly before the bill was eventually approved by the Conseil des ministres some 18 months after its text was agreed, were very doubtful that the bill would ever be passed into law, and even more doubtful that it would be applied if it were to be enacted. This doubt was also expressed in public communications by some. For example, the same Anti-Slavery International blog post referenced above continues:

We also have serious doubts about whether the government has the will and resources to roll out a proper inspection scheme, given that there are many thousands of daaras in Senegal. As most of the daaras would claim that they can't operate without the income provided by child begging, they simply wouldn't register with a government Inspectorate.

In this deeply religious country, few politicians are courageous enough to talk about taking any action against religious schools that are non-compliant. But having a law with no sanctions for daaras that don't register or comply with the rules would just be pointless.

(Mathewson, 2017)

Despite the misgivings among some NGO workers, at the time of my fieldwork there remained a level of hope that the bill would be enacted. The fact that it has not been is blamed by state actors on ongoing resistance among Qur'anic teachers, despite the assertion that they had approved the bill and the fact that FNAECS has since called on the government to enact it. In fact, after both FNAECS and the Conseil des Ministres approved the bill, in rhetoric at least, the government and the FNAECS have now switched positions when it comes to the bill of law. After the bill became blocked at the level of parliament, FNAECS' objection transformed into calls for the state to enact it. While it should be remembered that FNAECS leadership does not speak for all of their members (Charlier and Panait, 2018), in December 2019, the FNAECS President Sériñ Moustapha Lô is cited in the media as calling for the swift adoption of "the law governing daaras" and funding of legitimate daaras, linking the lack of regulation to the "behaviour of individuals who distort the daaras from the original form for economic purposes, making children beg all day long" (Le Quotidien, 2019). As Mamadou Mbodj Diouf, PAMOD Coordinator, describes, the longer the passing of the bill into law is put off, the more likely it becomes that resistance will build again:

[Regarding] the bill of law, it was necessary that it was very inclusive, and it was. We got all the associations to participate. But there too, the associations are growing day by day, new associations are seeing the light of day and they are looking to get a place in the sun. That means that each day we can wake up to hear that an association is not in agreement and all that, it's necessary to come back to the start to bring them together, exchange with them to really make them join the project. So those are the pitfalls that we meet along the road but each time, through a good dialogue, a good communication, we manage to have them with us.

(Interview. Mamadou Mbodj Diouf, PAMOD Coordinator. Dakar, 4th July 2018)

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the state's daara modernisation strategy which has taken shape over several decades and is currently operationalised primarily through the

PAMOD and PAQEEB projects. Since the early 2000s more concrete steps have been taken towards this goal, coinciding with universal primary education targets and the Education for All agenda and its aftermath. The modernisation approach necessarily employs an education-based discourse to justify plans to regulate both the curricula and conditions in the daaras. This can be understood as simultaneously a breakaway from the positioning of daaras outside the national education system, as established under the colonial administration, and a return to attempts to regulate the daaras, akin to colonial policy. The version of modernisation that is promoted through the project is inspired by global education discourse while also seeking, or claiming, to valorise the memorisation of the Qur'an as a legitimate form of education, demonstrating how global norms are reinterpreted but cannot be fully rejected (Charlier and Panait, 2018). In this project, however, Qur'anic education is legitimate if *and only if* the daaras transform into sites that more closely fit the Western idea of what a school should be.

While on the surface the modernisation project appears as an example of collaborative engagement between state and non-state actors, there are more complex dynamics at play. The engagement of Qur'anic Teachers' Associations in the process of renegotiating the bill of law has been the result of overt rejection of the modernisation project, and in their collaboration we continue to see resistance more concerned with renegotiation and claims-making. Although forced to engage with the modernisation project on the terms of the development industry, organising themselves into associations and taking part in processes typical of how NGOs and international institutions function, the Qur'anic teachers were able to assert their power through the renegotiation of the bill of law. As well as ongoing debates about the content of the curriculum and the obligatory nature of modernisation, the main impact of this renegotiation has been to silence the issue of begging in the modernisation discourse, much to the chagrin of NGOs involved in the process. This outcome has relied upon the ability of *sëriñ* daaras to take advantage of both discourses: framing themselves as legitimate educators and dissociating their work from the practice of begging, implying this is a separate issue while conversely leaving space for begging in daaras to continue. This contradiction does not only work well for the *sëriñ* daaras but for the government too, allowing them to be seen to be taking action in the face of resistance, which can be blamed for any

failure. While the bill has, as of 2021, yet to be voted into law, the process of redrafting the bill demonstrates how the framings imposed on daaras within competing discourses are both resisted and exploited by those who exist within them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Saving the #Talibés: the Removal of Children from the Street

8.1 Introduction

On the 1st July 2016, while the state's modernisation project was slowly ticking along, the Sall government announced through the media and the President's Twitter account that it would be launching a project aiming to clear Dakar's streets of begging children. Shortly afterwards, the government began the *retrait des enfants de la rue* (Removal of Children from the Street) project, often referred to simply as *le retrait*. As will be shown in this chapter, the new direction heralded by this announcement took many in the child protection sector in Senegal by surprise, as neither government ministries nor NGOs already running activities to remove children from the streets had been forewarned of this policy change.

Over the following two years, government agencies led two different phases of this project. Phase One officially began on the 30th June 2016 and continued until the 30th March 2017. Phase Two began on the 28th March 2018 and was halted in May 2018 (Dieng, 2018). In addition, between these two phases of the state-led project in November 2017, an international operation coordinated by INTERPOL, known as *Opération Epervier* (Sparrowhawk) also took place which, unlike the other projects, saw a small number of prosecutions. There is very little information available about this externally led initiative, which sits apart from the government project.

The chapter contributes to understanding how the 'dance between discourses' (Thiam, 2014) plays out in an initiative that had not begun at the time of Lahti's work. It demonstrates that the narratives underpinning the Removal of Children from the Street approach are far more fluid than that which justifies the modernisation of daaras. In particular, it finds that the use of multiple constructions of *sëriñ daaras* is required to facilitate the contradiction between the project's justification, couched in the language of trafficking, and how it engages the *sëriñ daaras* in practice.

The state's Removal of Children from the Streets project has attracted critiques of both its implementation – seen largely as chaotic and without cooperation between the state and NGOs – and its underlying rationale of 'rescuing' talibés. Covering both of these categories of critique, in this chapter I first introduce the different phases of the project, before discussing how the project engages with sèriñ daaras.

8.2 Project background and rationale

Before looking into the perceptions of the different phases of the project in detail, I will first consider why this approach was suddenly adopted by the government in mid-2016. As will be discussed later in this chapter, NGO workers, state officials, and sèriñ daaras alike claim to have been taken by surprise when President Sall announced the new approach over social media on the 1st July 2016. Translated from French, the two tweets sent out from the President's Twitter account read:

For the protection of the rights of children and vulnerable groups, I have ordered the urgent Removal of Children from the Streets
#EducationSenegal

To save the #Talibés, the State foresees fines and prison sentences for those putting their children in the street (Sall, 2016. My translation)²²

An official government strategy document states that this public announcement followed discussions held in a cabinet meeting on the 22nd June 2016, during which the President of the Republic urged "the Government to continue the significant efforts led in the framework of the fight against child begging", inducing "the implementation of a plan to remove children from the street started on the 30th June 2016" (République du Sénégal, 2016, p. 4. My translation).

Although the timing was unexpected, the plan did not come out of thin air. Plans to remove children from the streets through direct intervention already featured in the state's Plan for the Eradication of Child Begging (*Programme d'éradication de la*

²². « Pour la protection des Droits des enfants et groupes vulnérables, j'ai ordonné le retrait d'urgence des enfants des rues #EducationSenegal"
"Pour sauver les #Talibés, l'État prévoit amendes et peines de prison pour ceux mettant leurs enfants dans la rue" »

mendicité infantile) 2013-2015, published by the Department of Rights and Protection of Children and Vulnerable Groups (DDPEGV) in the Ministry of Women, Family and Children (Direction des droits, de la protection de l'enfance et des groupes vulnérables, 2013). By the time of my fieldwork, the DDPEGV, which was responsible for the first phase of the Removal from the Streets project had been relabelled as the *Direction de la promotion des droits de l'enfant* (Department for Promotion of Children's Rights or DPDE) following the restructure that created the MBGPE. A participant working for this structure, who had knowledge of the June 2016 meeting, stated that the child begging eradication plan had not been put into action earlier due to "several bottlenecks", until "there was a cabinet meeting where the President had thumped on the table a bit to say that something must be done about the begging situation" (Interview. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018).

Although we cannot know exactly what motivated the President to prioritise the Removal of Children from the Street at this point, the following section considers some of the sources of pressure facing the government at the time.

8.2.1 ACERWC ruling and TIP reports

Why mid-2016 was selected as the propitious time to abruptly begin to put state resources behind these existing plans to remove children from the street is not entirely clear. The start of the project has been linked, including in state documents, to pressure to adhere to international child rights mechanisms, and may also be influenced by the USA's Trafficking in Person (TIP) report and the connected threat to funding.

Firstly, the Senegalese government had been (and continues to be) under pressure from both national and international advocacy organisations to adhere to recommendations made by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in their ruling of April 2014. This ruling found the government to be failing to adhere to their international commitments to uphold talibés' rights as enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). The first of the ACERWC's 13 recommendations to the Senegalese government in this communication was "to ensure that all talibés are immediately taken back from the streets to their families" (ACERWC, African Union, 2014). Mame Couna Thiouye, a representative of RADDHO, one of the organisations that submitted the complaint to the ACERWC,

believes that this was a factor in the government's adoption of the Removal from the Streets approach in 2016 (Interview. Mame Couna Thioye, Child Rights Programme Coordinator, RADDHO. Dakar, 2nd July 2018). As there were more than two years between the ACERWC's communication and President Sall's announcement and the resulting actions, however, it seems there were other factors behind the decision to launch the project. In fact, rather than the ACERWC communication, the official *Communication plan in support of the Removal of Children from the Street and from exploitation by begging* refers to the later assessment of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in order to justify the project:

[...] during examination of the 3rd, 4th and 5th monitoring reports of the CRC in January 2016, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had recommended to Senegal to undertake an evaluation on the talibés' circumstances and to develop a global policy that addresses the underlying causes, discourages, prevents, and reduces child begging, and offers to children who beg or live in the street vital protection, appropriate health services, an education, and other services aimed at their social reinsertion.

(République du Sénégal, 2016, p. 4. My translation)

Like the ACERWC ruling, however, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child only has persuasive and diplomatic power over the state. One mechanism that differs in this regard is the US State Department's annual TIP Reports. The ranking is a significant motivational tool for the government since, if downgraded to Tier 3, Senegal like other countries "may be subject to certain restrictions on assistance, whereby the President may determine not to provide U.S. government nonhumanitarian, nontrade-related foreign assistance" (United States Department of State, 2019, p. 37). This is the factor that makes the TIP reports more influential than other recommendations issued from external bodies, such as those from the ACERWC and UN CRC that do not come with consequences explicitly attached. In the 2016 TIP report, published in June just before the announcement of the project, Senegal was demoted to the Tier 2 Watch List, for the third time, due to making no trafficking-related prosecutions and delays in the daara modernisation project (United States Department of State, 2016).

Senegal remained on the TIP Watch List until 2019, when it was upgraded to Tier 2 on the basis that the “government demonstrated overall increasing efforts to meet the minimum standards compared to the previous reporting period” (United States Department of State, 2019, p. 405). Although the promotion is primarily linked to the prosecution of three “traffickers posing as Quranic teachers” under the 2005 anti-trafficking law (United States Department of State, 2019, p. 405), the Removal from the Streets project is also praised in the form that the second phase took in 2018.

The 2019 promotion to Tier 2 (along with another five countries in which forced begging in Quranic schools is identified as an issue²³) represented a remarkable volte-face from the rhetoric used in the 2018 report, implying that Senegal was again skating close to being downgraded to Tier 3 from the Watch List:

Because the government has devoted sufficient resources to a written plan that, if implemented, would constitute significant efforts to meet the minimum standards, Senegal was granted a waiver per the Trafficking Victims Protection Act from an otherwise required downgrade to Tier 3 (United States Department of State, 2018).

In fact, Senegal’s rise from Watch List to Tier 2 in the 2019 TIP report as a result of the action they were seen to be taking to reduce child begging is not the first time that such efforts have changed the country’s TIP ranking. The short-lived attempt of the Wade administration in 2010 to apply the 2005 anti-trafficking law were enough to have the same effect in 2011, lifting Senegal from its position on the Watch List (where it had been since 2008). This only lasted for one year, however, before Senegal was demoted again. Again in 2013, efforts to repatriate children to Guinea Bissau, funding the CNLTP and beginning the daara mapping project made it back on to Tier 2 until 2016. Likewise, the 2019 promotion to Tier Two did not last long: in 2020 Senegal returned to the watch list, where it remains in 2021, largely, it appears, because of a failure to prosecute traffickers in accordance with the 2005 law (United States Department of State, 2020, 2021). This

²³ Chad, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria were also promoted from the Watch List in 2019 – all except Niger returned to the Watch List in 2020. Among other country narratives where forced begging in Qur’anic schools is identified as a problem, Guinea Bissau remained on the Watch List in 2019 and 2020, and Mauritania and The Gambia were on Tier 3 (United States Department of State, 2018, 2019).

cycle goes to show how repeated short-lived projects and policies are able to avert the threat of sanctions and reductions in aid, while having little impact - or at least not the intended impact, as documented by Boiro and Einarstóddir (2020) who have explored the unintended impact of NGO programmes returning talibés found begging in Senegal to their home villages in Guinea-Bissau – on the ground. Long-term implementation appears to be unnecessary for the purposes of rising in TIP status; announcing policies and developing plans allows the government to be seen to be doing something, demonstrating just enough action to neutralise the threat of repercussions for another year. The timing of the 2016 policy announcement, in the same month as the 2016 TIP report, suggests a desire for quick results may help explain the rapidity with which the project was begun, which in turn led to a lack of planning and chaotic implementation as discussed below.

