Hannah
HOECHNER

Search for Knowledge and Recognition

Traditional Qur'anic Students in Kano, Nigeria

Search for Knowledge and Recognition

Traditional Qur'anic Students in Kano, Nigeria

Hannah Hoechner

OpenEdition
Books

https://books.openedition.org

ABSTRACTS

Hannah Hoechner investigates an educational practice that is widespread in Muslim West Africa. "Traditional" Qur'anic schools, whose students live with their teacher and earn their own livelihood (often through begging), have become the subject of much public concern and anxiety. Hannah Hoechner explores the experience of such Qur'anic students (pl. *almajirai*; sg. *almajiri*) in Kano State in northern Nigeria.

The *almajirai* have attracted attention in the context of increased attempts to universalise primary education and of growing concerns about child welfare. They have also been rightly or wrongly associated with Islamic radicalisation, militancy, and the periodic riots that have blighted many northern Nigerian cities. The current spate of Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria has carried such modes of thinking to the extreme. The Qur'anic schools are described as a "ticking time bomb" and a "threat" to national security.

Despite the concern and controversy sparked by the almajirai, there is a dearth of research engaging directly and in depth with the constituencies of the "traditional" Qur'anic schooling system. That the existing literature does not contribute to a better understanding of the system is a particularly severe shortcoming, given the enthusiasm with which speculative narratives are constructed in some sections of the media. Such narratives craft their own realities, as people act upon their stereotypes.

Hannah Hoechner's research aims to fill the gap in knowledge about *almajirai*. She explores the processes through which children become *almajirai* and what they learn while they are living as *almajirai*. She also engages with the (overwhelmingly negative) representations of the system and asks how young people living as *almajirai* position themselves with respect to such representations.

HANNAH HOECHNER

Hannah Hoechner is a doctoral student at the University of Oxford. She is based in the Department of International Development, from where she previously earned an MPhil. Shealso holds a BA in International Relations from the University of Dresden, Germany. Shelived and worked in Bolivia (2004/05) and Romania (2009/10) and conducted ethnographicresearch in Nigeria (2009 and 2011). Her research examines the role of education in intergenerational transfers of poverty and life chances, with a focus on young people's ownexperiences of, and views on, their education. In her DPhil, she combines a political economy perspective with ethnographic research, to understand the trajectories of traditional Qur'anic students (*almajirai*) in northern Nigeria.

Hannah
HOECHNER

Search for Knowledge and Recognition

Traditional Qur'anic Students in Kano, Nigeria

Searching for Knowledge and Recognition:

Traditional Qur'anic Students (Almajirai) in Kano, Nigeria

Hannah Hoechner

9 791092 312003

1

About the author

Hannah Hoechner is a doctoral student at the University of Oxford. She is based in the Department of International Development, from where she previously earned an MPhil. She also holds a BA in International Relations from the University of Dresden, Germany. She lived and worked in Bolivia (2004/05) and Romania (2009/10) and conducted ethnographic research in Nigeria (2009 and 2011). Her research examines the role of education in inter-generational transfers of poverty and life chances, with a focus on young people's own experiences of, and views on, their education. In her DPhil, she combines a political economy perspective with ethnographic research, to understand the trajectories of traditional Qur'anic students (*almajirai*) in northern Nigeria.

Searching for Knowledge and Recognition: Traditional Qur'anic Students (almajirai) in Kano, Nigeria is based on Hannah Hoechner's thesis work for her MPhil in Development Studies at the University of Oxford. It builds on three months of research conducted in 2009 in Kano in northern Nigeria and has been updated with insights from fieldwork she conducted for her DPhil in 2011.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Glossary

ajami	Hausa written in Arabic script (Hausa)
almajirci	discipleship, practice of living as full-time Qur'anic student/*Almajiri* (Hausa)
almajiri pl. *almajirai*	traditional full-time Qur'anic student (Hausa)
bidi'a	unlawful innovation in religious practices (Hausa)
boko	modern secular education (Hausa)
hadith	traditions of the Prophet Mohammed
ilimi school	school for advanced Islamic studies
Islamiyya school	modernised Islamic school
Izala	short for *Jama't Izalat al Bid'a Wa Iqamat as Sunna* (Society of Removal of Innovation and Reestablishment of the Sunna) (Arabic)
jama'a	(Muslim) community (Hausa)
LGA	Local Government Area
makarantar allo	traditional Qur'anic school (teaching full-time- or day-students); lit. school using wooden slate (Hausa)
mallam pl. *mallamai*	Qur'anic teacher, honorific form of address (Hausa)
purdah	female seclusion
Sabuwar Ƙofa	New Gate (one of the gates in the city wall surrounding the Old City of Kano)
sadaka	alms, charity (Hausa)
tafsiri	Qur'anic exegesis (Hausa)
tsangaya	traditional Qur'anic 'boarding' school located in remote area hosting mainly older students (Hausa)
ulama sg. *al-alim*	class of religious scholars (Arabic)

zaure/soro   entrance room to a house/compound (Hausa)

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Some people, especially now that there is boko [modern school], *if you come for Almajirci, some people think it's because you don't have food in your house; that's why you come out to beg. But it's not like that; it's because you're searching for knowledge.* (Nasiru,[1] 15 years old, 21 August 2009)

Since the proclamation of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and its commitment to universal basic education, 'education' has become firmly established within development discourse as the development intervention par excellence. It has been promoted as a human right and thus goal in itself (e.g. UNESCO n.d.), as an avenue to and expression of personal autonomy (e.g. Sen 1999), and as a means for individuals to achieve better health (e.g. Cowell 2006) and higher incomes (e.g. Tilak 1989). Often such discourse is underpinned by the tacit assumption that education is the same as formal schooling (Jeffery & Jeffery 1998). Then, to lack the latter becomes equivalent to lacking the former. According to the equation of education with schooling, children who are like Nasiru (*Almajirai*[2]) go uneducated.

The *Almajirai* are boys and young men from primary-school age to their early twenties, mostly from poor rural families, who live—beyond the state's purview and regulatory interventions—in traditional Qur'anic 'boarding' schools in Nigeria's Muslim North.[3] For part of the day they learn to read, write, and recite the Qur'an. For much of the remaining time, they engage in a plethora of different activities to secure their livelihoods. While students of rural schools mainly farm with their teachers, students in urban areas beg for

---

[1] All names have been changed to protect the identity of informants.
[2] The Hausa term *Almajiri* (pl. *Almajirai*) derives from Arabic *Al-Muhajir* (migrant). The term *Almajirci* refers to the practice of living as *Almajiri*.
[3] Many schools lack physical infrastructure, beyond a canopied forecourt where the teaching takes place. The students do not necessarily sleep, eat, and bath on the actual school 'premises' but often inhabit other spaces (see Chapter Two). Qur'anic 'boarding' schools are referred to as either *Makarantar Allo* or *Tsangaya*. *Makarantar Allo* is also used to describe non-'boarding' Qur'anic schools. *Tsangaya* refers more specifically to schools in remote areas hosting mainly older students.

food/money in the neighbourhood or on the streets, work as household helps,[4] or, when older, wash clothes, carry loads, and engage in petty trading. The *Almajiri* practice is highly gendered in that neither female students nor teachers form part of it.

The children are handed over to the teacher (*Mallam*), who receives no salary but lives off the support given by the local community, the contributions of his students, and supplementary income-generating activities. Most teachers are not formally certified but products of the *Almajiri* system themselves. While many students return home at least once a year (for the major holidays or to help their parents farm), others do not see their parents for years. Some teachers migrate with their schools following seasonal agricultural patterns. Formerly to be found mainly in remote rural locales, today full-time traditional Qur'anic students increasingly populate the urban centres of the region—a development that has been accompanied by a steep decline in respect for the system.

Enrolment in Qur'anic schools all over Nigeria is estimated to exceed 9.5 million, with more than 8.5 million in the northern part of the country (UBEC 2010).[5] The most reliable estimate for Kano suggests that some 300,000 boys and young men—more than 12.5% of all 6–21 year-olds—live as *Almajirai* in that state (MoE 2008). Qur'anic 'boarding' schools exist in both Nigeria and most of Muslim West Africa.

Modern/secular or Islamic subjects other than the Qur'an do not form part of the *Almajirai*'s curriculum. The conclusion that they are therefore 'uneducated', however, stands in stark contrast to their self-conception. Nasiru, for example, considers himself to be somebody "searching for knowledge".

Anthropologists and sociologists have pinpointed the epistemological limitations of equating education with schooling. They argue that education occurs in multiple spaces and pursues various goals rather than preparing merely for future employment (e.g. Dore 1976; Levinson et al. 1996). According to Levinson and Holland, all societies and also the microcultures within them provide "some kind of training and some set of criteria by which members can be identified as more, or less, knowledgeable" (1996: 2). A failure to recognise that notions of the 'educated person' vary—not only across cultures and time but also within

---

[4] In Northern Nigerian Hausa society, where many women practice *purdah* (seclusion) and are thus largely confined to their compounds, children make the daily productive activities of the household possible, as they are sent to buy foodstuffs, fetch water, or run errands (Schildkrout 1978/2002: 349; Robson 2004). Young *Almajirai* are often employed for such tasks.

[5] How many of these students are *Almajirai* is, however, subject to speculation, as the existing statistics do not differentiate between day-students (who stay with their parents, potentially attend modern school in addition to Qur'anic school, and include females) and 'boarding' students.

societies along lines of class, religion, etc.—reduces our comprehension of people's educational choices and the politics involved in education.

Firstly, it precludes a real understanding of what motivates the decisions families make about their children's education, particularly if they resist endeavours to universalise basic education. The knowledge and skills defining the 'educated' person in a specific context may, for instance, not be transmitted adequately through formal schooling. Importantly, alternative child-rearing practices may equally be sustained by explicitly *educational* aspirations. A narrow vision of education as formal schooling may give rise and even credibility to discourses that portray those opting for non-mainstream ways of bringing up their children as in a state of 'crisis', without paying much attention to either the educational aspirations sustaining such practices or the processes through which such aspirations are formed.

Secondly, a failure to recognise that there is no universally valid, ideal, 'educated person' obscures the political dimension of education. Socialising the young into a particular educational ideal may serve the interests of certain powerful groups. Yet, educational institutions have been shown to be "a contradictory resource for those who would fit the young to a particular vision of society" (*ibid*. 1) as within them even hegemonic definitions of the 'knowledgeable person' can be challenged. Also, the pursuit of certain educational practices may have unintended side-effects. For instance, inadvertently exposing students to new streams of thought may trigger a re-negotiation of the ideal 'educated person'.

This thesis looks at the *Almajiri* system through the lens of the anthropology and sociology of education, enquiring how certain educational ideals and 'educated persons' are culturally produced. Doing so, I contend, helps to answer two important questions that have so far been answered only somewhat partially: why families opt for *Almajirci* and what the *Almajirai* learn through their enrolment in the system.

As regards the first question, in the Nigerian context the increased presence of destitute-looking *Almajirai* in the towns and cities of the region has been discussed, in both public and academic discourse, as an expression of crisis. On a societal level, it has been attributed to poverty and dry-season-induced food shortages in rural areas, without much attention being paid to the ways in which those opting for *Almajirci* make sense of the constraints they are subjected to. On a personal level, parents who send their children on *Almajirci* have been criticised as ignorant or neglectful. With little regard to the avowedly educational purposes of their sojourns in the urban centres, the *Almajirai* have been pigeonholed as "street children"

(CONSS n.d.) and quasi-orphans (see COCFOCAN n.d.), "forsaken by their parents" (Weekly Trust, 1 January 2010), and "totally neglected" (VOA News, 28 November 2007).

As regards the second question, traditional Qur'anic 'boarding' schools, particularly those in urban areas, have become an accessible scapegoat in Nigeria on which inter-religious hatred and Muslim militancy can be blamed.[6] Despite the general recognition, at least within anthropology, that educational institutions can become sites of intense 'identity politics', where students contest their parents' and teachers' views of what is good and just (e.g. Skinner & Holland 1996), surprisingly few researchers have explored the views of children and youth enrolled as *Almajirai*. Nevertheless, many—academics included—unhesitatingly put forward conjectures about what they think the *Almajirai* learn in terms of behaviours and values. Their deprived living conditions and the values presumably taught at traditional Qur'anic 'boarding' schools have been used to explain—and predict—violent and criminal conduct. The *Almajirai* have been described as "a social time bomb" (Daily Trust, 21 November 2009) and accused of being "experts in political rampage, looting of houses and shops, burning of properties, [and] slaughtering of innocent souls" (The Vanguard, 16 December 2002, in Adamu n.d.). They have been said to "[lack] the practical skills required … to contribute meaningfully to modern society, or even to earn a livelihood" and to therefore become "burdens" on society (Sahara Reporters, 25 September 2009).

On an empirical level, it is important to address the questions of why families opt for *Almajirci* and what the *Almajirai* learn through their enrolment, before the popular answers provided so far (which, I suggest, are largely based on speculation rather than empirical evidence) craft new realities. Firstly, as overly negative representations trigger resistance, particularly amongst the students, they become a factor in the very process of "cultural production of educated persons" (Levinson & Holland 1996) taking place within the *Almajiri* system. Secondly, framing the *Almajiri* system as "exploitation" (e.g. Daily Trust 21 November 2009) may give rise—and legitimacy—to certain government policies not necessarily in the interest of the *Almajirai*. At the time of my research, for instance, a law designed to outlaw begging by children was in its second reading in the Nigerian parliament.[7]

While modern schools have been the focus of in-depth studies paying due attention to the politics involved in education (e.g. Poluha 2004; Jeffrey 2005; Ball 2006; Froerer 2007), very

---

[6] Traditional Qur'anic 'boarding' schools are by far not the only institutions imparting religious knowledge in Northern Nigeria (see below), but they are the ones sparking most controversy.
[7] Dr Galadanchi, 7 September 2009

little is known about the 'cultural production' (Willis 1977) taking place within Islamic education systems. This ignorance is paradoxically increased by anxieties about them as putative centres of Islamic terrorism, or, in the West African context, Muslim militancy. Despite an increase in in-depth studies of Islamic education systems (e.g. Boyle 2004; Bano 2007), still very little is known about the views of children and youth enrolled in or graduated from these. On a practical level, this thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap.

On a theoretical level, the answers I provide in this thesis may help us understand the role educational institutions play in inter-generational transfers of poverty and life chances. The mechanisms behind such transfers are highly relevant for development studies, and 'education' occupies a central place within the current paradigm as a supposed asset for people to improve their lives. Yet, the most prominent approach offered within the discipline with respect to education—human capital theory—fails to capture adequately the complexity of the processes involved. Even though some authors have transcended narrow visions of education as formal schooling (e.g. Carneiro & Heckman 2003), the insights of this body of literature are limited as both 'inputs' (what counts as education) and 'outputs' (what counts as achievement—mainly enhanced income opportunities) are narrowly defined and linked in a mechanistic way (Johnston 1985). While livelihood frameworks (e.g. Chambers & Conway 1992; Chambers 1995; Scoones 1998, 2009) have recognised the importance not only of human but also of other forms of capital for people to lead successful lives, they do not explore the process through which such capital is transferred between generations.

I propose an analytical framework that integrates a broad view regarding both educational 'inputs' and 'outputs' with an analysis of wider power structures and students' opportunities to exercise agency within them. My research thus contributes to a growing body of literature on inter-generational transfers of poverty, spearheaded by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (Hulme et al. 2001; Yacub 2002; Moore 2005; Moncrieffe 2009), which sets out to study not only the implications of the diverse forms of capital for the transfer of poverty but also the role of larger power structures and people's power to exercise agency within these (Bird 2007: 35).

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The second half of this introduction provides some background information and clarifications and reviews the literature on Qur'anic 'boarding' schools in West Africa. I then move on to elaborate the methodology used to conduct the ethnographic and child/youth-

focussed study of *Almajirai* in Kano State, Nigeria, on which this thesis builds (Chapter Two). In the third chapter I develop the analytical framework of this work. I propose to explore the *Almajiri* system in terms of the "cultural production of educated persons" (Levinson & Holland 1996), combining this anthropological approach with Bourdieu's field theory (1986/2004) and de Certeau's conceptualisation of resistance (1984). In Chapter Four I investigate the context of the current formation of the *Almajiri* system. The integration of the *Almajirai* into the local urban economy and popular discourses that frame the *Almajiri* system in terms of crisis will receive particular attention, as these are important factors in the 'cultural productions' addressed in the following chapters.

In Chapters Five and Six I explore why families opt for *Almajirci*. I first address the salient themes of the crisis rhetoric presented in Chapter Four, challenging the assumption that *Almajirci* can be understood merely in terms of poverty, parental neglect, and ignorance. I offer an alternative account of how children become *Almajirai*, paying particular attention to the mechanisms that hold teachers accountable (Chapter Five). In Chapter Six I then explore how socio-economic deprivation meshes with context-specific constructions of childhood, high religiousness, and particular conceptions of an accomplished social life to produce the educational ideal sustaining the practice. I argue that the *Almajiri* system is the result of the "dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity" (*ibid*. xiv/xv) of economically marginalised families struggling to grapple with structural constraints, rather than a direct product of poverty or parental neglect and ignorance.

Finally, Chapter Seven investigates what 'educated persons' the system actually produces. I claim that owing to the very set-up of the *Almajiri* system, which emphasises learning by 'doing' and 'being' rather than merely by 'being taught', what the *Almajirai* learn is the product of both intentional instruction and their 'tactical creativity' (*ibid*.) in engaging with their social environment. This defies mechanistic equations and opens up room for agency and uncertainty. While their accumulation of spiritual capital is mainly the result of intentional instruction, the *Almajirai* acquire moral/social capital—knowledge of how to be 'well-behaved'—particularly as a consequence of their 'tactics' in dealing with disapproval and rejection. What the *Almajirai* learn in terms of economic capital (some basic 'survival skills' in Kano's urban economy) and in terms of aspirations for such capital (the wish to acquire modern education)—they learn outside school. The Conclusion draws together the arguments made and suggests directions for further enquiry.

1.3 Context of the research

The geographical setting: Nigeria's population, estimated at more than 150 million, is split relatively equally between Christians and Muslims (UN 2008; Pew Forum n.d.). While Muslims live in all parts of the country, their concentration is highest in the northern states. According to the census of 2006, Kano State is the most populous state in Nigeria with over nine million inhabitants, most of whom are Hausa Muslims. The city of Kano, an important commercial hub and centre of Islamic learning, is Nigeria's second-largest city after Lagos, with more than 3.6 million inhabitants. Three-quarters of Kano State's population live in rural areas, most of them depending on small-holding, rain-fed subsistence agriculture for their livelihood. Rural-to-urban migration, both seasonal and permanent, is a frequent strategy to seize employment opportunities in the manufacturing and service sectors of Kano and to escape hardship in the countryside (DFID n.d.).

The landscape of religious education: Over 80% of all children and youth aged 6–21 years in Kano State are estimated to attend some form of Islamic education, either in addition to attendance in a secular school or as their only educational experience (MoE 2008). Qur'anic 'boarding' schools exist alongside Qur'anic day-schools following largely the same curriculum as the 'boarding' schools and *ilimi* schools for senior students eager to further their knowledge. Modernised *Islamiyya* schools teach not only the Qur'an but also other Islamic and in some instances modern/secular subjects. In contrast to the traditional schools, where students and teachers sit on prayer mats on the floor writing the Qur'an with quill and ink on wooden slates, the *Islamiyya* schools use modern teaching materials. Some *Islamiyya* and Qur'anic day-schools have registered with the state government and receive support from it.