It is also notable that the four TIP reports published since (and including) 2018 have not once used the word ‘talibé’ in their country profiles for Senegal, despite each of these reports employing this Wolof term in the country narratives of non-Wolofphone countries where begging among Qur’anic school students is problematised, including Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, and Niger during the period of 2018-2021 (United States Department of State, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). Instead, children in the profile for Senegal are referred to by their status as “child trafficking victims” or “child forced begging victims” and their exploiters as “some Quranic teachers and men who claim to be Quranic teachers” (United States Department of State, 2021, p. 489) or even “traffickers posing as Quranic teachers” (United States Department of State, 2019, pp. 405-406). The fact that it is only in Senegal that the term talibé is not used suggests a conscious choice not to use the term in this context, which, since this language is different from other framings in the same report, *may* come from the country upwards and not the other way around. The use of the terminology of imposters claiming to be or posing as Qur’anic teachers nevertheless lends legitimacy to the construction of the ‘faux marabout’ in the Senegalese context. Disconnecting talibé begging from religious teachers in this way also facilitates the TIP stance going beyond trafficking. Despite their obvious focus on anti-trafficking work, the TIP reports are not silent on daara modernisation: they call for the adoption of the modernisation bill into law while also

lamenting the removal of begging from the approved draft of the bill (United States Department of State, 2021). This encapsulates the entanglement of the two discourses, with repercussions that can be seen in the remainder of this chapter.

No one can say for certain the role that international child rights committees or the USA's TIP reports had in influencing President Sall to personally press for plans that had been made several years before to be put into action in 2016. Yet situating the project within a context of international pressure may be beneficial for the state in two ways: firstly, it allowed the Senegalese government to be seen internationally to be taking action to address the issues raised by international bodies such as those cited above. Secondly, were plans to go awry and the government to face backlash from marabouts and their followers, this narrative allows space for the government to backtrack and make the argument that the idea was imposed on them, just as Wade's government had done after briefly attempting to apply the 2005 law in 2010.

8.3 An unplanned and evolving project

In this section I cover the differences between the two phases of the 'retrait' project, as well as, briefly, the INTERPOL-led Opération Épervier. I demonstrate how the chaotic implementation of the first phase, announced as it was with little planning or cooperation, was improved in the 2018 phase. Most of the changes in this more thought-out phase of the project can be seen as direct responses to the criticisms of the first phase from civil society and international institutions, while more fundamental criticisms that hold that the approach is inappropriate altogether continue to be levelled, specifically those about the lack of sanctions for adults.

8.3.1 Phase One (2016-2017): A sector taken by surprise

The first phase of the removal from the streets project was led by the DDPEGV, under the Ministry of Women, Family and Children, as it was then known. The first phase of the project was marked by its chaotic nature: "it was a bit of a fiasco", commented one senior staff member at the welcome centre SamuSocial (Interview. Senior staff member, SamuSocial. Dakar, 24th July 2018). Among both NGO staff and state officials, this iteration of the project is widely criticised for the lack of planning on the part of the

government, with next to no collaboration with experienced NGOs, until after the start of the project, and a lack of cooperation between state structures.

The announcement of the beginning of the project took most of the sector by surprise. None of the NGO staff I interviewed had been aware that this initiative was to be launched, and instead most of them found out through the press. For some, this meant that the initiative was doomed from the start. One welcome centre staff member described why he didn't agree with the approach:

I don't know where he found it, or what stung him, to make him wake up one day and said it's finished... in any case it wasn't us, because we tried to see him, we wrote him letters, we had... we attracted his attention – he never responded to us, but he woke up one day, he says no it's finished and all, without consulting us. We said to ourselves, maybe he has a plan... you see? Because it's a president speaking, it's not me [...] it's not whoever. Normally, a president speaking means that everything is ok, *quoi*, he has already planned everything. But why do we continue to see children? It's because he said something without having a plan or anything behind it. And... we aren't saying we're indispensable, but it's necessary to recognize our experience, our experience in that. There are many things that we know, that we would like to give, to put on the table, to solve this problem. But if they don't ask our opinion, if we're not consulted, we can't do much. You see? So that's why I don't agree. If you find a problem that you want to solve, and there are people who are working on it... caution tells you that you ask them 'but you've been working on that for a long time, why is it blocked?'. You collect their opinions and afterwards you try to work with them to solve it. And that – I'm sure that has more chance of success than if me, I wake up tomorrow and say, 'ok, why aren't we living on Mars yet? Let's go!' That will go nowhere.

(Interview. Welcome centre staff member. Dakar, 7th December 2017)

As this respondent points out, the failure to include NGOs with a long history of working with talibés who beg had several repercussions for the project, as perceived by NGO staff: a lack of expertise meant that some children were excluded; a lack of state resources meant unsuitable and potentially traumatising transport was used. Many felt that their exclusion from the project meant that the government was not able to profit

from their perceived expertise, their ability to promote and support the project, nor their access to funding, according to Ahmadou Gning, then Child Protection Manager at Save the Children (Interview. Dakar, 16th July 2018). The expertise that some NGOs see themselves as having and the government as lacking is partially due to their direct connection with children, particularly in the case of welcome centres that typically include family reunification in their activities. The state's imposition of the project without engaging these structures therefore may have contributed in part to its limited impact on the numbers of children begging (even temporarily). The NGOs that work with street-connected children on a regular basis are able to reach groups of children that the state-led operations were apparently not able to find. This forced the focus of the project to be on talibés even if, as officials claimed, the original intention was that all children in the streets were to be targeted:

[We were] not involved, not used for the lodging of kids, or to identify... in fact, yes, they can round up talibés like that in the street, but they will not manage to touch the fàqman, those who are completely estranged, they don't know where to find them. [...]. And then, another thing, they don't know how to do it. They don't know where to take the children, they don't know where to house them, and they don't necessarily have the means to do it. There are no genuine figures on what really happened. And we weren't in the least bit involved, us, like the other associations

(Interview. Senior welcome centre staff member. Dakar, 11th January 2018)

This lack of expertise and of relationships with the children in the streets is not the only perceived drawback of the state's failure to coordinate with NGOs. A further criticism is that the state simply does not have the resources required to undertake the project it had announced, at least not in a manner that adheres to child safeguarding standards. According to Imam Elimane Diagne, President of COMOD, the state-run welcome centre Centre Ginddi did not have any vehicles available to collect the children it claimed to be removing from the street when the project was first started. When criticised for this, the state, according to the same person, provided one minibus with less than 20 seats. Inadequate, as Imam Diagne points out, for the over 1,000 daaras that are thought to exist in the Dakar region (Interview. Imam Elimane Diagne. President of

COMOD. Guédiawaye, 24th April 2018). A staff member at CAPE (the Child Protection Unit) who had been involved in both phases of the project, confirmed that police vehicles were initially used by the state to collect children, before it was explained by NGOs that this was not good practice (Interview. Fulbert Dioh. Programme Manager, CAPE. Dakar, 6th July 2018). In fact, the physical act of collecting children from the street and taking them to welcome centres was at first conducted by the ministry itself, and later by police. Worrying stories emerged of children traumatised by the use of police vehicles or even "*brutalisés*" (beaten or bullied) in the process (Ndoye, 2018).

In recognition of these resourcing issues, the DDPEGV did eventually reach out to certain NGOs to ask for support during the first phase of the project. For example, a member of staff in the SamuSocial welcome centre in Ouakam said that it was only after the announcement of the 'retrait' that someone came to visit the centre to see if there was space available to take in any children, but as SamuSocial has themselves been supporting children to leave the street for 15 years, the centre is always full (Interview. Senior staff member, Samu Social Senegal. Dakar, 24th July 2018). Eventually, other organisations such as SOS Village d'Enfants did support the state in housing children taken from the street after the state-run Centre Ginddi had been filled. NGO-run welcome centres such as Village Pilote and SOS also had to volunteer their own vehicles to collect the children (Interview. Imam Elimagne Diagne, President of COMOD. Guédiawaye, 24th April 2018).

This lack of coordination and the failure to include relevant structures in planning was not limited to relations between state and non-state actors. Like the NGOs, state structures were not involved in planning for the project before it was announced. This was true even of the state structures that are mandated with child protection, with even a representative of the CAPE, which was at the time under the direct control of the President's Office with the role of coordinating the various ministries responsible for different aspects of child protection under one national strategy [Ndène, 2017]) stating that they had not had any more warning than any other structure, including the DDPEGV (Interviews. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018, and Fulbert Dioh, Programme Manager, CAPE. Dakar, 6th July 2018). Once the first phase began, a lack of coordination *between* state structures was also a common theme of critiques of the

intervention, as well as being used by the ministries involved to justify the project's insufficient results. For example, a representative of the department that led the first phase of the project complained that other ministries did not play their part:

Unfortunately not all of the Ministries acted in this way [cooperatively]. We tried to do what we can but... at a certain point we have no more authority, we stop. People say 'what is the ministry of children doing' and so and so on. But there are things, it's necessary to take things into consideration - what is the responsibility of the Minister for Childhood, what is the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior, what is the responsibility of the Minister of Justice? Because the [ministry of] the Interior has its part to play. If all the - with all the gendarmes, police there are in the street, if they took those children, if they made it so that children were no longer in the street, if everyone plays their part, I think we could meet the ambition of the President of the Republic.

(Interview. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018).

It is difficult to assess what effect the lack of coordination, or inadequate coordination, between structures had for the outcomes of the project. What is clear, however, is that this lack of coordination allows each structure to deflect any blame for the project's ineffectiveness to other ministries. In particular, Aminata Niang Ly of the DPDE described how the department did not have the necessary mandate to sanction the adults responsible for the children's begging, limited as it was to referring cases to the Ministry of Justice:

Well, in the capacity of the Ministry of Child Protection, what we do is that if the marabout - or, well, the so-called Qur'anic teacher - is a repeat offender, we refer them to the Ministry of Justice to bring it to their attention. Now, as for us, our authority stops there. We don't have that power of... sanction, of repression. And that's also something that means that the phenomenon persists, because if there were sanctions behind [the project], we wouldn't be here. [...] But unfortunately, we don't have that authority.

(Interview. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018)

Here, she moves from critiquing the lack of cooperation between state structures, to another common critique of the Removal of Children from the Street approach: the lack

of sanctions for the adults responsible for the children picked up, here framed as imposters posing as *sëriñ daaras*. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section, however, it is important to note here how the fragmented nature of state structures allows the justification of lack of sanctions, as each structure is able to blame others.

Despite the chaos of the first phase, the state claims that 1,547 children (1,318 boys and 229 girls) were removed from the streets of Dakar over the period of June 2016 – March 2017, as reported in the media (Dieng, 2018; Ndione, 2018). 71% of these children have been described as "*apprentis coraniques*" (Qur'anic apprentices) (Ndione, 2018, p. 94). Given that female Qur'anic students do not beg, this figure of 1,098 children equates to 83% of the boys. We are not told what criteria are applied for particular boys to be considered as 'Qur'anic apprentices', which brings to the fore some of the issues discussed in Chapter Five. For example, does this include boys who have fled daara as well as those currently residing in such places? Does it include boys who beg only for food and only at mealtimes as well as those asking for money for the whole day, who are assumed, by a logic based on their timetables, not to be learning much if any of the Qur'an? These questions remain unanswered. In any case, several of the NGO workers I interviewed cast doubt upon the government's statistics on the number of children taken off the street during the first phase. One child protection specialist in an INGO claims that the numbers are fabricated altogether, while a different project coordinator was similarly cynical about the announcements made by then Director of Protection of Child Rights (leading the DDPEGV) specifically regarding the results of the first phase of the project:²⁴

Today, you haven't seen the removal of children continued. There are only the declarations of Niokhobaye Diouf, I don't know if you've met him? Everything he tells you, it's not true. It's not. It's to safeguard his spot that he says this and that.

This is an example of the level of distrust between the NGOs and the government when it comes to this issue. Of course, even if the state's numbers are based in fact, they tell

²⁴ Dates for these interviews are not given to ensure anonymity.

us nothing about how many of these children returned to the street, or how many new children arrived on the street. This is especially pertinent as many of the talibés removed from the street in the first phase were later returned to their daaras, as shall be discussed below. This leads us into the criticisms that go beyond the logistics of the project into its aims and approach. Before addressing these more ideological critiques, I continue to 2017, after the end of the first phase of the official project, at which point an INTERPOL intervention with similar aims was conducted.

8.3.2 *Interlude: Opération Epervier (2017)*

Between the two phases of the state-led Removal of Children from the Streets project, in late 2017 a brief operation spanning several countries was coordinated and conducted by INTERPOL. This operation had similar aims of recuperating children assumed to have been trafficked, with the addition of sanctions for those responsible. There is little information publicly available about this operation and it is not clear whether the timing of the operation between the two phases of the removal from the streets project was a coincidence or not. We do know that 236 children were among 500 people picked up through Opération Épervier across the five countries of Senegal, Niger, Mali, Chad, and Mauritania, and 40 arrests made of those who allegedly trafficked them (INTERPOL, 2017). According to Ministry of Justice sources cited by Human Rights Watch, this included 54 children picked up from the streets in Senegal, of which 47 are said to be talibés, and, moreover, that five Qur’anic teachers were among the seven individuals arrested and eventually prosecuted for exploitation of minors through forced begging (Seibert, 2019b). These prosecutions are the crucial difference between the project to remove children from the street and the INTERPOL-coordinated operation. As a member of the CNLTP explained:

The difference was that it was with the help of INTERPOL, people could be prosecuted. The exploitations have been prosecuted. Whereas, the first retrait, we had that retrait, there were no trials, there were none.

(Interview. CNLTP staff member. Dakar, 22nd January 2018)

Although they were prosecuted under the 2005 anti-trafficking law, the sentences given to these men were short sentences far below those detailed in the law – two months in prison for four of them and, for the fifth, 15 days in prison and two years’ probation

(Seibert, 2019b). Nevertheless, if those *sëriñ daaras* who were found to be exploiting children during the brief INTERPOL intervention could be prosecuted under this law, this suggests there is no legal reason why the Removal from the Streets project could not have applied the same law. However, perhaps the differences between the INTERPOL operation and the other phases of the retraits should not be overblown: NGOs report that some of the children picked up during *Opération Épervier* were reportedly returned to their *daaras* at the request of police or government officials, only to be found back on the streets just a few months later (Seibert, 2019b).