Children, youth, and young people: I argue in this work that 'children' and 'youth' (0–14 and 15–24 year-olds respectively, according to UN definitions) are not merely biological categories, but situational concepts that vary across time, space, cultures, social groups, and other markers of difference (see James & Prout 1997). Hausa society is broadly divided into the young (*yara*) and the elders (*dattijai*), with the very old and very young falling outside these categories. A boy's transition into the category of *yara* is marked by his circumcision (carried out at around age seven), after which he is considered old enough to be sent away

14

from home. Adulthood begins for both women and men with their first 'dependant'—for women their first child, for men their first wife (Last 2000: 366).

There is a further stage related to puberty, when gender norms governing adult behaviour begin to apply fully. Whereas girls are supposed to stay predominantly at home from the onset of puberty, boys decide for themselves towards the end of puberty that they are too old to enter a house other than their own, thereby renouncing forms of employment that involve entering houses.

All the young people identifying as *Almajirai* that I engaged with during my research fell into the category of *yara*. Furthermore, they all positioned themselves unambiguously as either 'older' or 'younger' students, depending on whether they considered adult gender norms fully applicable to themselves. Many of them did not know their exact biological age, which complicates the application of strictly age-based categories. In this work, I therefore use the term 'children' or 'younger students' to refer to those who considered adult gender norms not yet fully applicable to themselves, and the terms 'youth' or 'older students' to refer to those who considered them fully applicable. I use the term 'young people' to refer to both categories simultaneously. I also use the term 'children' when I refer to parents' statements about their offspring.

1.4 Literature review

A number of sociologists and anthropologists have investigated rural-based Qur'anic 'boarding' schools in West Africa (Wilks 1968; Cruise O'Brien 1971; Kaba 1976; Sanankoua 1985), arguing that the system is based on the exchange of students' farm labour for 'cultural capital' (Saul 1984; Bledsoe & Robey 1986), or on cultural and religious norms, including specific ideas about the proper upbringing of children (Sanneh 1975; D'Hondt & Vandewiele 1984; Last 2000; van Santen 2001). The extent of the continuity between this rural tradition and the more recent phenomenon of urban-based schools is, however, subject to debate. Most authors, including those writing about Nigeria, attribute the increased presence of destitute-looking, begging religious scholars in the towns and cities of the region to structural factors, such as dry-season-induced food shortages (Lubeck 1985; Winters 1987; Reichmuth 1989; Last 1993; Khalid 1997) and mounting economic pressures on scarce resources, particularly in rural areas, exacerbated by structural adjustment and rapid population growth (Ojanuga

1990; Hunt 1993; Killen & Nigisti 1995). These are seen to undermine both the ability of the Sahelian peasant household to provide adequately for the young and the capacity of the community to offer support (Winters 1987; Last 1993; Mohammed 2001; Sule-Kano 2008; Bambale n. d.). Increased individualism and growing mistrust[8] have also been amongst the reasons put forward to explain dwindling support structures (Lubeck 1985; Winters 1987).

Few authors explore in any depth the role of cultural values in sustaining the system or the attempts of sending communities to deal with the constraints they are subjected to. Those who do explore these factors perceive much continuity between rural and urban practice and explain the children's physical deprivation in the urban schools as a consciously chosen child-rearing strategy aimed at their moral and spiritual maturation and the acquisition of life skills (Last 2000; Perry 2004).

For the Nigerian context, the overwhelming consensus is that Qur'anic 'boarding' schools were highly revered institutions of religious learning throughout the past (Paden 1973; Fafunwa 1974; Last 1993; Khalid 1997; Shehu 2004; CDRT 2005; Sule-Kano 2008). The so-called Maitatsine riots in Kano in the 1980s mark a break in writing about them. During the riots, members of an Islamic sect, condemning the corruption of the existing elites and particularly the enjoyment of Western consumer goods (Lubeck 1985: 370), rose against the police, resulting in hundreds of deaths. The insurgents were believed to be mainly peripatetic Qur'anic 'boarding' students. Since then, several authors have been arguing that the *Almajiri* system is capable of producing extremists ready to commit atrocities (Lubeck 1985; Isichei 1987; Winters 1987), or even international terrorists (Awofeso et al. 2003). More frequently, *Almajirai* have been linked to inter-religious violence and petty delinquency and street crime (e.g. Mohammed 2001; Casey 2007, 2008; Bambale n.d.).

Most authors converge on the position that the gradual erosion of the moral and economic bases of their livelihoods, owing to the unequal effects of capitalism and the introduction of modern education upsetting traditional knowledge economies, caused the *Almajirai*'s violent potential (Lubeck 1985; Isichei 1987; Winters 1987; Watts 1996; Awofeso 2003; Sule-Kano 2008). Winters (though not going into any more depth) claims that militancy arises from the "values taught at [traditional] Koranic schools, values which stress unity between Muslims, alms-giving and communal living" and which are incompatible with lifestyles perceived or constructed as un-Islamic (Winters 1987: 183).

---

[8] More and more people are reluctant to take *Almajirai* into their household or to shelter them in their entrance halls (*zaure/soro*), Lubeck argues (1985: 380).

Several authors assert, however, that blaming crime and violence on the *Almajirai* alone simplifies matters by obscuring their origin in the local political economy. Hiskett claims that most Maitatsine insurgents were not Qur'anic students but seasonal economic migrants (1987: 215). Adamu attributes responsibility for many of the crimes imputed to the *Almajirai* to *yan daba*, "street corner 'dudes'", or vigilantes, with little or no schooling and "not bothering to attend Qur'anic schools" (n.d.: 3-4). His analysis is supported by Casey, who argues that through "'*yan daba* caretaking" *Almajirai* are drawn towards the lifestyle of the former (2007: 112). Unfortunately, Casey does not pursue her analysis of these processes any further. Thus, the conditions under which *Almajirai* may come to learn values and behaviours considered to be problematic remain unexplored.

More recently the *Almajirai* have been approached from a social policy angle, in the context of increasing attempts to achieve universal primary education (Bano 2008a, 2008b; USAID 2009) and heightened anxieties about the well-being of children considered to be "trafficked" (Olujuwon 2008) or otherwise in need of support (Arewa House 1997; Okoye & Yau 1999; Kurfi 2000; NCWD 2001; Onolemhemhen & Pugh 2002; Usman 2008). However, these studies have narrow research agendas and rarely include the perspectives of children.[9]

In conclusion, the existing literature enables only an incomplete understanding of the *Almajiri* system. Whereas many authors outline clearly the structural factors supporting it, hardly anyone explores how those opting for *Almajirci* deal with these factors and how they translate them into educational strategies. Most importantly, the views of the main actors of the system—the students—are virtually absent in the literature, despite anxieties about the values and attitudes they presumably learn. That the existing literature does not contribute to a better understanding of the processes through which children become *Almajirai* and through which they learn certain behaviours and attitudes considered problematic is a particularly severe shortcoming, given the enthusiasm with which speculative narratives are constructed in some media (see Chapter Four).

---

[9] The researchers of the National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute, for instance, interviewing *Almajirai* about their income-generating activities, take the fact that 97.2% of the children were either begging or working to mean that the system is "very much unwholesome" (NCWD 2001: 115), without asking how the children experience their activities.

2 Methodology

2.1 Epistemological and methodological framework

In this thesis I argue that 'reality' is not an objective fact to be 'discovered' by the researcher but inter-subjectively constructed by those participating in it (see Geertz 1973). From such an epistemological viewpoint, the *Almajiri* phenomenon cannot be understood unless approached from the perspective of those who are centrally involved in the construction, contestation, and transformation of its meaning—the students themselves. This epistemological position informed my research methodology. I chose an approach that combines semi-structured interviews with ethnographic and participatory methods, in order to gain as deep and contextualised an understanding as possible of the *Almajirai*'s life-worlds and to show respect to the young people by recognising them as agents and experts in their own lives (Sime 2008: 63-64). Finally, I reasoned that an in-depth small-scale study could well shed light on bigger issues as experienced locally.

In the following, I first give a summary of the data this thesis draws on and describe the context in which they were collected. I then review the methods I used, explaining my reasons for choosing them and discussing their limitations. Finally, I describe the two schools which formed the focus of my research and my forms of interaction with the students there, to convey a clearer picture of my data. I interject reflections on my own positionality within the research and on the ethical challenges that arose.

2.2 Data

This thesis builds on 11 weeks of fieldwork carried out in Kano State between July and September 2009. My work draws on data from the wider literature, from fieldwork observations, and from semi-structured interviews with 13 important opinion holders (NGO spokespersons, government officials, and university staff), 6 teachers of Qur'anic 'boarding' schools in both rural and urban areas, and with 14 fathers whose sons live as *Almajirai*. I spoke only to fathers, as they are perceived to be the main decision-takers behind the *Almajiri*

system and because to explore the views of mothers too would have required a more long-term engagement in the respective rural communities to build up trust.

Most importantly, this thesis relies on repeated semi-structured interviews, group conversations, and casual interactions with 35 *Almajirai* in two schools I worked with over an extended period of time. I also draw on translated and transcribed 'radio interviews' the young people conducted amongst each other with my tape recorder and on discussions of the photographs they took with disposable cameras. To ensure that I had captured the full range of *Almajiri* experiences I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 *Almajirai* from other schools, in particular with children begging for alms on the street.

For most of my conversations with students, teachers, and parents, I had to rely on a translator, as they took place in Hausa. After I had made initial contacts with schools through the Kano Ministry of Education, with which my research was associated, I worked with a masters' student, herself Igala and Christian, but fluent in Hausa as she had grown up in Kano. Since access had already been negotiated, her 'otherness' was an asset rather than a liability, as in her contacts with the students she did not have to respect gender norms to the same extent as a young Muslim woman would have had to. To minimise the inevitable distortions involved in translation, I tape-recorded all conversations and translated and transcribed them word for word together with my research assistant so that I could enquire about potential ambiguities. I analysed my data through repeated reading of transcripts and field-notes, identifying salient themes and highlighting supporting data.

2.3 Location of the research

My choice of Kano was driven in part by practical considerations, as it enabled me to draw on the institutional support and the contacts of the Kano Ministry of Education. Its long tradition of and sustained high demand for religious education also make Kano a particularly interesting research site. Moreover, the quality of public schools in Kano—as in most of Nigeria's northern states—is low (MoE 2008), which partly accounts for the choice of *Almajirci* as an educational strategy. Kano is considered to be host to the largest number of *Almajirai* of all northern Nigerian states (Daily Trust, 21 November 2010).

I conducted my research in an urban setting (metropolitan Kano), as it is urban *Almajirai* that have attracted most controversy and anxiety. To gain in-depth insights while simultaneously getting a feeling for how different circumstances may shape the *Almajirai*'s

experiences differently, I focussed my research on two schools, the choice of which was mainly determined by the conditions of access (see below). To capture the experience of children begging on the street for money, I approached *Almajirai* at two notorious 'begging-spots' in Kano: a bakery frequented mainly by expatriates and well-to-do Nigerians (See Sweet Bakery) and a motor park (Mallam Ƙato).

It was impossible for me to 'match' children and parents, as teachers, fearing for their reputation, were reluctant to put me in contact with their students' parents. I thus explored the conditions and motivations on the 'sending side' by visiting villages and interviewing fathers whose sons live as *Almajirai*, in Ƙunchi, a Local Government Area (LGA) in the northwest of Kano State. Ƙunchi, largely dependent on agriculture, is one of the poorest LGAs in Kano State whose public schools are severely underfunded, indicating their poor quality even relative to the—already low—Kano average (MoE 2008). All the fathers I spoke to were farmers, and some of them were Qur'anic teachers in addition.

2.4 Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork, participant and non-participant observation, and semi-structured interviews

I chose to make both participant and non-participant observation a central part of my methodology, to gain insights into the daily circumstances of the *Almajirai*'s lives, to understand their embodied practices (e.g. the habitual movements involved in learning Qur'anic recitation) and attitudes they may not be able to express verbally, and, most importantly, to build up the trust necessary to make research with young people possible. Yet, to be admitted as a participant observer posed challenges. Given the negative image of *Almajirci* in much public discourse, insiders are often suspicious towards outside inquirers—particularly if these are white, modern-educated, non-Muslim, and female, like me. Accordingly, access was one of the main challenges in my research, as teachers functioned as powerful gatekeepers to the children entrusted to them.

As Qur'anic education is highly gendered and several activities and spaces (e.g. mosques where the teaching often takes place) are considered inappropriate for women, I could not easily participate in the children's everyday activities, even when teachers were open towards my research. Also, to visit schools on a regular basis to build up trust and observe daily routines proved difficult. Teachers feared that my continued presence might arouse suspicion

in the neighbourhood. Activities that would have given me a reason to spend time in the schools were difficult to come up with. Despite these hurdles, I was able to gain valuable insights into and ethnographic data on the functioning of the two schools that became the focus of my study (see below).

As the nature of my research required rich, contextually-situated data, I chose semi-structured interviews with children, youth, and adults to complement ethnographic and participatory methods, which permitted flexibility in conducting interviews, remaining open to unexpected turns while following a set of clearly laid-down research interests.

Participatory methods

'Participatory' research methods have become fashionable, particularly in research with children, as a tool by which power differentials between researcher and researched can potentially be overcome (see Chambers 1997). Yet, it has been pointed out that it is not enough to pick a method from the 'participatory menu'. In order for research to be 'truly participatory' and a positive experience for all parties involved, the methods used have to be constantly reviewed and adjusted, and ideally children are involved not only in the creation of data but also in its interpretation and in the formulation of research goals (e.g. Clark & Moss 2001; Cooke & Kothari 2001).

In order to come as close as possible to this ideal, given the temporal and logistical constraints on my research, I used a flexible, multi-method approach that helped me sustain the young people's interest in the research and gave me room to adjust to their preferred forms of communication so as to reduce inevitable power differentials (Barker & Weller 2003). However, although I recognised that power imbalances are particularly pronounced at the analysis stage (e.g. Hastrup et al. 1990), it was not possible for me to involve my research participants in the interpretation of data and representation of the researched 'realities'. Writing as an agnostic adult mainly about children whose actions and positions, in addition, were often underpinned by religious beliefs, I tried my best to tread a difficult path between taking seriously what my research participants told me and recognising how cultural and socio-economic power relations constrained the ways in which they could imagine themselves and conceive of the world around them.

Photography: I chose to use photography in my research with the *Almajirai,* as the use of cameras has been shown to be a potentially enabling tool for young people with poor oral/written literacy (Morrow 2001; Young & Barrett 2001a; Punch 2002; Einarsdottir 2005).

Given the spatial constraints I was subjected to—I could neither follow the children to their income-generating activities nor participate in lessons taking place inside the mosque—the pictures the young people took allowed me to gain access to spheres of their lives that would otherwise have eluded me. In addition, the photographs were a good starting point for conversations about their ideas of moral behaviour and also educational ideals, as I had asked them to take pictures of what they thought was good/bad behaviour and treatment of children. Finally and importantly, the young people enjoyed taking pictures.

The older students used the cameras largely at their own discretion, snapping mainly their friends and workplaces. While their pictures therefore provided less of an access point for conversations about notions of morality, they were useful to talk about daily activities and future plans. Also, as the young people valued the opportunity to get pictures of themselves and their friends, they felt sufficiently compensated for the time they spent with me.

Group conversations: While many researchers have found group discussions to be a useful means to put children at ease who might feel uncomfortable speaking alone with an adult (e.g. Boyden & Ennew 1997; Ennew & Plateau 2004), in the context of my research this was only partially true. While the young people felt more at ease in the presence of a peer, they were reluctant to voice their opinions in bigger groups. By virtue of seniority, the eldest in the group would put forward his view, after which nobody ventured a contradiction (cf. Gabhainn & Sixsmith 2006). Also, a strict code of conduct seemed to restrict them in what they could say in bigger groups, for they feared being censured as immoral by their peers.

Radio interviews: As I used to tape-record our conversations and to demonstrate how the recorder worked when asking the children for their consent, they started taking pleasure in recording and re-playing their own voices. Eventually, they started playing 'radio', and when I encouraged them to 'broadcast' a radio programme about *Almajirai*'s views on their education system, they began enthusiastically interviewing each other, delivering very eloquent and passionate 'radio speeches' and even visiting other schools to interview the students there. Being able to take the recorder with them to conduct their interviews outside the view of adults put them at ease, and the playful form encouraged otherwise timid children to speak out (see Young & Barrett 2001b; Veale 2005; Frankel 2007).

While their recordings provided exciting data and valuable insights into some of the boys' most pressing concerns, the recordings raised a number of practical and ethical issues.

It was, for instance, sometimes difficult to tell whether the students were talking about the real-life situation in their school, or, following the logic of the play, 'improvising'? Through casual conversation it was possible to clarify some of these issues. In some instances, the children—absorbed in the dynamics of their play—clearly forgot that their recordings formed part of my research or even that I would listen to them (and translate and transcribe them). It is therefore difficult to decide whether the children's consent to participate in my research covers all these recordings.

2.5   The two case study schools

Both schools were residential (as opposed to peripatetic) and located in comparatively wealthy neighbourhoods inside the Old City, which are almost entirely Muslim Hausa. The teachers in both schools were relatively liberal, evidenced by the fact that they consented to my research and sent their own children to modern school. They did not rely exclusively on their students' contributions for their livelihood but had additional sources of income. If the students contributed financially, their payments were small and voluntary. Most younger students had secured employment—paid in cash—as household helps in the neighbourhood, and only a few had begging (mostly for food at houses) as the sole source of income. Older students in both schools engaged in the petty economy. As I conducted my research during the rainy season, a significant number of students had returned home to farm. The conditions described here may set the experiences of the *Almajirai* I conducted my research with apart from those of other *Almajirai*.[10] Further research should therefore complement this work.

Mallam Hamza's school

Mallam Hamza's school is situated in a lively quarter close to the Emir's palace inside the Old City. In addition to the approximately 60 students enrolled as 'boarding' *Almajirai*, approximately 120 day-students come to the school for Qur'anic lessons. The youngest *Almajiri* is eight years old while the oldest are in their late twenties. The majority of students come from either Gezawa or Kabo LGAs (both in Kano State). The school has a proper

---

[10] Students of peripatetic or rural schools and students under more pressure to contribute financially to their teacher's livelihood, or without access to employment paid in cash—and thus likely to beg on the street for money—may, for instance, have fairly different experiences.

physical structure, with washing facilities and several classrooms in which the *Almajirai* sleep.

Fourteen teachers altogether work at the school, though not all of them teach the *Almajirai*. None of them lives on the school premises, but the head-teacher, who took the school over from his father, lives close by. Beyond the students' contributions and other donations, all teachers have additional sources of income from either farmland or further teaching engagements.

To win the trust of the younger students in particular was a challenge in this school, as it was difficult to find a reason for casually spending time with them. The teachers did not want me to teach English, as they feared their students' parents might oppose this. I eventually began teaching the students to make bracelets, but gave this up after a while as spending time with me conflicted with their responsibilities to earn income. Also, in many instances, the younger students withdrew as soon as older students entered our interactions. As a consequence of these constraints, I focussed mainly on the older students with whom familiarity was less of an issue.