8.3.3 *Phase Two (2018): new leadership*

Over the year that followed the cessation of the first phase of the project in March 2017, during which *Opération Épervier* was conducted, the Removal of Children from the Streets project was reimagined with changes to its implementation before being relaunched in late March 2018. According to press reports, the government claimed that the number of children removed from the street during the second phase of the retraits (28th March - 11th May 2018) was just "219 children [...] Senegalese (135), Bissau-Guinean (69), 3 Conakry-Guineans, 3 Malians, 7 Gambians, and 2 Nigeriens" (Dieng, 2018. My translation), before it was put on hold for evaluation and fundraising purposes.

One of the biggest changes was in the leadership of the project, following a government reshuffle. Control of the operation was passed to the recently established (and now defunct) MBGPE, or more specifically to then newly recruited Director of Child Protection, Alioune Sarr. As discussed in Chapter Six, this ministry was intended to bring together all of the dispersed structures working on child protection, bringing optimism to those who hoped for greater cooperation, but ultimately only existed for less than two years.

The new leadership also brought substantial changes to the implementation of the Removal of Children from the Streets project. Some of these changes were presented as direct responses to the critiques of the earlier project outlined above. The adjustments were spelled out by technical adviser Abdoulaye Dieng during a press conference in May 2018. The changes included both the adaptation of the process of dealing with the children, practically speaking, and the redirection of blame. Rather than being taken from the streets in police vehicles, children found begging in this phase were instead

collected in unmarked cars belonging to the Ministry of the Interior accompanied by social workers and taken to the Centre Ginddi for processing by social workers including "photo identification, registration, medical consultation, listening, support, hygiene care, lodging, and follow up" (Diallo, 2018. My translation). From there, children identified as talibés were separated from the others. One of the main differences between the first and second phase was that, in the second phase, talibés were not returned to their original daaras, but sent to one of a selection of daaras that had been preapproved by the state. I discuss this relationship with sēriñ daaras further in the next section.

8.4 Sēriñ daaras and the Removal of Children from the Street

Having now detailed the evolving operationalisation of the Removal of Children from the Street project, I now focus in on how the state-led project engaged with sēriñ daaras in different ways over the two phases. While the grounding of the approach in the language of trafficking and protection might typically suggest a focus on prosecution (Chuang, 2006), this has not been the case in either phase of the project. The two variations of the project each attracted criticism for how they dealt with sēriñ daaras. These objections come from two somewhat contradictory viewpoints: one which argues for legal sanctions to be handed down to the sēriñ daaras (and in some cases the parents) of talibés who beg, and the other that argues that alienating and creating tensions between the state and the sēriñ daaras is counterproductive to the goal of stopping begging by talibés. This tension ultimately comes down to differences in how the sēriñ daaras, and the begging they impose on talibés, are understood, with one side seeing them as villains to be punished, and the other seeing them as requiring support to change their ways.

8.4.1 Sēriñ daaras in Phase One: rewarding those responsible

In the first phase of the project, children picked up in the streets were taken to residential welcome centres. The sēriñ daaras of those who were categorised as talibés were found. They were not, however, tracked down to be prosecuted. Instead, there were no sanctions whatsoever for sēriñ daaras whose talibés had been picked up when begging and taken to residential welcome centres, and instead, quite the opposite

occurred. As well as children being returned to the same daaras, some sēriñ daaras were rewarded with resources:

First, the idea is that when the Qur'anic teacher comes, he is made to understand that... he doesn't have the right to make that child go out into the street. Because, once we identified them, there would be a support plan. So, all of the Qur'anic teachers who came by, we discussed their projects that they wanted to put in place to actually avoid making children beg. So it's on that basis that they deposited their projects and we... I think that there are some among them who were... who were funded. There are others who are in the process of... steps are being taken to go towards [funding them].

(Interview. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018)

This consequence (or lack of consequences) for sēriñ daaras whose talibés have been found begging brings to the fore the complexities of the narrative underlying the Removal of Children from the Street project. While the project's underlying justification was grounded in a discourse of child protection, with its focus on saving children from traffickers, the support provided to sēriñ daaras whose children were found begging shifts the narrative to the same discourse underpinning the modernisation approach which frames the daaras as legitimate, under-resourced and in need, and the sēriñs as well-intentioned teachers. This creates a degree of confusion - what makes these children different from those who are 'trafficked', and are the trafficker and the Qur'anic teacher whose pupils beg one and the same, and if not, how does one differentiate? - that remains unresolved in the state's rhetoric.

Although the DDPEGV did eventually come to realise "that for recidivist children, when the Qur'anic teacher comes [to find the child at the centre they are housed at], we don't give him the child" (Interview. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018), the initial policy of returning talibés to the same daaras that had sent them out to beg was not well-received among NGO workers. The provision of resources can be seen as incentivising begging, encouraging more sēriñ daaras to send talibés out rather than deterring them.

But the children that they picked up, not only did they take them back to their teachers, but with money! With food - bags of rice, milk,

tomatoes and so on. And me, if I had some children who were in the street, [if] they pick them up, and when I go to find them, they give me them back with money, well, my neighbour is going to send his children, even if his children hadn't been in the street, he is going to tell them to go out in the street!

(Interview. Imam Elimane Diagne. President of COMOD. Guédiawaye, 24th April 2018)

This view is not shared by all. The *sëriñ daaras*, for example, saw this differently, again adopting the vulnerability discourse to justify begging by their talibés and criticise the Removal of Children from the Streets approach. Some *sëriñs* claimed that if children beg for food, or for money with which to buy food, and are suddenly instructed to stop begging for fear that they will be collected by the police or an NGO vehicle, they lose their access to food altogether. Nevertheless, this approach was abandoned before the second phase of the project began.

8.4.2 *Sëriñ daaras in Phase Two: differentiating sëriñs*

In the second phase, the approach to *sëriñ daaras* was altered. Instead of returning talibés picked up when begging to the daara where they came from, they were instead placed with one of a selection of daaras already identified by the state as being acceptable, such as the daara run by Imam Kéba Gaye, President of the Qur'anic Teachers' Association in Pikine. The *sëriñs* of these daara were then paid a small amount (around 3,000 cfa - £3.85 - a month according to an official) to keep the child while parents are located. This approach was perceived by some NGOs, such as HRW (Seibert, 2019a), as an improvement on handing the child straight back to the teacher who made them beg in the first place. For some, including development practitioner Aliou Kebe, this change marks an improvement on the first phase because it prevents children being returned to men considered to be traffickers:

Before, they gave the child back to the marabout [...] there have been rectifications, they no longer give the child to traffickers, as they call them, or as I call them, traffickers, eh? They give them directly back, they look for the parents to give them to them, but take the contact details of the parents, to avoid recidivism. [...] instead of only giving the child to the Centre Ginddi, they also found daara that were decent, where

Qur'anic teaching happens, they made the referrals while waiting to identify the parents. So there is a progressive rectification and they are still correcting it. Now, where it is necessary to act, it's that it's necessary for the Ministry of Justice, once the referral is done, to press charges, for everything that is trafficking. It's them too who must go to see who was behind the exploitation, and how to take them, and that will be a logical path.

(Interview. Aliou Kebe, development practitioner. Dakar, 26th July 2018)

Beyond the removal of specific children, once again there were no legal sanctions for those deemed to have trafficked and exploited children. Nevertheless, this revised approach effectively meant that the government was putting formerly rhetorical distinctions between legitimate Qur'anic teachers and illegitimate 'so-called' Qur'anic teachers into practice, but doing so in an informal, unregulated way.

Outside of this project, the decision between legitimate and illegitimate *sëriñ daaras* would be made by parents deciding whether to entrust their child to a particular *sëriñ daara*, not by the state. Indeed, as Ahmadou Gning pointed out, this could open the government to legal challenges from parents, who have entrusted their child to a specific *sëriñ* (Interview. Ahmadou Gning. Child Protection Manager, Save the Children. Dakar, 16th July 2018), with whom they often have long-standing familial relationships (as addressed by the discussion of *confiage* in Chapter Five). Unlike sending a child to a formal school, parents have entrusted the care and education of their child, albeit informally, to an individual rather than to a system or institution. They may therefore object to their child being placed in the control of another, unknown individual.

There was also more focus on parents' responsibility in the second phase of the project, at least in rhetoric. As Alioune Sarr, in his role leading the second phase of the project, explained:

Now, the next step is to put the same pressure on parents. Often, people criticise the marabout, imprison the marabout, do all sorts against the marabout. But he is jointly responsible with the parents! Ah yes, it's necessary to go to unmask those parents. And we have taken the contact details of all the parents of those [talibés] we had. They come, them too, we make them sign a contract. If we find that child in the street again,

they will be dealt with. And that's where we are going to apply the law. So that's what's now giving more or less success in this phase of the retrain. Because, when they took children, in the earlier phases of the retrain, they did the return to families. Yes. But returning [a child] to family is expensive! [...] You have to take a social worker, have to rent a vehicle, you put four children inside, you go to Kaolack, you continue to Tamba, all over you drop off a child - at whose cost? The state's! Why pay? It's the parents who must pay [the cost of returning the child]. [...] This phase, it's the parents who pay. People will tell us 'yes, the parents are poor, they don't have the means' - I say they have only to do what the children do! They can go hold out their hand [to beg] [...] [He laughs.] Yeah, they must be subjected to the same conditions as the children. Beg to have their living, I say. But if they don't come here, we send the police to them. They come!

(Interview. Alioune Sarr, Director of Child Protection. Dakar, 5th June 2018)

This discourse emphasises parents' agency rather than presenting them as either being naively tricked into subjecting their child to a situation of which they were ignorant, or by being forced into sending their child to such circumstances as a last resort due to extreme poverty. It serves, too, to deflect culpability for the talibés' situation away from the sēriñ daaras. Ultimately, for the sēriñ daaras of the talibé picked up in the second phase, there were no legal sanctions. An HRW record of all Qur'anic teachers convicted over the period of 2017-2019 shows that there were no convictions in Dakar in 2018 (and only six elsewhere in the country, mostly for violent offences with only two of them - one in Saint Louis and one in Kaolack - for 'exploitation of begging' under the 2005 law) (Seibert, 2019b).

8.4.3 *The sēriñs' mixed views*

While it is often assumed that sēriñ daaras will be displeased by any efforts to police the practice of begging by talibés, the sēriñ daaras I interviewed - while by no means a representative sample - had varied views on the project. The variation in their opinions is not divided between those who do or do not enforce begging in their daaras, but rather on how they perceive the state's targeting of talibés in relation to how they understand, or justify, begging among their own talibés and those of other sēriñs.

Some sēriñs saw the project as an attack on the daaras. The young teacher in his uncle's daara in Pikine whose fears about the sustainability of the state's modernisation approach were referenced in Chapter Seven stated that he had not heard of the law against begging until the state recently started to talk about removing children from the street. He resented that efforts to curb begging were focused on talibés and daaras rather than the other people who beg. When asked why he thought there was this focus on the talibés, he stated "*dañuy xeex daara yi*" - they are fighting the daaras. He expanded on this to suggest that the state's focus on daaras was influenced by international powers that want to weaken the daaras, and that the Senegalese state has not given value to them (Interview. Qur'anic teacher. Pikine, 27th May 2018). Likewise, another sēriñ daara complained about the project being implemented without any support to provide an alternative means of income, describing it as "a bad programme, an ugly programme, because you give nothing to a person, you don't help them, and then you don't want them to be in the street waiting for someone else to help them" (Interview. Masamba Cissé, sēriñ daara. Pikine, 6th June 2018 A). As mentioned above, the state did provide resources to certain sēriñ daaras in the first phase – but only to those whose talibés were caught begging, not to those who kept children inside during the period of the retrait. Despite not being entirely accurate, then, this perception demonstrates how sēriñ daaras construct the begging of their own talibés as an act of necessity, passing blame to the lack of state support.

Other sēriñ daaras, however, supported the aims of the project. The divide was not between those who themselves practiced begging in their own daara and those who did not, as one might expect. The sēriñ quoted in Chapter Five when he differentiated the begging of his talibés, who go out and return to the daara before 9am, from the children who beg all day, supported the project. He saw it as targeting those who spent all day on the street and who were not, in his view, learning the Qur'an as a result. "If the state sees that [children begging until midnight] and takes decisions to put an end to it," he said, "everyone should go along with it." (Interview. Sēriñ daara. Pikine 10th May 2018 B). These examples demonstrate that the sēriñ daaras' views on the project are, at least in part, influenced by how they understand and portray the begging that goes on in their own and others' daaras, as well as their views of the state.

8.4.4 *Creating tensions with cooperative Qur'anic teachers or excusing abusers?*

While many of the critiques above are concerned with the operationalisation of the project – the lack of coordination and inadequate resource allocation of Phase One, and the selection of approved daara without parental knowledge in Phase Two, for example – concerns about how talibés are targeted and sēriñ daaras interacted with are more fundamental to the core of the project. While some sēriñ daaras feel that removing talibés from the street is the wrong approach because it is unfairly targeting the daaras, some NGO staff reach the same conclusion but for quite different reasons. This is not only a question of whether efforts should be focused on child talibés or other children who beg (which is also a matter of debate among NGO workers, according to a representative of NGO SamuSocial, the second phase was more specifically focused on talibés than other children who beg, because "the government doesn't know what to do with the other street children" [Interview. Senior staff member, SamuSocial. Dakar, 24th July 2018]), but rather an issue of whether an intervention directly removing children from the streets is appropriate at all. In this section I show that these objections are related to how sēriñ daaras are portrayed in the discourse around the project, and that the contradictions in this framing lead to objections from opposing viewpoints.

On one hand, despite the diversity in the views of sēriñ daaras as demonstrated above, various NGO workers raised concerns that the approach is counter-productive, as it will serve to alienate those sēriñ daaras who engage with other projects, including NGO's own projects and the modernisation approach. For example:

And I think that, rounding up the talibés in the street like that, it's not... at the end of the day they are shooting themselves in the foot because... well, they're shooting themselves in the foot, if they make things difficult for themselves with the Qur'anic teachers, who don't appreciate their children being rounded up like that by the state services or the police

(Interview. Senior staff member, welcome centre. Dakar, 11th January 2018)

This fear arises from how the Removal of Children from the Street project employs narratives of talibés as victims of trafficking who need to be rescued from the street and taken away from those who have put them in that position. With its focus on talibés,

sëriñ daaras, it is feared, will find themselves labelled as a traffickers, albeit implicitly, and withdraw their engagement in other endeavours.

On the other hand, however, while those responsible are framed as traffickers in the abstract, in practice, as seen above, the sëriñ daaras making children beg were at first rewarded with resources and training, and then, in the second phase, punished only with the removal of the specific children found begging. Rather than emphasising the risk of alienating sëriñ daaras, this leads others in the sector to argue that the approach does not go far enough to hold the culpable adults to account. They instead call for a focus on prosecuting responsible adults rather than attempting to round-up the children themselves. As Biram Ndiaye of ENDA explains:

[the state] decreed the Removal of Children from the Street, but that was... window dressing [(*saupoudrage*)], bluster! It's not necessary to do a retrait. It's the adults who send the children into the street. Those children don't fall from the sky, they have fathers, they have fathers and mothers, they come from somewhere, and there is someone who says to them each morning 'go beg'. But one [should] address those people first. But they go in the street, they take the kids, they put them in the centres. We don't have enough centres to do that. And even if you take them, you put them in the centre, you leave freely the people who sent them, but if he's returned to the house, they are going to send him back into - back to the person. I say to people, at the end of the month, I say today, [...] I give you from here to the end of March to completely stop begging. I say, from the month of March, every adult who will send a child to beg in the street, I put them in prison. So they have a month to return the children home. And I could potentially ask NGOs and my technical departments, ask, ask them to help those who haven't got enough money, to help those marabouts to return the children home. And it's finished!

(Interview. Biram Ndiaye, Programme Manager, ENDA. Guédiawaye, 8th March 2018)

From this perspective, this protectionist intervention to remove individual children from their street situation is inappropriate due to its failure to address the reason that they are on the street in the first place. In this quote, however, Mr Ndiaye also demonstrates the fundamental contradiction inherent in the project, like many NGO projects. He asserts that those responsible should be in prison, and then implies that

the *sëriñ daaras* have a lack of money preventing them from returning children to their homes that requires NGO support to resolve. In making this swift leap between proposed solutions, he expertly demonstrates the use of the dance between discourses to justify NGO action (Thiam, 2014).

The Removal of Children from the Street approach itself relies upon this fluidity between discourses. The apparent contradictions between objections to the project from those who believe that the project may alienate *sëriñ daaras* who are otherwise cooperating to improve their practices, or at the very least not resisting other interventions, and from those who believe that those responsible should be prosecuted may be the result of contradictions inherent in the project itself. The approach of removing children from the streets cannot be seen as the operationalisation of any one narrative to explain the ‘talibé problem’. From the launch of the project with President Sall’s tweets, the use of dual discourses can be identified. In one tweet, the President employed the hashtag #EducationSenegal and uses the language of children’s rights. In the other, sent just a few minutes later, he switches to a protectionist discourse with the explicit goal of ‘saving talibés’ and punishing those responsible with fines and sanctions. The impression is given that the problem is *simultaneously* an issue of an unfulfilled right to education (or at least of an education deemed adequate in the international discourse) and of exploitation of vulnerable children by adults who deserve punishment.

This duality of problematisations continues throughout the project. At the beginning of the first phase, the government publicised that it had gained the support of Moustapha Lo, President of the National Federation of Qur’anic Schools (FNAECS) through an article on the State’s website recognising that it is necessary to “better support the *daaras* [as] veritable places of socialisation, very often deprived of the adequate means to meet their obligations” (Le Service de Communication de la Primature, Gouvernement du Sénégal, 2016. My translation). Yet the very same news piece refers to “abusive exploitation”, “security threats” and the “morally unacceptable image” of Dakar as place where begging is “a real career” (Le Service de Communication de la Primature, Gouvernement du Sénégal, 2016. My translation). The FNAECS Secretary General Adama Seck was then quoted in the press as interpreting this meeting to mean that talibés were not the target of the initiative, requiring further clarification from the

government (*Enquête Plus*, 2016), before it became obvious that talibés were indeed the primary target. These interactions with FNAECS demonstrate, as with the modernisation project, how the state attempts to use the associations to give legitimacy to its interventions, using the dual discourses to patch over potential tensions.

As Thiam (2014) theorised, the division between discourses does not fall between structures. Within a structure, there can be discord between written documents and spoken discourse of individuals. For example, when speaking to an official from the DPDE, it was clear that the respondent believed the narrative to be one of exploitation by men posing as Qur'anic teachers but motivated by profit:

There's a whole business behind it too. Because the visible aspect is the children who are in a situation of begging, but it has happened that [when] we've returned children to Qur'anic teachers, we've realised that the Qur'anic teacher is in the process of building a shop, or setting up this or that other business... so it's the so-called Qur'anic teachers, if we can say that, who are saying, who have captured [the practice]

(Interview. Aminata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018)

Yet in the official documents shared by the same person, such as the Communication Plan in support of the Removal of Children from the Street and from Exploitation by Begging (*Plan de communication en appui au retrait des enfants de la rue de de l'exploitation par la mendicité*), the 'faux marabout' is entirely absent. Rather, this document fully acknowledges the role of (legitimate) *sëriñ daaras* in making children beg, putting this down to not only a lack of resources and state support, but also a lack of knowledge on the part of these and many other actors. This framing is perhaps inevitable: being produced by the DDPEGV, a department with, as noted above, no authority over whether or not sanctions are imposed, and written in September 2016 in the context of the Removal of Children of the Streets project which had already been imposed from the President's Office, this communications plan could only ever exist in this form, diagnosing the problem with a narrative of poverty and naivety to explain the practice and prescribing a behaviour change campaign as the cure.

8.5 Conclusion

Although the second phase of the Removal of Children from the Streets project is recognised as an improvement on the first shambolic phase, it still had very little impact. This suggests that the problems in the first phase were not just in the way that the project was operationalised, but in the nature of the project itself. The project seeks to solve the problem of children being on the street by simply removing them, not by addressing underlying causes or bringing consequences for those responsible. Thus, the project did little to discourage the adults responsible for child begging to change their behaviours. With no prosecutions in 2018, for the majority of *sëriñ daaras* whose *talibés* were found begging, there was no legal action taken to either remove any other children (beyond the *talibé* or *talibés* who had been picked up) from their guardianship or to prevent them from acquiring more children, not to mention any form of punishment such as the laws and fines prescribed by the 2005 anti-trafficking law. The project may therefore have done just enough to move Senegal away from the precipice of being downgraded in the following year's TIP report, while keeping prosecutions, and the threat of backlash from religious leaders and the population to a minimum.

Following the second phase, the approach of removing children from the street was again put on hold, despite a number of statements saying it would start again soon. A few months after the end of the second phase, a new phase of the project covering the departments Dakar, Guédiawaye, Pikine and Rufisque to begin in July 2018 was announced (United Nations Senegal, 2018), but nothing seems to have come of this announcement, given that there is no mention of a further phase in Human Rights Watch's reporting of the project (Seibert, 2019b). Then, on the 16th September 2019, during the opening ceremony of the International Institute of Human Rights' 10th Training Session on theme of Child Rights and International Human Rights Law, the Minister of Women, Family, Gender and Child Protection, Ndèye Saly Diop Dieng, announced that the President had given the order for the "imminent resumption" of the Removal from the Streets project, but it was not until the following year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, that further steps were taken to remove children from the streets. The latest TIP report asserts that this 2020 phase "identified and referred to care 6,187 vulnerable children, including potential trafficking victims", but also comments that

there was resistance from religious leaders and that, due to a lack of prosecutions and sanctions, this phase like its predecessors “failed to deter future exploitation” (United States Department of State, 2021, p. 488). With the latest TIP report taking a more critical view of this additional phase of the project, the government may need to rethink the approach.

If the modernisation project, despite its flaws and delays, is often described as a triumph for collaboration between actors including state and non-state development organisations as well as religious leaders and teachers, analysis of perceptions of the Removal of Children from the Streets projects suggests quite the opposite. From all sides, actors involved or observing recount a tale of chaotic actions taken in isolation from other parts of the sector. This may both *be due to* and simultaneously *the cause of* the lack of coherency in the justification of the project and the problem that it seeks to solve. Ministries and departments operating in silo are limited to employing the narratives that justify the pieces of work that they, without cooperation from other structures, are mandated to do, even as these render other parts of the story invisible. As for international pressure, although international mechanisms such as the UNCRC, ACERWC and the US TIP reports instruct the Senegalese government to *both* modernise daaras and support Qur’anic teachers *and* prosecute child traffickers, they do not always take into account that these two approaches may mean interacting in contradictory ways with the same people, labelled as they are in two different ways.

For the Removal of Children from the Streets approach, these contradictions have opened the project up to criticisms both from those who think the project stigmatises the sërîñ daaras too much, to the detriment of engagement in other initiatives, and from those who think those responsible for putting children in the street should be more harshly punished. These fundamental concerns, coupled with critiques of the chaotic implementation, lead to questions about the sustainability of the project. Ultimately, the outcomes of the phases of the retrain, and the limited impact of Opération Epervier despite a small increase in prosecutions, does not serve to stop the flow of children – nor of new daaras moving to cities or opening. Even among those who consider that every child removed from the street is progress, without any attempt at prevention, and with no sanctions for the sërîñ daaras nor for the parents, the project does not do

anything to stem the supply of children arriving in the urban daaras. As a representative of the CNLTP, the national anti-trafficking taskforce, stated:

Yes [the Removal of Children from the Street was a success] because contrary to many people[’s opinion], when we remove one child, for me that’s a success. Because it’s one child less. But where many people are mistaken, it’s that the removal of children... has never solved the problem of trafficking in any country. [...] The objective, well, if we take out these children, we take out all of the children today. But the children who will come tomorrow, they are going to return to the street! No! We must - for me, really, my wish, it’s that we reach a situation, a society, where there are no more children, as soon as those who are there will be removed, that’s that, and those who arrive tomorrow cannot be exploited anymore.

(Interview. Senior staff member, CNLTP. Dakar, 22nd January 2018).

CHAPTER NINE

Zéro mendicité in Dakar

9.1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of the modernisation project languishing at the level of the government after being approved by the Conseil des ministres, and the state-led Removal of Children from the Street project failing to show a sustained impact on the numbers of children visible in the street, at the time of my fieldwork, another project was attracting attention. Funded by USAID, the *Réduire les Abus Contre les Talibés à Dakar* (Reducing Abuses Against Talibés in Dakar) activity – often referred to simply as the *Zéro mendicité* (or Zero Begging) project - brought together the UNODC and, in the first phase that ran from 2014-2016, the local authorities of two of Dakar’s *commune d’arrondissements* (municipalities or boroughs): Médina, and Gueule Tapée-Fass-Colobane (GTFC). From 2018, a second phase expanded the project area to include two communes in Pikine: Diamaguene Sicap Mbao and Pikine Nord. Being managed by local teams, the project played out differently in each of the two communes that took part in the first phase, including how they interpreted the shared goal of reducing begging.

The first phase of the project had a \$500k USD budget, of which \$300k was given to the UNODC to lead ‘Leadership Change Management’ training intended to build the capacity of project teams to engage the community and raise awareness of the issues, and \$100k to each of the two Dakar communes of Médina and GTFC. Médina had been the site of the 2013 fire that killed nine children sleeping in a daara, while GTFC was selected following an open call for applications. The fire is seen by many as a turning point in the long history of the talibés who beg in urban Senegal, one of the “trafficking crises” referred to by Richard Roberts (2012, p. 70) as events that, albeit briefly, galvanise “bursts of policy and implementation”. The resulting deaths are believed to have been a wake-up call for many Dakarois for whom the sight of young talibés begging is a daily occurrence, and, according to staff working on the project, was certainly a catalyst behind the Zero Begging project. The event created the necessary preconditions by allowing a “new level of discussion on how to deal with the sensitive religious and

political issue surrounding human trafficking and the talibé phenomenon in Senegal” between community members, according to the eventual evaluation of the project (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 8).

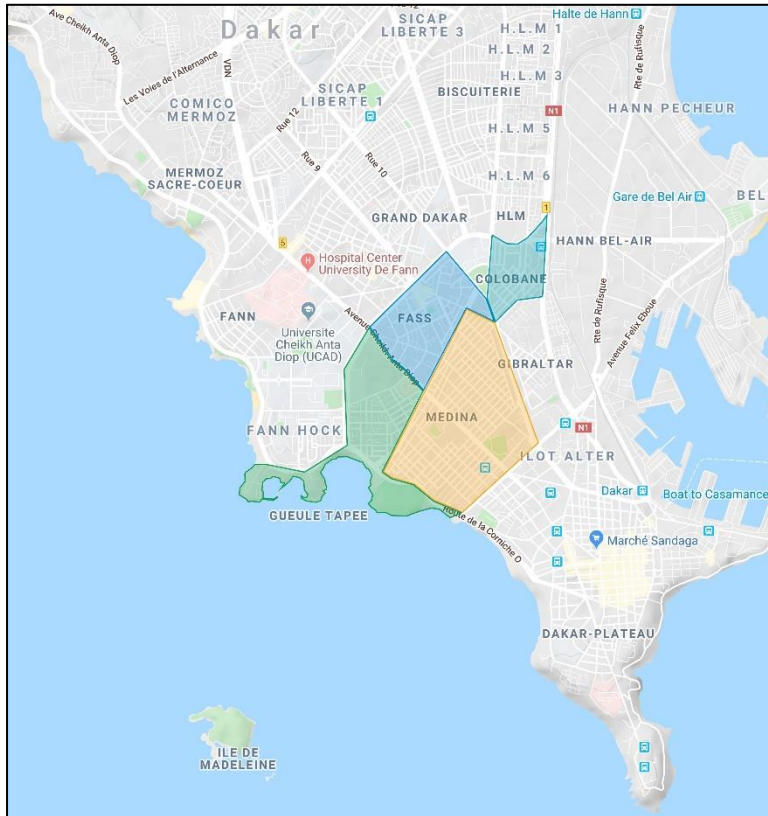


Figure 5. Map of GTFC and Médina communes. Adapted from Google Maps

The project is interesting not least because it can lay claim to, albeit limited, success where others cannot: it is claimed by project staff and evaluators that by the end of the project there were no daaras in Médina practicing begging. As shall be discussed in this chapter, however, this claim may not be as impressive as it at first sounds given the small numbers of daaras in the area. In the other commune, GTFC, the project was less

successful in meeting its objectives despite a more modest goal being set, allowing examination of the differences between the two areas. However, as the USAID-funded project has since been the subject of an external evaluation (Management Systems International, 2017),²⁵ my research is not so interested in whether the project achieved its aims – already addressed in the evaluation – but in the extent to which the project remains ensnared within the same discourses and dynamics that shape and are shaped by the other approaches discussed in previous chapters. Based on fewer interviews, given the smaller scope of this project, the findings in this chapter are more tentative

²⁵ By external I here mean external to the project; it may be relevant to note that the authors’ names on the evaluation are all Senegalese/West African. The primary researcher, Mamadou Moustapha Wone, is a Senegalese researcher with many years’ experience of researching child protection concerns in Senegal, implying that the issue of ‘outsider’ experts with little knowledge of a culture or society (Jeanes and Lindsey, 2014) is not the dynamic here.

than those in previous chapters. These tentative findings remain illuminative, however, and the chapter contributes by beginning to explore the extent to which a project can, or rather cannot, break out of the constraints imposed through the discourse and the dynamics within the development sector in Senegal.