I relied primarily on the use of disposable cameras. The conversations with the older students about the pictures they had snapped often covered a broad range of topics, not necessarily related to the photographs, and on several occasions evolved into an informal exchange which other students joined. While the ease with which other students participated was fruitful on the one hand, it proved problematic with respect to the younger *Almajirai*. The classrooms in which our conversations took place did not provide a truly private space, as other students and also teachers stopped to watch and listen and it was difficult to insist on privacy without arousing suspicion. Consequently, the children were reluctant to speak out, and I was careful not to make them talk about topics that might have put them at risk.

As the teaching and studying takes place inside the classrooms, I could observe it on the occasions that I visited the schools either to teach making bracelets or for group conversations with the students.

Mallam Gali's school

The conditions for research regarding Mallam Gali's school, located just inside the Old City wall near *Sabuwar Kofa* (New Gate), were probably as favourable as they could get, as I was living right next to the *Mallam*. Even though the teaching and most of the studying took place in the nearby mosque, which I could not enter, there were plenty of opportunities for informal interaction owing to the physical proximity.

Mallam Gali teaches only *Almajirai* (and his own children). The youngest of the approximately 25 *Almajirai* is ten years old, while the eldest are in their early twenties. Mallam Gali does not accept students younger than around ten years, arguing they are too young to fend for themselves and thus a liability. The majority of students come from either Dambatta (Kano State) or Magaria (Niger Republic). Mallam Gali is the main teacher (of two) and a former student of the previous teacher. Like his predecessor, he became Imam in the nearby mosque. He earns his income mainly from commissioned prayers, Qur'an recitations, and other spiritual services.

The school does not have its own buildings but 'cohabits' other spaces. The younger students sleep in the *zaure/soro* (entrance room) of their teacher's house, or, if the weather is dry, on a patch of concrete in front of it. While the older students also used to sleep there during the dry season, for the rainy season they had moved to the nearby mosque. Some of the students sleep in the *zaure/soro* of neighbours' houses or of the houses where they work. There is an ablution space in the mosque, but owing to high demand many students have to rely on rubbish dumps and public baths for personal hygiene.

Both the younger students and their *Mallam* often sat on a little bench in front of the door, where I could join them exchanging greetings or practising my Hausa. I could also invite the children into our courtyard for private conversations and playing (which would have been inappropriate for me in public). The older students, too old to enter my or even their teacher's house without an explicit invitation, mainly stayed clear of these spaces. This made interactions with them more difficult. Yet, it improved my rapport with the younger students, as older students did not 'take over' our interactions. Thus, while in Mallam Hamza's school older students were more accessible than younger ones, in Mallam Gali's school the reverse was the case, which balanced my sample.

The house I lived in had been rented by Europeans for over 20 years by the time I moved in. The students and their teacher were therefore well familiar with foreigners and trusted me easily. One of the students worked in the house, which allowed us to develop quite a close relationship. As I was aware that the dependence relationship associated with his employment might be ethically problematic, I was careful to always stress he could opt out of the research at any time. Yet, I felt he sincerely valued the opportunity to make his opinion heard.

I began my research with photography and group conversations about the pictures taken and involved both younger and older students in this. Particularly the younger students found the research entertaining, volunteered for further research activities, and eventually conducted numerous interviews with my tape-recorder. Owing to the physical proximity, I

could complement the participatory material with informal chats and gain quite deep insights into the children's daily routines.

3 Theorising education

3.1 Introduction

I propose an analytical framework that draws mainly on the anthropology and sociology of education, to answer the two questions: why families opt for *Almajirci* and what the *Almajirai* learn while enrolled. Levinson and Holland (1996) offer an enabling conceptual framework for analysing why families make certain educational choices, what young people learn through these, and what implications their learning may have for the continuation or disruption of existing cultural and socio-economic power structures. They suggest looking at education in terms of a 'cultural production of the educated person'. I take this suggestion up and combine it with 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu in Wacquant 1989: 50) offered by the two social theorists, Bourdieu and de Certeau.

3.2 The cultural production of the educated person

The first question this thesis is grappling with is this: why do families opt for an educational system that (at least at first sight) seems highly likely to perpetuate their economic marginalisation?[11] More than 30 years ago Willis (1977) asked a very similar question. He wondered how (and why) working-class boys, through their oppositional behaviour in school, perpetuate their own subordination. While Willis wrote about universal Western-type schooling in the 'developed world', the issue at stake is similar. As regards the *Almajiri* system, the 'decision' to accept continued economic marginality is made already 'upstream', when families decide about their children's education, rather than negotiated within the classroom. While I will argue later on that the *Almajirai* in many instances challenge their parents' decision to 'accept' such marginality for their children, the question remains: how can we understand this decision in the first place?

---

[11] Admittedly, the alternative option—modern education—does not guarantee economic success either and is often inaccessible or of poor quality (see Chapter Four).

Willis proposes the term 'cultural production', meaning the production of certain cultural styles and competencies (Levinson & Holland 1996: 5), to conceptualise educational processes. He builds on Bourdieu's insights into the role that culture—the skewed valuation of different cultural styles and competencies—plays for reproducing inequality in liberal societies (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Instead of challenging the existing distribution of cultural capital, education offers a forum for its owners to celebrate their achievements, which may be why those who do not already possess such capital choose to opt out. Educational ideals therefore both mirror and reproduce existing inequalities.

Willis (1981) criticises Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural *re*production' for denying the agency and creativity of the dominated classes in the process. He asserts instead that it is only "through struggle, contestation and a partial penetration of [existing] structures" that dominated groups end up taking an active hand in their continued subordination by aspiring to educational ideals that will not help them overcome their structural disadvantage (1977: 175). He argues that the processes are specifically cultural, as "[s]tructural determinations act, not by direct mechanical effect, but by mediation through the cultural level" (174). The working-class boys were aware that for them the promise that respect could be exchanged for knowledge, knowledge for certification, and certification for better jobs did not hold. Resistant humour—'having a laff'—was their "own creation in light of that realization" (Levinson & Holland 1996: 14).

While Willis' notion of cultural production is useful in that it acknowledges the agency marginalised groups may exercise while perpetuating their own subordination, for two reasons it needs to be recast in order to be an enabling 'thinking tool' for the *Almajiri* context:

First, Willis is mainly concerned with the reproduction of *class* inequalities. Levinson and Holland contend that his focus is too narrow, given the importance of other determinants of life chances in addition to or instead of class, such as gender, race, ethnicity, or religion—particularly in 'developing world' contexts. Second, Willis tries to explain essentially why things remain the same: why existing structures are reproduced. The direct applicability of his work is therefore limited in contexts of rapid socio-economic and cultural change. In the case of the *Almajirai*, this objection is particularly relevant. As I will outline in this thesis, even though their parents do not necessarily envisage this, the *Almajirai*, through their engagements in the urban economy, eventually become to some extent 'urbanised'. While more research is needed to ascertain whether they actually encounter opportunities to succeed

economically, they certainly aspire to do so and thus do not necessarily become the 'losing winners' Willis describes (see Collins 2009: 36).

If decoupled from its association with 'social reproduction' and instead associated with a more flexible notion, the concept of 'cultural production' may, however, still prove useful. Levinson and Holland propose replacing 'social reproduction' with the concept of a culturally variable 'educated person', as a privileged vantage point from which to explore forms of cultural production (1996: 3). Instead of exploring how education enables different groups to position themselves in the class structure, the question should be how education enables them to acquire (or not) certain skills and forms of knowledge (or 'capitals', as I will argue later) that define the 'educated person' in specific contexts. The notion of the 'educated person', I maintain, provides access to important insights of the anthropology of education:

Firstly, anthropologists suggest that what counts as important knowledge to live a socially, morally, spiritually, economically, and politically successful life varies across time, space, cultures, social groups, etc. Definitions of the fully knowledgeable person, the "person endowed with maximum 'cultural capital'" (*ibid*. 21), are thus context-specific and relative. The recognition that *competing* notions of the 'educated person' may exist makes it possible to apprehend the politics involved in pursuing certain educational ideals. In Chapter Six, I analyse the forms of capital considered valuable in the context of the *Almajiri* system. In Chapter Seven, I investigate how the *Almajirai,* who, throughout their stay in urban Kano, come in contact with alternative ideals of the 'educated person'—out of tune with or even in contradiction to the educational ideal sustaining the system—contest this ideal.

Secondly, a broad notion of the 'educated person' makes it possible to capture that education is about more than the acquisition of formal skills and may thus occur in multiple spaces. Wood suggests that the idea that "children must be taught in order to learn, let alone the expectation that they will do so in classrooms, is by no means a universal one" (1988: 16). In Chapter Six, I demonstrate that the *Almajiri* practice acknowledges that learning processes also take place outside the classroom and without formal instruction. It is understood that children *learn* by 'being' (e.g. being away from home) and 'doing' (e.g. earning their own livelihood).

Thirdly, to acknowledge that learning may take place even without teaching, and that teaching does not necessarily translate into learning, highlights the politics involved in producing—or failing to produce—certain 'educated persons' (see Skinner & Holland 1996; Poluha 2004; Froerer 2007). Erickson, for instance, argues about Western-type schooling that

[*s*]*tudents in school, like other humans, learn constantly. When we say they are "not learning" what we mean is that they are not learning what school authorities… intend for them to learn as the result of intentional instruction… Learning what is deliberately taught can be seen as a form of political assent. Not learning can be seen as a form of political resistance.* (1987: 343-344)

In Chapter Seven, I explore the political dimension of the *Almajirai*'s learning, by looking at the knowledge and skills the students acquire (or learn to aspire to) which are not provided for by the *Almajiri* system.