Keeping this caveat in mind, the chapter first demonstrates that although the anti-trafficking discourse is used in official documents to justify funding the project, the discourse has to be abandoned to explain the project's activities. I then consider the extent to which the approach differs from the others discussed in the thesis, demonstrating that the same dynamics of collaboration with the community and religious leaders, which brings a sense of frustration, and of inadequate cooperation between structures persist within this new approach.

9.2 From anti-trafficking to rehabilitation

Analysis of the Zero Begging project documents and interviews with staff of the project and of USAID and UNODC provides a clear example of the contradictions and difficulties that arise when the global anti-trafficking discourse is filtered down to a local project. At the level of official USAID documentation, the project is justified by and grounded in the anti-child trafficking discourse. The funding - \$500k - for the project came from USAID's budget for anti-trafficking in persons activities, and it is explicitly stated in the evaluation that the project was intended to improve Senegal's position in the USA's TIP ratings (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 8). The evaluation leaves no doubt as to the official justification for the project:

The goal of this program is to reduce the problem of human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of vulnerable children under conditions of forced labor, by building the capacity in the Government of Senegal (GOS) to sustainably and effectively respond to this problem (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 1)

However, as I demonstrate in this section, digging deeper into the evaluation and other project documents reveals the fluidity of this problematisation and the disconnection between the anti-trafficking discourse and the community-based project's activities on the ground.

One need not look further than the evaluation report itself to see evidence of the oversimplified trafficking framing starting to crumble. Although the entire project is justified as an anti-trafficking initiative, in the evaluation, talibés, defined in the glossary as students, are at no point explicitly described as victims of child trafficking, and likewise their sēriñ daaras are at no point described as traffickers. On the contrary, an emphasis is placed on the fact that many sēriñ daaras in both communes did not practice begging even before the activity began and that although those “interviewed as part of this evaluation are not fundamentally opposed to talibés begging, [...] they hope to see it better regulated to prevent abuse” (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 19). This creates a discursive division between those who were interviewed and may practice begging in their daaras or approve of others doing so, and those who abuse the tradition of begging to exploit children. As we do not hear their voices in the study, at no point is it clarified either who exactly falls into the latter category or, therefore, who it is that is deemed responsible for the abuses suffered by talibés who beg.

It is this gap that the character of the faux marabout or ‘so-called Qur’anic teacher’ often emerges to fill, as discussed in Chapter Five. In the case of the project’s official documentation, however, the ‘faux marabout’ is not explicitly referenced. There are certainly hints of his presence in the evaluation: it is recognised that many community members “believe that the majority of children found begging in the street are not talibés associated with daaras” (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 78), for example, implying that they are in that vague category of children masquerading as talibés but assumed to be the victims of a trafficker. The evaluation does not address this further, instead leaving a silence that leaves it to the reader to decide whether to assume blame lays at the feet of the sēriñ daaras, or to attribute responsibly to an unspecified someone else. The former case, of course, cannot be voiced explicitly because to do so would cast light on the contradiction between problematisation and solution.

The Zero Begging project provides a clear example of an intervention operated with a profound disconnection between the framing of talibé begging as a motive for child trafficking and the proposed solution the intervention provides, in which the majority of activities were focused on working with communities to support daaras where

children live in poor conditions in ways other than giving alms to begging children. There are competing explanations for this disconnection. On one hand, it may be that local project staff (and the Senegalese evaluators writing the report) are constrained by the need to use the language of trafficking to access American funding, required to adopt the global anti-child trafficking discourse to tie a complex local problem to oversimplified global – and more specifically American – goals. However, the disconnect between these framings cannot be put down to Senegalese staff using a discourse more sympathetic to the *sëriñ daaras* than that employed at the level of USAID. Quite on the contrary, those I interviewed offered a far harsher critique of the *sëriñ daaras* in their neighbourhoods. Take, for example, the description given by Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator in Médina, who explained that in his commune, as well as the neighbourhood *daaras*, there were

daaras where in fact those children don't live [...] or their parents don't live in the neighbourhood or even the commune, but those children come from Kolda, from Tamba, from Guinea-Bissau, from The Gambia. They are there under the responsibility of a person who calls himself a Qur'anic teacher, and who is said to, who is supposed to teach them the Qur'an, but those children, in the morning it's them who one sees in the street with their pot, dressed in a vest, barefoot – without shoes – to practice that begging.

(Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Médina, Dakar, 1st August 2018)

This again demonstrates the constructed hierarchy of street-connected children, differentiating between those who are *talibés* and beg as well as (it is assumed) learning the Qur'an and those who are the *talibés* of the 'so-called Qur'anic teacher', who now re-enters the scene. It is equally recognised by those involved in the project's implementation that not all of the *sëriñ daaras* in Médina were purely motivated by the desire to teach the Qur'an. This became clear when the commune offered a monthly salary to replace the income from begging, only to come up against the same obstacles as the proposed national formalisation of the sector under the modernisation approach, whereby the state cannot provide a sum equivalent to the profits of exploitative begging:

There are people who benefit from that begging so only think of their

profit. And one of the experiences that we had, by the way, in the framework of the first phase, the mayor of Médina held a meeting with the Qur’anic teachers to tell them ‘I’m ready to give you a monthly salary so that you don’t have to ask children to beg,’ but some Qur’anic teachers said, ‘but what we collect each day is more than the sum that you’re offering us monthly.’ Because we proposed 50,000 cfa a month, and them, they can have 25,000 cfa, 30,000 cfa per day. So they didn’t accept.

(Interview. Senior project team member, UNODC. Dakar, 29th June 2018)

Moreover, however, this quote again suggests the belief that those in the project area whose talibés begged did so not out of necessity – which may justify the project’s support for those daaras - but for profit. We see, then, that although the assumptions underpinning the trafficking discourse used to justify the project do not disappear at the local level, the project activities do not seem to follow the same logic.

Turning to documents provided by Moussa Ndoye, the project coordinator in GTFC, we can see how easily one discourse is replaced by another. The baseline mapping of daaras in GTFC found three daaras where begging is “totally” practiced,²⁶ and where 55% of talibés come from Kolda, a region in southern Senegal, or other countries (USAID / Municipalité de GUEULE TAPEE –FASS –COLOBANE, 2014). The document leaves no doubts as to the perceptions of the author (likely Moussa Ndoye) regarding the intentions of the sēriñ daaras of those three daaras:

Those [talibés] coming from the region of Kolda, from the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau are the result of very dubious enrolment practices with a scent of trafficking and mistreatment. There, the principal is not at all to be found in a noble objective of mastering the full Qur’an, but rather in the unbridled search for financial gain for the marabout. The talibés become objects to accomplish a sordid and undeclared scheme of private income. (USAID / Municipalité de GUEULE TAPEE –FASS –

²⁶ In project reports from GTFC, a distinction is made between *mendicité totale* and *mendicité integrale*: an attempt to capture the nuance between those who beg as well as studying the Qur’an and those whose time is fully occupied by begging (though the terminology fails to clarify the situation as it is not clear from either the reports or my interviews with Moussa Ndoye, who mixes up the terms when trying to explain, which term, *totale* or *integrale*, relates to which group).

COLOBANE, 2014. My translation.)

And yet this discourse is not applied when project documents refer to a specific daara or a specific sēriñ.

Another unpublished project document reports on the renovation of a daara that had been in the GTFC area since 1972, started by a “learned scholar” but now under the tutelage of someone else (Zero mendicité project team, Guele Tapée - Fass - Colobane, 2015. My translation). From an outsider’s perspective, the daara in question fits all of the criteria frequently referenced as signs of trafficking or exploitation: its 35 students, who have come from Southern Senegal and neighbouring countries, are housed under a tin roof and tarpaulin tucked in behind the wall of a primary school, where they make use of toilets having no water access of their own. The talibés beg each day to reach a quota of 300-500 cfa each, spend many hours in the street, and have no access to healthcare. The report specifies that children’s rights are not all respected, that the situation is “close to torture”, and, fundamentally, that the children do not learn even the basics of the Qur’an, while “the Qur’anic teachers swim in opulence” (Zero mendicité project team, Guele Tapée - Fass - Colobane, 2015. My translation). The framing of this daara as a site of trafficking and mistreatment, and not one of education, is therefore unmistakable, and yet its connection to a ‘learned scholar’ is invoked to allow it to be distanced from the same discourse. This distance justifies the support provided to the daara in the form of renovating the building, equipping a classroom, and providing French teaching and food (with the latter intended to be taken up by ndeyu daara). We are not told the effects on begging of all of this work in this particular daara, but the document notes a reduction across the three daaras in the commune where begging was practiced “at high intensity” (Zero mendicité project team, Guele Tapée - Fass - Colobane, 2015. My translation). There is no mention of those responsible for the initial conditions, whose “only concern”, according to the report, “was to put the talibés and the institution at the service of their deceitful project” to make money through begging (Zero mendicité project team, Guele Tapée - Fass - Colobane, 2015. My translation). As the daara is rehabilitated then, transformed from site of exploitation to one of learning, the narrative of blame also transforms from malicious intent to a lack of support.

Taking all of these examples together demonstrates that, while in official documents related to the Zero Begging project, the malicious imposter or faux marabout may be absent, the space he leaves behind remains conspicuously empty. At commune level, therefore, we see a return to the “dance between discourses” (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019) to fill these silences.

9.3 Continuity and differences from other approaches

Moving on from these contradictions between problematisation and proposed solution, in this section I explore to what extent the Zero begging project mirrors the dynamics of other projects and programmes targeting daaras and talibés. The project, to its credit, was clearly trying to break the mould, as evidenced by the approach focusing on the municipal level government. As I shall demonstrate below, however, the project was not immune to the dynamics of competition despite attempts at coordination that have been seen in the state-led projects. In this section I first examine the differences between the by-laws passed in Médina and in GTFC, with implications for the perceived success of the project in each area. The section then turns to the engagement of sèriñ daaras in the project, before discussing the same dynamics of cooperation with undertones of competition that exist in other projects.

9.3.1 By-laws and (limited) project success

The main difference between the Zero Begging project and other initiatives (both state- and NGO-led) was the aim and ability to contribute to the creation of by-laws intended to restrict begging within the communes in both Médina (signed, not accidentally, on the third anniversary of the Médina fire, 3rd March 2016) and GTFC (following on the 25th April 2016). The by-laws passed in each of the municipalities are however quite different, with implications for their application.

Both laws adopt the discourse of anti-trafficking or anti-exploitation, but differ in how they connect this exploitation to daaras and in the sanctions that they provide for those breaking the law. The by-law passed in Médina not only forbids “public begging, mistreatment and exploitation of children” in the commune, but also establishes that “clandestine and illegal” daaras will be shut if they fail to meet norms of safety and security, and that new daaras require inspection and authorisation from the Commune

(Commune de Médina, 2016). In this way, the commune has managed to set up, at least on paper, a system of regulation that has not been possible at the national level. The GTFC by-law takes a different approach. It is purely focused on begging, banning the practice of begging both during the day and at night “on the main roads as well as public areas” of the Commune, with exception of daytime begging in religious areas (Commune de Gueule Tapée - Fass - Colobane, 2016). It makes no mention of the conditions of daaras; in fact there is no mention of daaras whatsoever. In its preamble, it does, however, make reference to a variety of national laws intended to regulate child labour as well as the 2005 anti-trafficking law, which the Médina by-law does not reference, instead referring only to an “official assessment report of the police and hygiene services on the conditions and state of daaras” (Commune de Médina, 2016) and various statutes concerning the legal status of the commune itself.

Although the importance of the by-laws themselves should perhaps not be over-stated, since, as the national example has demonstrated since 2005, “it’s good to have a law, but often what causes problems is the application of the law” (Interview. Senior project team member, UNODC. Dakar, 29th June 2018), the differences between the two laws are indicative of the different outcomes achieved by the two communes participating in the first phase of the project.

In terms of reducing begging, it is claimed (tentatively, as no baseline was conducted) in the project evaluation that the project was a success in Médina, but not in GTFC (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 3). Indeed, by the end of the project’s first phase, it is claimed that no daaras in Médina required their talibés to beg. While this sounds like an impressive claim, expectations should be tempered with the knowledge that there were only 32 daaras in Médina at the beginning of the project, including those who teach only neighbourhood children who return home at night and for lunch and who do not beg. The numbers are even smaller in GTFC. Having read the project documents shared by Moussa Ndoeye in the weekend between our two interviews, I was surprised by how few daaras there were in the selected communes: only 18 traditional daaras in GTFC (including those that teach Arabic or French and Arabic as well as the Qur’an alone, and ranging from daaras with some 20 students to those with over 200), according to a mapping exercise done at the start of the project (USAID / Commune de

Gueule Tapée – Fass - Colobane, 2014), of which only *three* apparently practiced begging even before the project began.

Unlike in Médina, the first phase in GTFC cannot claim to have eliminated begging even among this small number. This is not necessarily a lack of project success, because they had not, in fact, intended to do so. Given the flexibility accorded to the project teams in each commune, it was decided by the local project managers in GTFC that reduction of the time spent begging by talibés rather than elimination of begging should be the goal, at least the goal communicated to the communities:

We started with them [the populations of the two communes], we told them that the objective is not to eradicate begging in the commune, it's to organise begging and to reduce the number of child talibés in the commune. The final objective it is to eradicate, but there are steps that need to be put in place first.

(Interview. Senior project team member, UNODC. Dakar, 29th June 2018).

This demonstrates the understanding that not all begging is considered unacceptable within the community. Of the three daaras that had been counted as practicing begging at the start of the project in GTFC, two continued to do so, with talibés spending similar numbers of hours begging, and the other had left the commune for reasons unconnected to the project, as the owner of the building the daara was occupying reclaimed their property (Management Systems International, 2017). Two other daaras also left the area, apparently not because of the regulations on begging but because they do not want to be subject to observation by surveillance brigades, and because the parents of talibés in the daaras objected to the expansion of the curriculum in the daaras to include vocational training and French (Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Zero Begging Project Coordinator in GTFC. Dakar, 29th July 2018).

In Médina, meanwhile, where the municipal decree is worded more strongly than that in GTFC and lacks the exception made for begging in places of worship during the day, which in GTFC creates a loophole similar to that of the national law that differentiates alms-seeking and begging, the evaluation claims that the first phase of the project had “helped enable the municipality to reduce begging originating from Médina daaras to

zero” (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 25). The strong political will of the mayor of Médina, Bamba Fall, who is a recognised child rights activist (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 29), is seen as another factor. This again confirms the dependence of projects on committed individuals.

By the time I interviewed the assistant to the project coordinator, however, some two years after the collection of data for the evaluation, the eradication of begging even among those daaras in the commune seemed not to have been entirely sustained:

In fact today there is only one daara that is counted in our commune where there is, where people report to us that those children practice begging. So it’s... there’s a *grand khalife* of the Omarian family,²⁷ who has a daara so... but, the khalife, at the time of the evaluation, for him, the khalife, he had forbidden child begging, he said he was going to take care of [(*prendre en charge*)] all the children that people entrusted to him. But, since he doesn’t manage the daara, since he’s [busy with] other things, there are people volunteered to do it, so it’s those people who make the children beg. But they do it in secret! [...] in fact we saw those children, identified as belonging to that daara. But once... once we went there, him, he said, no, no, no, we don’t practice begging, all that. So it’s just that daara, otherwise the other children that we see begging here, they come from other communes.

(Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018)

This situation provides an example of the discursive dissociation of begging from the *sëriñ* daara who is himself perceived as legitimate, as the khalife is distanced from the practices taking place in his daara in his absence. It also hints at the limitations of the approach, which are that it cannot reach the talibés who do not sleep in daaras within the communes. As evidenced in Chapter Five, not all talibés who beg are in the same circumstances. While the Zero Begging project, in Médina at least, was able to target those talibés who beg while (perhaps) also learning the Qur’an, as recognised by the project coordinators of the communes participating in the first phase of the project, the children who beg all day arrived from areas outside of the commune’s jurisdiction. It is

²⁷ A branch of the Tijjaan brotherhood.

for this reason that a second phase of the project was planned to expand to the areas of Pikine Nord and Diameguene Sicap Mbao in the next phase, two areas on the outskirts of Dakar which are known to be home to many exploitative daaras.

In some ways, the project promises an alternative to the centralised Removal of Children from the Streets approach, but in others it shares many of the features of the NGO projects that have over the years attempted to encourage the sēriñ daaras of talibés who beg to return to their villages. Although the focus of and justification for the project is child begging, where daaras were shut in Médina, it was not because begging was practiced but because of the living conditions for the daaras' talibés. Souleymane Diagne explained that the process begins by the project team identifying the daaras where there are “very extreme” conditions, where “if we’re not careful, another fire could take place” (Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018). The process for shutting daaras in Médina involved the project team or surveillance brigades alerting the mayor’s office, from where the mayor then has to alert the health and hygiene services (to confirm that the conditions are inadequate), then the police are involved to ask the sēriñ daara to leave the premises. The project is involved “to give them temporary shelter while organising their return” to their area of origin (Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018). Most importantly, perhaps, those responsible for the three daaras that were shut in Médina not only escaped the fines promised in the national 2005 law – the by-law states that those not respecting its terms “will be punished in accordance with the law” (Commune de Médina, 2016) - but were instead each paid 300,000 cfa to “facilitate” their return to their place of origin (Management Systems International, 2017). Support given to facilitate the return of daaras to their areas of origin was intended not only to remove them from the commune but to use them to discourage others from moving to Dakar (Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018). As with other projects taking this approach, however, it is not clear if this is successful, or alternatively whether it encourages others to move to the city in search of funding to return, similar to how Boiro and Einarsdóttir (2020) have documented talibés repeatedly and intentionally using NGO repatriation schemes as

free transport for seasonal returns home to work on the farms. Moreover, even if, as is claimed by the Zero Begging project team, no one can now open a daara or “come to squat in a space on the pretext of giving Qur’anic teaching without the support of the municipal authorities” (Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018), there is, of course, nothing to stop the exiled sēriñ daaras from reopening their daaras in another city or even in another commune of Dakar. Unless daaras were to be systematically inspected in all communes, the approach may only relocate the issue, and like the many attempts at returning sēriñs to their areas of origin that have gone before, may serve to incentivise others to come to the surrounding areas.

9.3.2 *Engaging communities and sēriñ daaras*

The logic of the Zero Begging project has more in common with the many community-based projects of NGOs than with the usual work of USAID and international institutions in Senegal. Like many NGO projects, with its focus at the community level, the project depends on awareness raising work and working with ndeyu daara, encouraging community support for daaras no longer through giving money but by organising donations of food and other necessary materials, cooking and doing laundry for the talibés and sēriñ daaras. However, the Zero Begging project also benefited from working closely with the mayors’ offices, which have the power to legislate. Unlike the top-down imposition of laws from the central state, the local government approach allows for contextualised legislation accompanied by the types of awareness raising initiative (Wessells *et al.*, 2015) that may, in theory, prevent the type of backlash of which the national government is frequently claimed to be afraid of igniting. In this section I explore how the project delivered similar awareness-raising activities to those delivered by NGOs focused on dissociating begging and Qur’anic teaching, while attempting to distance itself from these preceding NGO projects.

As with many NGO-led initiatives, the community-based trainings and activities are based on explaining, or vernacularising, concepts of children’s rights and breaking the link between Qur’anic teaching and begging. Some involved in the project believe this link, and the idea that child rights are an external imposition, to be intentionally promoted by a segment of the sēriñ daaras:

There is the 'marabout lobby'. Those Qur'anic teachers are well networked... so then they're in the ear of those religious leader, to tell them that those people there are... fighting Islam, you see, their funders are infidels, they're Americans, English, French, all that... to make it so that those others think that those who are there to support us to eradicate begging are fighting Islam, even though that's not the case. So it's those paradigms that needed to be deconstructed with a lot of awareness raising. [...] And today, in fact, me, I think that the majority of Qur'anic teachers who were involved in this project know that in fact the financial partners who come to support us are actually much more concerned with child rights, they're concerned with child protection, than with fighting any one religion.

(Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018)

Mr Diagne's comments here also confirm the perceptions of international donors, as discussed in Chapter Six. Being funded by USAID and UNODC, the Zero Begging project faced the same challenges as many other projects with international donors who may be perceived by communities, and in particular by *sëriñ daaras*, as at best motivated by Western concerns, and at worst fighting Islam. These concerns may be real fears, or may be messages instrumentalised for the benefit of these religious lobbying groups, and which can be represented as either of these to fit the narratives of the development actors involved. The UNODC staff member I interviewed explains how the appointment of local people, selected by the mayors of each commune, to run the project alleviated accusations of Western interference and bad intentions, coupled with the deliberate limiting of the visibility of international actors:

When people come with their projects, they [the communities] see that USAID it's the Americans, they see UNODC - they think that's the Europeans - they're going to say it's the Europeans trying to destroy our Islamic education. So there is often that apprehension, that fear. But what we did, since it's community projects, the people who manage the projects are from the community they know them. They know that those running the projects are good Muslims like them, good citizens who have lived 20, 30 years in the commune, who are well known, who have good morals. We weren't visible - we brought our expertise, resources.

(Interview. Senior project team member, UNODC. Dakar, 29th June 2018).

This idea of minimal visibility of the international partners was echoed by Moussa Ndoye. He also described how the renovation of daaras that were in a bad state, including the one described in the project document cited above, helped to distance the project from these accusations:

There was a double goal: show the population that we aren't enemies of Islam, because we want to improve living conditions, and the population accepted and appreciated [that]; and also to show Qur'anic teachers that we're not like the others who come to feed themselves from the problem

(Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Zero Begging Project Coordinator in GTFC. Dakar, 29th July 2018).

Here, Mr Ndoye also replicates another common theme in interviews with NGO workers, asserting that *their* organisation or their project is not like the others. The project staff also sought to distance it from the work of NGOs which is seen as lacking sustainability, with the focus on by-laws thought to make the difference in this case. As Souleymane Diagne described:

There had been NGOs who had, in the recent past, who asked Qur'anic teachers 'what do you want us to do for you so that you let the children stop begging?', so the Qur'anic teachers had benefited from funding, but once the money was finished, they put the children back in the street. For us, it wasn't that.

(Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018)

While this directly community-based approach of the Zero Mendicité project may be a change of tactic for USAID, in terms of its activities, the project is not as unique as the excerpts above suggest, as in many aspects the story is more one of continuity with the efforts of many NGOs conducting community-based work to change attitudes around begging and improve the conditions, and sometimes the curriculum, in daaras. As with other programmes, the evaluation reports that *sëriñ* daaras had "feelings of disappointment and frustration around perceived un-met expectations" of support after

communicating their needs to the project team (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 27). This echoes the experiences of sèriñ daaras I interviewed regarding other projects. However, Mr Diagne’s perspective also offers an example of the dynamics of competition between structures, which I go on to discuss in more detail in the next section.

9.3.3 *Cooperation or competition between structures*

As discussed above, one feature that makes the project distinctive was its ability, due to its positioning within the commune-level government, to contribute to the municipal decrees. This position, also allowed the project to circumvent, to a certain extent, the obstacles caused by a lack of coordination, or inadequate coordination, between the structures of the central state that were outlined in Chapter Six and which have hindered the state-led projects discussed in the preceding chapters. This is not to say that the project operates alone. Indeed, cooperation between structures is critical to the project’s logic. For example, the surveillance brigades put in place to monitor begging in each commune have limited powers and must rely on other structures. When they find a child begging in Medina, “[t]hey only report [//denounce],” explained Aliou Kebe. “To whom must they report? They must report them to the mayor’s office. But it’s the state structures who must act. It’s the IOM [International Organisation for Migration] that must act. It’s the others. But when they take those children, there must be agreement that they can take them to the Centre Ginddi” where there are specialists to decide what to do with the child (Interview. Aliou Kebe, development practitioner. Dakar, 26th July 2018).

In practice, however, the absence of adequate cooperation beyond the commune level brings repercussions for the structures established through the project and for the children intended to be protected. Souleymane Diagne described what happens when a member of the surveillance brigades or the municipal authorities in Médina finds a child begging who claims to come from a daara situated outwith Médina:

We investigate. We ask the child ‘where do you come from? Who is your marabout?’, all that. And we refer [the child] (*faire la reference*). But we tell him that, in fact, you need to tell your marabout, because, in fact, if the child sees the units of the brigade with their uniform he is... scared.

So in such a way that... we explain to him all of that, and he goes back. And once the information is passed on, he'll tell others, other children, don't go in that commune, there are people there who are apprehending children

(Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018)

It therefore appears that not only are there no consequences for the adults seemingly forcing the children to beg, the approach relies upon the children themselves to communicate their falling foul of the law to those responsible. This criticism is not necessarily to say that there is an alternative, as without jurisdiction beyond their commune, and without a coordinated application of the national law, the surveillance brigades cannot be expected to do more. Sending the child – assumed here to be a victim of trafficking and exploitation – back to pass on the message to the responsible adult, however, mirrors the first phase of the state's Removal from the Streets project which was so widely criticised.

The project also offers insights into the modes of cooperation - or competition - between national state structures and those at local level. In interviews, both project coordinators agreed that it was the Zero Begging project that inspired the central state's Removal of Children from the Streets campaigns. During our second meeting, Moussa Ndoye points out the *Préfet* (Prefect) in a photo in one of the project reports that he shared with me. The photo is taken at the final mobilisation event of the project, on 27th April 2016, and Moussa tells me, the Prefect had not been invited. Instead he, according to Moussa, had heard from someone in the mayor's office that the event was taking place, "he came, and he was flabbergasted" (Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Zero Begging Project Coordinator in GTFC. Dakar, 29th July 2018). He had come with the (then) Director of Child Protection, and this set off a chain of events which saw, in Moussa's view, the central government attempt to take over the initiative. Moussa felt that the government's attempt to scale up the project was not simply because they wanted to see it have a greater impact, but because they feared that they the mayor's office would be seen as having solved a problem that the government had been unable to tackle. Moussa was soon invited to a meeting at the Directorate of Child Protection, with the Minister,

the Prefect, the Director, and an NGO whose name Moussa cannot recall but who have an agreement with the state:

To my great surprise, they summoned us for an expansion meeting, and who do I see? I see state representatives, from different arms of the state, but I also see the NGOs, who came to perhaps work with us. And so you see, a little bit, the goal is led astray, because we wanted to work in a restrained fashion, to give it time. Today it's the State who confiscates everything and who wants to say here's what we want to do.

(Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Zero Begging Project Coordinator in GTFC. Dakar, 29th July 2018).

According to Moussa, it was only a couple of weeks after this meeting that President Sall made the announcement launching the Removal of Children from the Street project. Moussa's objection is not that the state attempted to scale up the project, but that they tried to replicate it themselves, and in doing so missed the steps that he had spent months building up with the *sëriñ daaras* and the population in the communes involved. In his view, although the state has a crucial role to play in terms of law enforcement, its involvement is destined to come up against resistance:

The state can supervise, can bring moral support, but also the law enforcement necessary to be able to go to crucial stages because, ok, it's up to the populations who created this phenomenon to regulate the problem, but if the state comes, already that poses, that twists the debate, because the state will come with its law enforcement and, unfortunately, there will be people who are against the state, for problems of political motivation, and who will say no, no, and who mobilise their position for profit, and that twists the debate.

(Interview. Moussa Ndoye, Zero Begging Project Coordinator in GTFC. Dakar, 29th July 2018).

For Souleymane Diagne in Médina, on the other hand, while there was good coordination with the DPDE, engagement with other state structures was "sporadic". He pointed out that a particular challenge in Dakar is the absence of Departmental Child Protection Committees, which have been established (though not always functional [Jailobaeva *et al.*, 2021]) in many of Senegal's other departments and which

play a coordinating role (Interview. Souleymane Diagne, Assistant to the Project Coordinator, Zero Begging project. Médina, 1st August 2018). The absence of these decentralised structures in Dakar means that initiatives have to attempt to engage the fractured and disjointed state-level structures directly.