3.3   Investigating the details of cultural production

I analyse two stages of cultural production in this thesis. First, on the level of aspirations, I explore how the educational ideal sustaining the *Almajiri* practice is produced (Chapter Six). Second, on the level of practical knowledge and skills,[12] I investigate how enrolment in the system produces 'educated persons' (Chapter Seven). I contend, however, that these 'educated persons' also learn certain ideals and aspirations that challenge and recast the original ideal of an 'educated person', thus (again on the level of aspirations) actually triggering the production of new ideals of the 'educated person'.[13]

I propose 'thinking tools' to analyse processes of cultural production in more detail on two levels: firstly, I propose to explore the "struggle, contestation and … partial penetration of [existing] structures" (Willis 1977: 175) through the lens of de Certeau's (1984) concept of 'tactics'. I argue that this is a useful analytical tool to locate cultural productions within wider power structures, capturing the forms and effects of resistance by the weak. Secondly, turning to Bourdieu's field theory (1986/2004), I suggest ways of conceptualising what these cultural productions actually *produce* in terms of different forms of capital.

Cultural production through 'tactics'

The weak, de Certeau says, are neither "passive" nor "docile" (1984: xii) but resist and subvert the structures they are subjected to through the "clandestine forms" of their

---

[12] By skills, I mean tangible embodied practices that can be put to use later in life. By knowledge, while it may translate into bodily practices, I mean things known at a conscious level and potentially verbalisable.

[13] While Willis' endeavour to make sense of the fact that the powerless seem to take a hand in their own subordination is directly relevant to the first stage of this production, it is less applicable to the second stage. His notion of 'cultural production', however, remains applicable, as he recognises that a reproduction of former circumstances is not an automatic or necessary outcome of cultural production.

"dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity" (*ibid*. xiv-xv). They do this "not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they [have] no choice but to accept… [T]heir use of the dominant social order [deflects] its power, which they [lack] the means to challenge; they [escape] it without leaving it" (*ibid*. xiii).

De Certeau defines 'strategy' as the manipulation of force-relationships by autonomous actors firmly established in time and space and thus able to generate relations with exterior others (*ibid*. xix). A 'tactic', on the contrary, is the mode of action available to the weak, acting in a physical or social space that is not their own. A 'tactic' "must play on and with a terrain imposed on it" (*ibid*. 37). It "must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'". The weak depend on "continually [turning] to their own ends forces alien to them" (*ibid*. xix).

In Chapter Six, I propose that the educational ideal of the *Almajiri* system can be understood as such a 'tactic' of the weak. By focussing their educational aspirations on realms in which they have a chance of succeeding (the social, moral, and spiritual realms, rather than the economic), those opting for *Almajirci* can maintain a self-definition as 'potentially achieving'—despite their apparent economic marginality, which they lack the power to end. In Chapter Seven, I contend that the *Almajirai*'s struggles to maintain a positive self-definition in the face of disapproval and rejection, and their manoeuvres to achieve skills and forms of knowledge they are excluded from, should be understood as an expression of their 'tactical creativity'.

Cultural production of different forms of capital

In his field theory, Bourdieu posits that social actors operate in various fields of activity using different resources specific to these, which he calls different forms of capital. According to Bourdieu, capitals are not necessarily economic and may for instance be social or cultural and thus be of symbolic rather than material nature. Bourdieu's theory captures the value that intangible resources, such as prestige, social standing, or spiritual assets, may have for people. It also recognises that economic capital may be inoperable in certain fields (Bourdieu 1990). This makes it possible to transcend the idea that 'human capital' is the only form of capital one may acquire (or fail to acquire) through education.

To think in terms of capital about the various resources people aspire to in order to live successful lives is helpful as it allows the use of concepts such as accumulation (i.e. processes

of acquiring certain resources), 'market value' (i.e. the valuation of specific resources at a given point in time), and conversion (i.e. transformation of resources operable in one field of activity into resources operable in another field) (e.g. Kane 2003). Conversion rates and the 'market value' of certain forms of capital can, moreover, be understood as dynamic. Certain forms of capital may 'devalue' or 'appreciate' in accordance with changing historical, cultural, and socio-economic circumstances. I argue that what the *Almajirai* actually learn (or at least attempt and aspire to learn) has to be understood as the outcome of a dynamic struggle over access to different forms of capital, over the definition of their respective values, and over conversion rates between them, taking place in the context of rapid socio-economic and cultural change.

Finally, Bourdieu understands cultural capital as inscribed in the body, which functions as a "mnemonic device upon and in which the very basics of culture… are imprinted and encoded" through experience and teaching (Jenkins 1992: 75-6). I will contend in Chapter Six that the embodiment of the Qur'an through memorisation, as well as stamina in the face of physical deprivation, can best be understood through such a lens.

4 Exploring the context of *Almajirci*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to situate the *Almajiri* practice in time and space. First, it explores the historical dimension of the system. How have changes in the political landscape, the economy and demography, the rise of Islamic reform movements, and the introduction of modern education affected the ways in which the *Almajiri* system functions and the ways in which the *Almajirai* can imagine and situate themselves within society? I maintain that whereas in the past the *Almajiri* system forged a scholarly class or *ulama* (Arabic, sg. *al-alim*) that enjoyed considerable prestige and power, it has increasingly become economically, socially, and politically marginalised. The second part of the chapter explores two factors that are particularly relevant for the cultural productions described in the following chapters, namely the relationship of the *Almajirai* to the contemporary local economy, and the crisis rhetoric about the *Almajirai*.

4.2 The changing role of Qur'anic scholars in Hausaland

Islam was introduced in Hausaland via the trans-Saharan trade as early as the eleventh century and became the religion of the ruling elites in the fifteenth century. The Fulani-led *jihad* of Usman dan Fodio, 1804–08, launched against what were perceived as syncretistic practices, and the ensuing establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate strengthened the hold of Islam among the population at large (Last 1967; Paden 1973). Given the scarcity of scholars in the early days of Islam in the region, religious knowledge was acquired by moving away from home to live with a renowned scholar in one of the emerging centres of learning (Okoye & Yau 1999: 15).

Initially restricted to scholarly families, religious knowledge has been a political asset since the inception of Islam in the Western Sudan, as the rulers, by submitting to the restraints of a written code, exposed themselves to the checks of intellectuals educated in that code (Last 1993: 119-120). As the main literate class prior to colonialism, religious scholars

became particularly influential in the Sokoto Caliphate not least because they were the only ones eligible for certain government positions (Umar 2001: 130). Peripatetic Qur'anic schools spanning the entire Caliphate with their migration routes and networks "were integral to the expansion, reproduction and ideological integration" of the Islamic state (Lubeck 1985: 372). Several scholars attribute the rise of widespread demand for religious education, and thus the proliferation of *Almajirci*, to the importance the reformist government of Usman dan Fodio attached to the religious education of the population and the substantial support Qur'anic schools received from both the community and the state (Lubeck 1985; Khalid 1997; NCWD 2001).[14]

Last (2000: 381) offers a slightly different reading of history, situating the sudden increase of demand for Islamic schooling in the early twentieth century. The gradual ending of slavery, induced by colonialism (see Lovejoy & Hogendorn 1993), Last asserts, created both new economic pressures and novel opportunities for social mobility, which fuelled demand for and supply of religious education as an avenue to high status in a very status-conscious society. At the same time, former slaves often struggled to secure their livelihood, which made Islamic teaching an attractive option and itinerant Qur'anic schools a welcome opportunity for households to reduce their subsistence burden. Lubeck, albeit possibly neglecting the importance of non-material factors, attributes the Qur'anic schools' movements to urban areas to the ecology and economy of the region, arguing that "[s]ituated in a harsh environment where rainfall was uncertain … the peripatetic tradition related harmoniously to the needs and risks of the peasant household economy" as children and youth could be dispatched to urban areas during dry-season-induced times of scarcity (1985: 372). Migrant Qur'anic students, he argues, were a readily available labour pool for the urban handicraft industry.

During colonialism and subsequent decades, religious education experienced little competition from modern education, which contributed to high enrolment rates. Early modern schooling was provided mainly by Christian missionaries and thus engendered resistance amongst Muslims. As a consequence of its unpopularity, the colonial authorities thought it politically unwise to establish modern schooling on a mass scale in the indirectly ruled North, and even after independence it was expanded only slowly. The need of the colonial administration for modern-educated officials was met instead by employing modern-

---

[14] Dr Wakili, 24 July 2009

educated southerners (Igbo/Yoruba) and by offering modern education to only a small section of society (Schildkrout 1978/2002: 363).[15]

Despite its narrow base, the introduction of modern education had a substantial impact on the traditional *ulama*, as it gradually undermined their "monopoly over literacy" and thus their access to prestige, positions, and resources (Paden 1973: 58). By making English and Hausa written in Roman script the language of the administration, the skills of the traditional *ulama*—their knowledge of Arabic and *ajami*[16]—were devalued (Wakili 2007: 67).

Upon independence in 1960, it was the first generation of modern-educated Muslims who inherited power from the British (Umar 2001: 130). Socio-economic change added momentum to the political transformation. The 1970s witnessed an enormous expansion of the Nigerian economy, owing to the oil boom. While the oil sector thrived, the agricultural sector, however, became increasingly marginalised (Lubeck 1985: 377; Khalid 1997: 29). The immense and often illegitimate financial returns from oil, accruing to some while by-passing many others, triggered "rugged individualism". Meanwhile, the new affluence and gross corruption put the moral fabric of society under strain (Umar 1993: 176). Massive rural-to-urban migration exacerbated inequalities in the cities as the newcomers were excluded from the new wealth. The structural adjustment programme, implemented from 1986 to deal with the economic crisis ensuing after the oil price collapsed, accentuated income inequality, reduced employment opportunities, and impoverished the population further (Jega 2000; Ya'u 2000; Mohammed 2001).

The societal transformation affected the traditional religious education system and *ulama* first of all in economic ways. During the 1970s the income of students and teachers declined, as more affluent Muslims increasingly ceased to support the *Almajiri* system through alms and accommodation and as those segments of society still endorsing it were hit by the economic downturn in the aftermath of the oil boom and by structural adjustment (Winters 1987: 180-181; Ya'u 2000). New capital-intensive innovations such as modern cement rather than labour-intensive mud-construction undermined the *Almajirai*'s traditional income activities, while the erosion of the rural economy simultaneously encouraged more and more students, lured into city life, to 'stay on' rather than to return to their villages. The push of the Northern Muslim elites in the late 1970s and 1980s to extend modern education to larger parts of the population—a result of the new oil wealth and increased competition for influence at the national level—strained the *Almajirai* competing for jobs in the urban

---

[15] The neglect of modern education in Northern Nigeria can be felt to the present day (see below).
[16] Hausa written in Arabic script.

economy (Lubeck 1985). Meanwhile, those sources of income that are the preserve of traditional religious scholars—e.g. commissioned prayers and potions to strengthen one's charisma (see Last 1988)—while providing a profitable livelihood to some, cannot sustain the bulk of the *Almajirai* and particularly not those only beginning to acquire the requisite knowledge.

Secondly, the landscape of legitimacy was reconfigured as the societal crisis triggered new religious movements and discourses. For centuries, the main current of religious thought in Northern Nigeria had been Sufism. The second half of the twentieth century, however, saw the rise of religious reform movements that challenged the customary dominance of the two major Sufi orders, *Qadiriyya* and *Tijaniyya*. Islamic ideologies of reform—most prominently epitomised by the *Izala* movement[17]—provided an anti-establishment ideology that could be embraced by those disaffected with the traditional social, economic, and moral order. The religious egalitarianism of *Izala* challenged both the more elitist vision of religion and society underpinning Sufism, in which only few persons are entitled to a special relationship with God, and the strict status hierarchies within Hausa society that vest supreme authority and wealth in the senior man of the household (Loimeier 1997: 297; Kane 2003: 305; Last 2004: 2).

Winters asserts that 'traditional Islam' in Northern Nigeria, including the *Almajiri* system, builds on the ideal of religion as a communal endeavour (expressed through mutual support in the form of alms) in which the individual is expected to "help his fellow man to find a place in the hereafter" (1987: 182-183). The individualistic mode of religiousness promoted by the reformists has been described as "more in tune with the rugged individualism of capitalist social relations" (Umar 1993: 178) and therefore appealing to newly modern-educated groups that want to take advantage of opportunities for social mobility offered by the new capitalist order (Loimeier 1997: 296). *Izala*'s commitment to public enlightenment, carried into effect through the establishment of a modern system of Islamic education (*Islamiyya* schools), not only put *Tijaniyya* and *Qadiriyya* increasingly under pressure to adopt similar policies (Loimeier 1997: 294) but also marginalised the *Almajiri* system further.

---

[17] Izala, the 'Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reestablishment of the Sunna', though probably the most influential innovation in the Northern Nigerian religious landscape, was not the only one and has since its foundation experienced several splits. The 'Yan Shia, a radical Islamist movement sympathising with the Shiite Islamist regime in Iran and the mujahidin struggle in Afghanistan, commands a considerable following (see Hunwick 1992: 152; Kane 2003: 95). Another movement with large repercussions was the Maitatsine sect (see literature review).

The impact of reformism can be felt not only in the ubiquity of *Islamiyya* schools in Northern Nigeria. In a context of increased anxieties about the religious integrity of the *jama'a* (Muslim community) and the Day of Judgement expected to arrive any moment, attempts to ensure the piety of the community[18] and to 'purify' Islam by removing unlawful innovation (*bidi'a*) assume a new urgency (Casey 2008; Last 2008). The *Almajiri* system has attracted criticism in this environment as a Hausa cultural accretion to Islam considered to be problematic. Several of my interviewees objected to the *Almajirai*'s practice of begging, which in their view Islam permits only in acute emergencies (see Bambale n.d.; Sunday Triumph, 16 November 2008).[19]

In 1985 Lubeck wrote that by the end of the 1970s, the new wealthy classes brought forth by the oil boom had already redefined migrant Qur'anic students as "an embarrassing, dangerous and immoral set of people" rather than a "social category that had reproduced the ideology of the Islamic state and provided an opportunity for Muslims to gain religious merit by giving alms" (380). In the early twenty-first century, reformist discourses have heightened struggles for legitimacy by insiders of the *Almajiri* system.

4.3   Almajirci *today: marginal but sustainable?*

Who nowadays opts for *Almajirci*, given that it promises neither access to political power nor to high social status, that its former economic viability has largely been undermined, and that even its religious merit has come under attack? Several structural factors combine to provide the background against which families formulate their educational strategies and decide to send their children on *Almajirci* in urban areas.

The socio-economic situation particularly in rural Northern Nigeria became increasingly precarious in the second half of the twentieth century. The decline of the rural economy, owing to oil boom and structural adjustment, combined with the onset of massive demographic growth, with population more than quadrupling since 1950. As a consequence, Nigerians are extremely young, with over 40% falling into the age group 0–14 years (UN 2008). Kano State has one of the highest population growth rates (3.5%) among the Nigerian states. This has contributed to perpetuating both poverty and educational disadvantage.

---

[18] As evidenced by the fervour with which *shari'a* law has been implemented in Nigeria's northern states since 2000, not only by reformists but also other Muslims, including Sufists (see O'Brien 2007).

[19] e.g. Mallam Murtala, 17 July 2009; Mallam Kiyawa, 27 August 2009

Approximately 60% of the population of Kano State live on less than US$1.25 per day PPP (MoE 2008). The most reliable estimate assumes that 47% of all primary school-aged children are enrolled in primary school—compared with 65% nationwide (World Bank 2008)—while secondary school net enrolment is only 27%. Enrolment is significantly lower in rural than in urban LGAs. Its poor quality,[20] its costs (a heavy burden particularly on poor families), and its low returns in terms of employment account for the low demand for modern education (MoE 2008).

What is the situation at the 'receiving end'? To account for the Maitatsine crisis, several authors argued in the 1980s that the moral and economic foundations of the *Almajirai*'s livelihoods in the cities became increasingly undermined. While this trend is likely to have continued, the impression I gained from my research is that as a consequence of the "prolonged institutionalization of children in schools" (Schildkrout 1978/2002: 346) in a context where most women practise purdah, new employment niches may have been opened up in urban Kano, at least for younger *Almajirai*.

Almost all *Almajirai* I met during my fieldwork who had not yet surpassed the age threshold that would exclude them from such employment worked as household help. I presume that *Almajirai* are employed not only by better-off households but also by poorer segments of society as, for want of alternatives, they often accept nonmonetary offerings—a place to sleep in the *zaure/soro* or a meal—as payment. This was apparent in my interviews with children begging on the street for money, who, albeit mostly also working as household help, begged for money as their employment earned them no cash income but only meals.

One of the boys in Mallam Gali's school explained to me why the labour of the children in their employers' households was not available:

- *In some houses, the children are not old enough to work, while sometimes the children have gone to school, and we, that's the time we are free.*
- *Which school?*
- *Boko school, they also go to Islamiyya school.*[21]

While I did not investigate this systematically, from the *Almajirai*'s statements I gained the impression that most of the children in the employers' households attended both modern and *Islamiyya* school. Although more research is needed to strengthen such a conclusion, it seems likely that the *Almajirai* attenuate the "far-reaching effects" that 'universal' primary

---

[20] Attributable to low levels of education spending, high pupil/classroom ratios, and low teacher qualification (MoE 2008).
[21] Ibrahim, 23 August 2009

education might have—through the pressure it puts on purdah-practising households—on the "whole structure of the Hausa family" (Schildkrout 1978/2002: 349).

4.4 Representations of the Almajiri system: a rhetoric of crisis

While evidently a considerable part of the population either supports or at least tolerates the *Almajiri* system (e.g. by sending sons on *Almajirci*, by supporting *Almajirai* and their teachers through alms-giving, or by employing *Almajirai* as household help), I also came across a wealth of opinions on it that were overwhelmingly negative and presented the phenomenon as an expression of acute crisis. As I did not systematically elicit opinions on the *Almajiri* system and was moreover restricted in my access to representations of it by my inability to speak Hausa, the picture I will present in the following is necessarily partial, requiring further research to complement it.[22]

As public opinions are, however, a crucial factor in the cultural production of 'educated persons' in the *Almajiri* system (see Chapter Seven), I still present this partial picture here, particularly as its relevance is to some extent confirmed by the painful awareness of the *Almajirai* of such negative discourses about them. Statements such as Nasiru's quoted at the beginning of this thesis that "some people think it's because you don't have food in your house, that's why you come out to beg"[23] or Habibu's explanation that "people bring their children to Qur'anic school not because they hate them, but because they want them to have the knowledge"[24] convey that the students *are* indeed aware of such crisis rhetoric.

In the following, I present the patterns of reasoning about the *Almajirai* that I found to be salient in my review of national and international English-language news, internet sources (blogs and online forums), publications of local and international children's rights organisations, and local academic production. In the empirical part of this thesis (Chapters Five to Seven) I investigate how much truth the discourses I present in this chapter actually

---

[22] I presume that negative attitudes prevail more amongst urban, modern-educated, better-to-do Nigerians than amongst *Almajirci*-educated, rural poor and that supporters of Islamic reform movements and Christians are more likely to participate in negative discourses. This is, however, little more than an informed guess and requires more research. The *Almajirai* did not point to any single social group from whom they experienced more rejection than from others.
Attitudes towards youth probably differ from attitudes towards younger children, and begging children attract more negative attention than children working in houses (even though my interviews with children begging on the street suggest that the two categories cannot be separated neatly, as many children engage in both activities).
[23] 21 August 2009
[24] 9 September 2009

contain. Here, I only outline some of their recurrent themes, suggesting that they may be problematic as judgments of the system in general: statements about why children become *Almajirai* and what they learn by living as *Almajirai* are often based on normative assumptions rather than empirical investigations.