The dual forces of inadequate cooperation and competition within this limited cooperation therefore continue to be manifested within the project despite its detachment from the central state. At the same time, the incident described by Moussa Ndoye makes clear that individual projects cannot be considered as operating in vacuums, independent of each other. Another example of this is found in the evaluation itself: the low numbers of children found begging in the streets of Médina at the time of the evaluation should not necessarily be taken as reliable evidence, because the evaluation was conducted almost immediately following the announcement of the Removal of Children from the Streets project (Management Systems International, 2017, p. 23), which is widely recognised to have caused a brief lull in begging. Indeed, all of the children in GTFC who told evaluators they had stopped begging since the beginning of the project reportedly themselves put this down to the presidential announcement of the retrait rather than the Zero begging project. The Zero Begging project may, therefore, operate at municipal level but it is still affected by, and may still have an effect on, the policies of the central state.

9.4 Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the Réduire les Abus Contre les Talibés à Dakar, or Zero Begging, project conducted at the municipal level in Dakar. The project offers an interesting case study because, although it faced many of the same challenges as other approaches, the integration with the mayors' offices allowed for local legislation to be put in place reinforcing the national law that is so rarely implemented. Although the decrees are somewhat symbolic, given the limited power of enforcement, the limited consequences for *sëriñ daaras* who disobey, and the fact, or assumption, that the majority of the children begging in these communes come in daily from the suburbs, the acceptance of the bylaws in the local communities offers a glimmer of hope to those advocating for the regulation of *daaras*.

The project demonstrates the challenges and contradictions that arise when the global anti-trafficking discourse is the driver behind a project focused on building a relationship with the community, including those deemed to be responsible for the trafficking the project is intended to target. Similarly to the Removal of Children from the Street approach, although the project is – and indeed is required to be, in order to access funding – justified by the anti-trafficking logic, in practice *sëriñ daaras*, the alleged traffickers, are supported with material goods and money. This transition from one narrative to another can happen seamlessly, in the space of one project document, and is not a one-way affair, as the return to trafficking language in the evaluation shows. Nor is it the case that these opposing narratives should be considered as referring to different people. Rather, the project offers evidence that the status of *sëriñ daaras* as teachers or traffickers, and of *talibé* as trafficking victim or impoverished student are both fluid constructions. The description of the rehabilitation (which I use here both in the sense of renovation and of the re-education or socialisation of a criminal) of the *daara* confirms this fluidity.

Ultimately, despite the apparent limited success found in Médina in particular, the project is unable to escape many of the dynamics that constrain other projects, finding itself entangled in competition, rather than cooperation, with the national state, and uncomfortable collaboration with the same people deemed to be abusing the children intended to benefit. Moreover, the extent to which the project can be replicated in other areas remains as yet unclear, particularly given the larger scale of *talibé* begging in the areas added in the second phase. According to USAID documents, a municipal by-law in Pikine Nord banned begging in 2019 (Slifer-Mbacke *et al.*, 2020), but of course, this was before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted everything.

Conclusion

Begging is such a nagging phenomenon that I think that... there isn't even anything left to find, all the solutions have been found, now all that's needed is the political will to manage to put an end to it.

(Interview, Animata Niang Ly, DPDE. Dakar, 8th June 2018)

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I bring together the central arguments of the thesis and identify the contributions of the research to the literature related both to the case study of talibés who beg and to broader questions of development discourse. This thesis has situated itself in a field of literature that critiques the dominant narratives that persist in development discourse, using the case study of talibés in Senegal to demonstrate what happens when global discourses clash and contradict at a local and national level. I have demonstrated that the contradictions between these narratives contribute to maintaining a fragmented sector with a lack of coordination between development structures, but are also used to facilitate both the engagement of and resistance from *sëriñ daaras*.

7.2 Key contributions and arguments

This thesis contributes to the literature in two main domains. Empirically, the thesis brings a unique contribution by expanding the focus of studies about the effects of competing narratives about talibé begging (Thiam, 2014) to include the more recent projects of the Removal of Children from the Street and municipality-based zero begging approach which have not previously been covered in the academic literature. These findings, and those related to the modernisation of *daaras*, also have relevance beyond Senegal in other West African contexts.

Secondly, the thesis contributes to the literature on development discourses and problem construction, beyond the case study of the talibés. It does this by offering an example of the repercussions of multiple global discourses clashing at the local level. It

provides evidence of the power of discourse to shape development structures and interventions, creating tensions between actors with different approaches and understandings. By discussing the social construction of talibés who beg as a group for intervention, and more importantly the porous boundaries of this construction, it builds on the literature related to the complexities of defining a term such as ‘street children’ (de Moura, 2002), demonstrating how even when local terms are used, such labels can create confusion rather than clear it up. It then contributes to the broader field of study on development discourses by investigating how stakeholders can use these multiple narratives to facilitate community engagement, including in activities designed to vernacularise rights, but also to resist.

In the remainder of this section, I give the main conclusions of the thesis.

9.4.1 Problem construction and discourse

In this thesis I have built upon the work of Sara Lahti (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019), whose work connects narratives explaining why talibés beg to the global education discourse on one hand, or the anti-child trafficking discourse on another. Lahti’s (Thiam, 2014; Lahti, 2019) concept of a “dance” between these discourses, allowing actors to employ first one narrative and then another to justify their actions, or inaction, and the construction of the ‘so-called’ *sëriñ daara* that facilitates this dance, was evident throughout my interviews.

Lahti (Thiam, 2014) does not specify which genre of dance she envisions when referring to the dance between discourses, but I picture a Dashing White Sergeant, in which the interlocutor in a set of three is whirled rapidly between their two partners, or in this analogy discourses, becoming inevitably dizzy and often confused. I have honed in on this confusion to examine the grey areas that the clash of discourses creates. Following Bacchi’s (2009, 2012) guidance to look for the silences in how a problem is represented, I have drawn attention to what is left unsaid in the discourse around talibé begging. In particular, I have asked, if blame for the perpetuation of talibé begging – at least of begging deemed unacceptable – is laid at the feet of an abstract category of imposters, what does that mean for the children under their control?

Due to their longstanding connection to Qur’anic learning and almsgiving, talibés do not conform to stereotypical perceptions of street-connected children as amoral or criminal (Ennew, 2003; Diack, 2019), unlike the fàqman who are outside of adult control. My research, however, has demonstrated that there are two different constructions of ‘talibés who beg’ that are each imposed with a different set of assumptions about the lives of the children being referred to, in order to fit them into an existing narrative. Whether a child is considered to be a talibé who learns the Qur’an (and also begs), or a talibé who begs (and is assumed not to learn the Qur’an) is rarely based on the reality of his individual circumstances but rather on how his sèriñ daara, or so-called sèriñ daara is perceived. The differentiation between legitimate sèriñ daaras and traffickers posing as such is, however, equally fluid, with a blurred line between begging that is considered necessary, if not acceptable, and begging which is seen as exploitation.

While this process of category construction oversimplifies and homogenises, there are advantages of the fluidity between constructions for all stakeholders. The blurring of boundaries between authentic and inauthentic, acceptable and unacceptable, allows responsibility to be shirked by all of the adults and organisations involved. The abstract category of the ‘so-called’ sèriñ daara, as Lahti (Thiam, 2014) argued, justifies ongoing interventions while allowing blame to be deflected from the individual sèriñ daaras who engage in and benefit from development projects. My analysis of project documents in the Zero Begging approach demonstrated how quickly the problematisation of begging as trafficking can slide into language legitimising an individual sèriñ, in order to justify interventions based on support rather than repression. As shown in Chapter Seven on the modernisation approach, sèriñ daaras are able to navigate these categories to differentiate themselves from others. Even children, as others have documented can use their agency to take advantage of the blurred boundaries, either taking on the appearance of a talibé to collect money (Hatløy and Huser, 2005; Champy, 2019) or repeatedly using NGO rescue and repatriation programmes as free transport to return for seasonal trips home (Boiro and Einarsdóttir, 2020).

I have referred at several points in the thesis to the “double bind” (Timmer, 2010) facing organisations and their staff members, who find themselves trapped into reproducing the oversimplified narratives connected to global discourses, despite their own

understanding of the complexities of the local context. While Timmer (2010) referred specifically to NGOs when introducing this concept, I have found it is no less true for those who work for government structures. This leads into the next section looking at this fragmented landscape of development actors who each intervene on the ‘talibé problem’, whatever that may mean to them.

9.4.2 Cooperation and competition: fragmented development landscape

There is a Wolof proverb which says ‘*su fukk di gas, fukk di suul, pënd ay bari waaye pax du fa am*’: if ten people are digging, and ten are filling in the hole, there will be plenty of dust, but no hole. This proverb springs to mind when trying to sum up the landscape of development interventions related to the talibés and their daaras. Inaction is certainly not the story here. A great many government structures, Senegalese and international NGOs, international institutions and aid agencies are all busy conducting projects and programmes that are justified with the objective of alleviating the suffering of talibés, most often of talibés who beg. And yet, nothing much seems to change. For every project pledging to take a harsh stance against those making children beg, there is another – or, as shown in Chapters Eight and Nine, at times the same project – offering the same sërñ daaras financial and material support.

This tension relates to the narratives discussed above, demonstrating that the competing problematisations of talibé begging have real effects beyond the discursive realm. This includes shaping the structures that each seek to intervene. Some of these structures, such as the Inspection des daaras or the CNLTP are explicitly connected to one or other of the discourses, with an understanding of the problem and a preordained solution to match. This reliance on pre-existing, often externally designed interventions is typical of the development sector (Ferguson, 1994). This is true even of bodies that are set up to coordinate disparate efforts. These structures and their practices cannot exist outside of discourse (Hall, 1997 drawing on Foucault), and therefore find themselves tied to one or other – or a combination of – the discourses that exist, not least in order to be able to access funding from external bodies.

This has created a siloed sector, tying talibé begging and the daaras to different global goals and objectives (Fukuda-Parr, Yamin and Greenstein, 2014). In this landscape, no one central structure can effectively intervene directly on the issue of begging, and when

they try to do so, the result is the chaos of the Removal of Children from the Streets approach as discussed in Chapter Eight. This state-led project demonstrated how one state ministry, acting unilaterally following the instructions of the President, and potentially with the principal aim of preserving Senegal's standing with the US Department of State and international child rights committees, angered NGOs and *sëriñ daaras* alike. Although the second phase of the project was seen as an improvement, allowing the state to do just enough to maintain its TIP ranking for another year, the coordinating structure put in place to facilitate this improvement was just as quickly dissolved. While the Zero Begging project offered an alternative to the challenges of working through the central state, by relying on municipal government to implement local bylaws, albeit on a very small scale, rather than waiting for the national law to be put into action, there were clearly tensions raised when the national state tried to become involved and scale up the project.

This dynamic of competition creates a system where learnings are not shared or are ignored, experience and expertise of other actors are not taken on board, and each structure is able to blame another for the failure of interventions. I have demonstrated that tensions between NGOs and the state, and among NGOs, are often linked to disagreement about how to engage with *sëriñ daaras*, with fears that the framing of *sëriñ daaras* as traffickers in one project risks their engagement as legitimate educators in the other. This engagement is the focus of the final set of conclusions, below.

9.4.3 Engaging sëriñ daaras: collaboration and resistance

As the Senegalese state has clearly shunned any approach based on prosecuting *sëriñ daara*, after the debacle of the brief attempt at implementing the 2005 anti-trafficking law in 2010, collaborative engagement with certain – but not *all* – *sëriñ daaras* is a common thread throughout the three case studies in this thesis. Akin to the process of vernacularisation (An-Na'im, 1990; Levitt and Merry, 2009), an 'Islamic argument' is used in all cases to connect secular ideas of child rights and child protection to pre-existing ideas that can be found in the Qur'an or other religious texts. This, somewhat paradoxically, involves employing a discourse of religion to dissociate talibés' begging from Islam. In this process, individuals who speak the language of both religion and development are crucial, as shown by the many NGOs who employ imams on their staff

or as consultants, lending legitimacy and avoiding the messages of these actors being seen as external impositions.

Engagement of *sëriñ daaras* in each of the projects takes a different form. My research shows that engagement is both exclusionary and conditional. In the modernisation approach, *sëriñ daaras* have had to organise themselves into associational forms familiar to the development sector in order to gain a seat at the negotiating table; in the second phase of the Removal of Children from the Street approach *some* *sëriñ daaras* are invited to be partners, housing children removed from the *daaras* of their peers. In both cases, certain *sëriñ daaras* have gained legitimacy by making use of the narratives about imposters, differentiating themselves from the other (fraudulent) *sëriñ daaras*.

This skilful navigation of the competing discourses has also allowed those engaged in the modernisation approach to renegotiate the content of the bill of law. Here, my thesis has brought to the fore the resistance that exists within this seemingly collaborative process, building on the work of Charlier and Panait (2018). This has shown that the *sëriñ daaras* approached the process with quite different aims to those leading the project, echoing the findings of Østebø and Østebø (2014) in other contexts. I have demonstrated that despite the external appearance of collaborative engagement, tensions over the meaning and form of modernisation to be aimed for remain, as does a lack of consensus over whether modernisation should be obligatory or optional. In this context, both engaging and resisting require the performance of the ‘dance between discourses.’

7.3 Directions for future research

The interventions featured in this thesis are all ongoing. Further iterations of the Removal of Children from the Streets project may bring new findings, while there will be opportunities to delve deeper into the perceptions of modern *daaras* as that project progresses. Furthermore, my conclusions related to the construction of *talibés* who beg as a category brought to light how older boys, the grand *talibés*, disappear from the discourse except for fleeting references to them as the perpetrators of abuses against the younger boys. There is very little research that has been published about the lives and experiences of these grand *talibés*, pointing to a gap in the literature.

Alternatively, future research could comparatively explore the differences in dynamics between Senegal and other countries in West Africa where ‘the talibé problem’ is an area of public policy and NGO intervention. Each country offers a unique context for further study. Specifically, the discourse around daaras in Senegal has thus far managed to resist the turn to a focus on Islamist extremism, prominent in Nigeria in particular (Hoechner, 2014), meaning that elsewhere there is an additional layer, another alternative discourse, to be studied.

Finally, future research could explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on these projects and the talibés they are intended to benefit.

7.4 COVID-19 and beyond

It cannot be ignored that the world has changed significantly since I completed my fieldwork in August 2018. During the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020, the populations of most of the world’s cities were in a state of lockdown or curfew. In Senegal, a curfew was imposed, first in 2020 and then, in Dakar and Thies, again in early 2021. The country’s government has been praised for its response in the first year of the pandemic, with Senegal ranked second only to New Zealand in the COVID-19 Global Response Index put together by Foreign Policy (2021), including full marks for both public health directives and public communications. However, the sërriñ daaras and talibés may not agree with this positive assessment. The impact of the pandemic, and restrictions intended to curtail it, upon street-connected children around the world who survive from the money they earn or collect on the streets has been widely reported by organisations that work with these children, with hunger the main cause of concern for many children (Edmonds and Macleod, 2021), and talibés are no exception. As a Save the Children (2021) report documents, for talibés who are accustomed to begging after dark (which, for some, would put them in the category of ‘fake’ talibés), the dusk to dawn curfew (8pm – 6am) meant going hungry. As well as leaving more time to study the Qur’an, these measures brought psychological turmoil and increased violence at the hands of police for the talibés (Save the Children International, 2021), both factors reported for street-connected children in other contexts (Edmonds and Macleod, 2021).

During the early months of the pandemic in April and May 2020, many daaras in Dakar and their talibés reportedly returned to their rural areas of origin (according to updates from my research assistant, Babacar, during this time period), while others relied on ndeyu daaras to provide food. Some children were returned to their families from daaras with state support on a voluntary basis, and media reports from the time suggest that these actions were couched in the language of protection from the virus rather than the combative language of the Removal of Children from the Street (*Le Quotidien*, 2020). It remains to be seen whether the discourse around talibé begging and the interventions that are produced by and influence this discourse will be fundamentally altered by events related to the pandemic.

Despite this global upheaval, there is much that has not changed when it comes to talibés who beg. Although the modernisation project continues, with construction significantly delayed, the bill that would bring daaras into the formal system has not been passed into law, three and a half years after it was approved the FNAECS and the cabinet. There will soon come a point when the modernisation endeavour cannot progress further without this law allowing daaras to be considered as educational establishments. Meanwhile, another phase of the Removal of Children from the Streets approach, this time with support from the institutional partners in the Zero Begging project, UNODC and USAID (UNODC, 2020), may have had temporary effects as with previous short-term projects, but, like its predecessors, is unlikely to have a sustained impact alone. As for the Zero Begging project, in 2019 a third commune, Pikine Nord, issued a mayoral decree banning forced child begging (Slifer-Mbacke *et al.*, 2020). It remains to be seen whether this momentum has been sustained throughout the pandemic.

Despite this somewhat pessimistic outlook, I wish to end by confirming that the critical assessment of the projects discussed in this thesis, and the NGO-led projects mentioned, is in no way intended as a criticism of the many dedicated individuals working, within the confines of the international development system, to improve the lot of the talibés. I have no doubt that the vast majority of these motivated people have the best of intentions in their work. And yet, as Li (2005) argued, and this research confirms, good intentions are not enough to disrupt the power dynamics whereby the

opinions and values of 'experts' are imposed on populations that find themselves the targets of development interventions.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

List of participants by date and location

Date	Department	Title	Name (left blank for anonymous)	Organisation
31 October 2017	Dakar	Imam and child protection specialist		INGO
13 November 2017	Dakar	Coordinator	Mamadou Wane	PPDH
22 November 2017	Dakar	Senior programme staff		ChildFund International
28 November 2017	Dakar	2 activists		Local association/NGO
30 November 2017	Dakar	Chef de mission	Stéphanie Prat	Secours Islamique France
07 December 2017	Dakar	Project coordinator		Welcome centre
14 December 2017	Dakar	2 senior programme staff		World Vision
18 December 2017	Dakar	Programme staff member		Welcome centre
11 January 2018	Dakar	Founder and director		Welcome centre
22 January 2018	Dakar	Senior staff member		CNLTP
02 February 2018	Dakar	Founder and director	Amou Yakaar Mbaye	Ecole de la rue
02 February 2018	Dakar	Senior staff member A		Inspection des daaras
05 February 2018	Pikine	Director		Local association/NGO
15 February 2018	Pikine	Director		Local association/NGO
27 February 2018	Dakar	Founder and another volunteer		Local association/NGO
08 March 2018	Guédiawaye	Programme Manager,	Biram Ndiaye	ENDA
19 March 2018	Dakar	Director		Local association/NGO
29 March 2018	Guédiawaye	Sëriñ daara	Serigne Faye	
05 April 2018	Guédiawaye	Sëriñ daara	Ibrahima Pouye	
24 April 2018	Guédiawaye	Imam and President of COMOD	Imam Elimane Diagne	COMOD
26 April 2018	Pikine	Sëriñ daara, President of Qur'anic Teachers' Association for Pikine	Imam Kéba Gaye	
05 May 2018	Rufisque	Sëriñ daara, Secretary General of Qur'anic Teachers' Association for Rufisque	Imam Babacar Pouye	
08 May 2018	Dakar	Senior staff member B		Inspection des daaras

10 May 2018	Pikine	Sëriñ daara		
10 May 2018	Pikine	Sëriñ daara		
24 May 2018	Dakar	Executive director	Youssoupha Badji	RABEC (NGO)
25 May 2018	Dakar	Child Protection Specialist	Yves Olivier Kassoka	UNICEF
27 May 2018	Pikine	Sëriñ daara		
05 June 2018	Dakar	Directeur	Alioune Sarr	Direction de la Protection de l'Enfance
06 June 2018	Pikine	Sëriñ daara	Serigne Masamba Cissé	
06 June 2018	Pikine	Sëriñ daara		
08 June 2018	Dakar	Senior staff member	Aminata Niang Ly	DPDE
12 June 2018	Dakar	Former director Child Rights	Mamadou Kébé	
13 June 2018	Dakar	1 senior staff member and 1 junior staff member	Aminata Kébé + assistant	OHCHR
25 June 2018	Dakar	Team Leader	Hamoud Abdel Wedoud Kamil	World Bank
26 June 2018	Dakar	Operations Director	Omar Ba	GSI
27 June 2018	Pikine	President	Ibrahima Lô	CAINT
29 June 2018	Dakar	Senior staff member		UNODC
30 June 2018	Dakar	Coordinator	Mamadou Wane	PPDH
02 July 2018	Dakar	Programme coordinator	Mame Couna Thioye	RADDHO
03 July 2018	Pikine	8 ndeyu daara		
04 July 2018	Dakar	Director and Coordinator	Mamadou Mboji Diouf	PAMOD
06 July 2018	Dakar	Programme manager	Fulbert Diah	CAPE
11 July 2018	Rufisque	Director	Moussa Sow	Avenir de l'enfant (NGO)
16 July 2018	Dakar	Child Protection Manager	Ahmadou Gning	Save the Children
17 July 2018	Saint Louis	Director	Issa Kouyaté	Maison de la Gare (NGO/welcome centre)
18 July 2018	Saint Louis	Superintendant	Diadji Sarr	Taliberté (NGO/welcome centre)
18 July 2018	Saint Louis	Programme coordinator	Ousmane Ndiaye	Action Jeunesse Espoir (NGO)
19 July 2018	Saint Louis	Senior staff member		And Taxawu (NGO/welcome centre)
19 July 2018	Saint Louis	Director	Papa Sow	Indigo 2 (NGO)
20 July 2018	Saint Louis	Senior staff member		Concept (NGO)
24 July 2018	Dakar	Programme staff	Djibril Fall	CONAFE
24 July 2018	Dakar	Senior staff member		Samu Social
25 July 2018	Dakar	Secretary General	Imam Oumar Diene	ANIOS
26 July 2018	Dakar	Development practitioner	Aliou Kébé	

27 July 2018	Dakar	Project coordinator	Moussa Ndoye	Zero begging project
29 July 2018	Dakar	Project coordinator	Moussa Ndoye	Zero begging project
01 August 2018	Dakar	Assistant to the project coordinator	Souleymane (Jules) Diagne	Zero begging project
01 August 2018	Dakar	Imam and Child Protection Specialist		INGO
06 August 2018	Dakar	Senior staff member		JAMRA

APPENDIX TWO

Consent form

Cette recherche est réalisée dans le cadre du projet de doctorat de Shona Macleod, dirigée par Dr. Michael Jennings, du département des études en développement à SOAS (L'Ecole des études orientales et africaines), l'Université de Londres. Avant d'accepter de participer à ce projet de recherche, veuillez prendre le temps de comprendre les renseignements qui suivent et de poser toutes les questions que vous jugerez utiles. Si vous acceptez de participer à la recherche, veuillez soit signer ce formulaire, soit donner un consentement verbal. Veuillez également signaler si vous acceptez que cet entretien soit enregistré en audio.

Nature et objectifs du projet

La recherche a pour but d'étudier des projets des ONGs et du gouvernement qui visent à protéger des talibés au Sénégal.

Déroulement du projet

Votre participation à cette recherche consiste à répondre à des questions qui vous seront posées dans le cadre d'une entrevue individuelle.

Avantages et inconvénients

Vous ne retirerez pas de bénéfices de votre participation à ce projet de recherche. Aucune compensation ne vous sera remise pour votre participation à ce projet. Votre participation à la recherche ne devrait pas comporter d'inconvénients significatifs, si ce n'est le fait de donner de votre temps.

Participation volontaire et droit de retrait

Vous êtes libre de participer à ce projet de recherche. Vous pouvez mettre fin à votre participation à n'importe quel moment sans conséquence négative ou préjudice et sans avoir à justifier votre décision. Vous pouvez également refuser de répondre à n'importe quelle question sans avoir à justifier. Si vous décidez de mettre fin à votre participation, il est important d'en prévenir le chercheur dont les coordonnées sont incluses dans ce document. Dans ce cas, tout le matériel permettant de vous identifier, incluant l'enregistrement de l'entretien, et les données que vous aurez fournies seront alors détruits, à moins que vous n'autorisiez le chercheur à les utiliser pour la recherche, malgré votre retrait. Le cas échéant, ils seront conservés selon les mesures décrites ci-après et qui seront appliquées pour tous les participants.

Confidentialité

En recherche, les chercheurs sont tenus d'assurer la confidentialité aux participants. A cet égard, voici les mesures qui seront appliquées dans le cadre de la présente recherche:

Durant la recherche:

- Votre nom et tous ceux cités durant l'entrevue seront remplacés par un code qui sera conservé séparément du matériel de la recherche, des données et des formulaires de consentement, et n'accédés que par la chercheuse
- tout le matériel de la recherche, incluant les formulaires de consentement et les enregistrements, sera conservé dans un classeur barré

- les données en format numérique seront, pour leur part, conservées dans des fichiers encryptés dont l'accès sera protégé et auquel seule le chercheuse aura accès;

Lors de la diffusion des résultats, aucune publication ne renfermera d'information permettant de vous identifier, à moins que vous ne demandiez spécifiquement que votre vrai nom soit associé à vos réponses.

Utilisation des données

Les résultats contribueront à la thèse de doctorat de la chercheuse. Il est possible qu'ils puissent être publiés en plus mais il ne sera pas possible de vous identifier. Si vous souhaitez recevoir une copie de la thèse finale, je vous fournirai d'une copie électronique.

Loi sur la protection des données

Les informations recueillies au cours de ce projet de recherche, une fois détenues au Royaume-Uni, seront protégées par la loi britannique sur la protection des données et seront assujetties à la politique de protection des données de SOAS. Vous avez le droit de demander l'accès en vertu de la loi aux informations que SOAS contient à votre sujet. Vous trouverez plus d'informations sur vos droits en vertu de la Loi et sur la façon dont SOAS prend en charge les données personnelles sur les pages de protection des données du site Web SOAS (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/dpa/index.html>) et en contactant le responsable de la conformité de l'information à l'adresse suivante: Information Compliance Manager, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom (courrier électronique à: dataprotection@soas.ac.uk).

Coordonnées de la chercheuse

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Signatures

Je soussigné(e) _____ consens librement à participer à la recherche. Je comprends ce que cela implique et je suis d'accord avec l'utilisation des résultats décrite ci-dessus.

 Signature du participant, de la participante Date

Ou

Le/la participant(e) a donné son consentement de façon verbale

 Signature de la chercheuse Date

Je m'engage à respecter ce qui a été convenu au présent formulaire d'information et de consentement.

 Signature de la chercheuse Date

APPENDIX THREE

Sample interview questions

The questions asked in interviews varied depending on the expertise of the person being interviewed and evolved over time as my understanding grew. Most questions asked of NGO and state staff were project specific. Typical questions, following introductions and consent procedures are included below. All respondents were given the opportunity to ask questions about me or the research at the end.

For NGO staff

- Can you tell me about your work with talibés/daaras? (Leading into project-specific questions)
- Were you or your organisation involved in the government’s modernisation project, and if so, what was your role? If not, what do you think of the project?
- Were you or your organisation involved in the government’s project to remove children from the street, and if so, what was your role? If not, what do you think of the project?
- Do you work with state structures or other NGOs, and would you say there is good coordination?
- Do you refer to child rights in your projects/campaigns/work with sèriñ daaras, and if so how?
- Who do you think is responsible for talibé begging and do you think they should be prosecuted?

For staff of state structures

- Can you tell me about your work with talibés/daaras? (Leading into project-specific questions)
- How does your structure work with other structures and ministries? Would you say there is a good level of cooperation?

- How does your structure work with NGOs? Would you say there is a good level of cooperation?
- Do you refer to child rights in your projects/campaigns/work with sēriñ daaras, and if so how?
- Who do you think is responsible for talibé begging and do you think they should be prosecuted?

For sēriñ daaras

- Can you tell me about the history of your daara?
- How many talibés do you have here now, and how many spend the night?
- Have you ever worked with an NGO in your daara? If so, what did they do?
- Why did you decide to work with an NGO?
- Did you ever have any difficulties in working with NGOs?
- Are you familiar with the concept of child rights, and what does that mean to you?
- What do you think about the government's daara modernisation project, and the bill of law? Were you involved?
- What do you think about the government's removal of children from the street project?
- Who do you think is responsible for talibé begging?