As the *Almajirai* do not live inside nuclear families, they are often considered to grow up outside appropriate adult care and control (see Sahara Reporters, 25 September 2009; COCFOCAN n.d.). Alternative upbringing arrangements are considered as being, *per se*, unable to provide sufficient support. The National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute, for instance, states that the "lack of parental participation in the moral up-bringing of the Almajiri pupils" predisposes them to become delinquents (NCWD 2001: 95). It seems unthinkable that a concern for their children's moral formation may inform parents' decisions to send them on *Almajirci*.

The fact that students often farm with their teacher and, if earning an income through other means, contribute financially to his livelihood has been equated with abuse. Ahmed Bello of the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons is quoted as saying the *Almajirai*'s provision of free labour on their teachers' farms amounts to "sheer exploitation" (Daily Trust, 21 November 2009; see Afrik, 25 December 2008).

The *Almajirai*'s income-generating activities have been portrayed as putting them in danger of becoming forever 'damaged' adults. Their work has been described as out of tune with the "exigencies of modern times", given that "sociologists and psychologists have noted that when a child is exposed to labour at a tender age… such a child normally develops a habit of loneliness, leading to schizophrenia" (The Nation, 11 January 2010). Begging in particular has been criticised for being "harmful to both [the *Almajirai*'s] physical and mental health with attendant physical and psychological consequences" (Okoye & Yau: 45; see Bambale n.d.).

Their deprived living conditions are considered a reliable predictor of future failure. Okoye and Yau write that "these children toil daily in scrounging for a living… [T]he consequences may have far reaching negative physical and psychological impact on youth development" (1999: 3). "It is not wise for one to use poverty and deprivation in moral upbringing" (*ibid*. 45), they claim, and they warn that the experiences of the *Almajirai* present a "waste of human resources as the future of many of them is permanently ruined" (*ibid*. 3).

As the *Almajiri* system is equated with exploitation and severe harm to a child's healthy development, all potential explanations for it that fall short of 'extreme crisis' are eliminated.

No parent in his right mind would send his child on *Almajirci* as long as he has an alternative option, nor would a child aspire to becoming an *Almajiri*. Attempts to explain the system consequently mostly resort to a crisis rhetoric that identifies acute poverty and parental neglect and ignorance as the main 'culprits' for the system, leaving no room for more subtle accounts or agency on the sending side.

Bala Muhammad, head of a Kano State directorate created to promote morals and good behaviour, for instance, chides "parents who have more children than they can afford and see Koranic schools as a means to rid themselves of the extra burden" (Daily Trust, 21 November 2009). Sule-Kano, academic at Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, writes that under conditions of poverty, "*Almajirci…* became a perfect excuse to some parents to reduce the burden of rearing children" (2008: 6).

Nigeria's Minister of State for Education, Aishatu Jibrin Dukku, claims that the *Almajirai*'s parents are "so insensitive to the welfare of their children that they dispatch them to unknown places to take care of themselves" (allAfrica, 22 November 2009). In internet forums, it has been argued that "most of the parents of *Almajirai* just don't want to take care of their children, that is why they send them to these schools" (Nigerian Village Square, 26 September 2009).

Another widespread claim is that the links between children, parents, and teachers are fragile and easily severed: CNN quotes an UNICEF researcher estimating that 60% of the *Almajirai* never return home (CNN World, 8 January 2010). It is claimed that parents barely know the teacher to whom they entrust their children (e.g. Weekly Trust, 5 December 2009). Teachers are depicted as being neither aware of who their students are nor willing to incur costs or trouble to take proper care of them (e.g. Sahara Reporters, 25 September 2009).

The circumstances of the *Almajirai*'s upbringing are often presented as sufficient conditions to make them inherently dangerous. Merely by living supposedly unchildlike lives, the *Almajirai* are thought to acquire problematic behaviours and attitudes. Dukku, for instance, declares that "[m]ost of these children, because of the harsh realities they found themselves in, end up becoming juvenile delinquents and, subsequently, adult criminals" (allAfrica, 22 November 2009). Saudatu Sani, a federal legislator from Kano State, claims about the *Almajirai* that "[t]he pathetic life they live... breeds heartless criminals" (Daily Trust, 21 November 2009).

It has been asserted that, "[h]ungry and angry", the *Almajirai* can easily be mobilised to engage in looting and killings during ethno-religious clashes so as to pay back society (Daily Trust, 21 November 2009; see The Nation, 13 November 2009; Business Day, 13 January

41

2010). The "terrorist potential of having about one million hungry and gullible children roaming aimlessly in Nigeria's northern cities, from whom any fanatic, religious or otherwise, could readily recruit disciples for antisocial purposes," Awofeso et al. write, "is immense" (2003: 320).

To my knowledge, the claim that the *Almajirai* participate in violence, whether inter-religious or sectarian, has been investigated systematically only on one occasion, namely in the aftermath of the Maitatsine crisis. A federal government-constituted Tribunal of Inquiry established that children aged 10–14 years, unaccompanied by their parents, were amongst Maitatsine's followers.[25] Despite the near-absence of systematic evidence, in accounts such as those presented above the circumstances of the *Almajirai*'s upbringing are translated into a predisposition towards, if not predestination for, violence and delinquency with astonishing ease. There is no room, it seems, for the *Almajirai* to exercise agency or to benefit from the positive aspects of their education. Kurfi, for instance, writes about the *Almajirai* that they "are innocently used in most of the crises in Nigerian societies, by interest groups" (Kurfi 2000: 4). Such perspectives suggest that the *Almajirai* are passive tools that, owing to the circumstances of their upbringing, can easily be manipulated. At its extreme, this means that the *Almajirai* are virtually written off as a "generation lost" (Daily Trust, 21 November 2009), with "no future whatsoever", who will inevitably "end up being criminals and victims" (BBC, 23 December 2008).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to locate the *Almajiri* practice in its geographical and historical context. From being a highly regarded and influential social category, the Qur'anic scholars have slid into political, social, and economic marginality. It is against the background of a declining rural economy, massive population growth, and poor-quality modern education that families opting for *Almajirci* today formulate their educational strategies and produce a specific educational ideal. The chapter emphasised two features of the urban context in which the *Almajirai* grow up, which, I contend, assume importance as factors in the cultural production of 'educated persons' in the *Almajiri* system: first, the *Almajirai*'s employment in households that embrace modern and *Islamiyya* education for their own offspring; and

---

[25] Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981): *Report of Tribunal of Inquiry on Kano Disturbances (Maitatsine)* (cited in Awofeso et al. 2003: 318).

second, the crisis rhetoric prevailing in some segments of Nigerian society. Such rhetoric, I asserted, reduces complex realities and processes to simple cause–effect chains: children become *Almajirai* because their parents do not care about them, whilst *Almajirai* become terrorists because they are hungry and grow up outside nuclear families. Such reasoning does not help us understand why families opt for *Almajirci* and what actually happens throughout the *Almajirai*'s education. The next chapters provide an alternative account.

5 Challenging the crisis rhetoric

5.1 Introduction

The following three empirical chapters propose that the—albeit limited—room for children and parents to exercise agency needs to be explored to bridge the gap between representations produced by outsiders and the meanings attached to their lived experiences by insiders of the *Almajiri* system. This chapter begins by challenging the main assumptions of the crisis rhetoric presented in the previous chapter and offering more nuanced explanations. While the practice mostly coincides with poverty, I assert that poverty influences decision-making less directly (than the crisis rhetoric suggests) by limiting educational choices. I then challenge the received wisdom that links between teachers and parents, parents and children, and children and teachers are fragile and easily severed. While in some instances this may be the case, there are mechanisms in place that ensure the continuance of such links and that secure particularly the teachers' accountability. Finally, I illustrate that young people can—and do—to some extent influence their schooling trajectories and thus are not the passive victims the crisis rhetoric portrays.

5.2 Poverty and seasonal migration

As I conducted my fieldwork during the rainy season, many of the students from peasant households had returned home to help their parents farm. The students I could work with therefore had a lower probability of coming from a peasant background, and indeed most of their fathers engaged in some kind of business[26] rather than being farmers. Some students' fathers also worked as Qur'anic teachers, some for the local government, and one was a primary-school teacher.

While the timing of my research obviously affected the nature of the data I could collect, it offered me insights into an often-overlooked dimension of the *Almajiri* phenomenon.

---

[26] e.g. as traders in clothes/phones/goats, provision-store operators, and bus drivers.

Almajirci is often equated to *ci-rani*, the dry-season migration of young men from rural to urban areas to find petty employment in an attempt to reduce the subsistence burden of the Sahelian peasant household during times of scarcity (Lubeck 1985; Winters 1987; Reichmuth 1989; Last 1993; Khalid 1997). While not necessarily invalidating these explanations, my research findings suggest that they do not tell the entire story. In fact, Mallam Gali explained the departure of his rural students as a response to his own constraints: as he had not enough space to shelter all during the rainy season, he sent part of them home and did not accept new enrolments until the rains had stopped.[27]

My interactions with the students in the two schools my research focussed on thus brought to light that not only children from poor peasant households enrol as *Almajirai*. In my interviews with fathers, most of whom lived as subsistence farmers in Kunchi, I tried to explore the role poverty plays in families' decisions to send their children on *Almajirci*.

I found that it is not necessarily the poorest households in a community that send their children on *Almajirci* (though the very poor are probably amongst those sending their children). For instance, I spoke to two Qur'anic teachers (one of them amongst the wealthiest persons of the village, owning several horses and other animals) who themselves hosted several dozen *Almajirai*. They fed their students from what they farmed together, simultaneously sending their own sons to schools where they either begged or farmed for their livelihood.[28] The perception even of fathers who did not send their own sons on *Almajirci* was that a particularly strong commitment to religious knowledge rather than poverty—combined with the belief that this could best be acquired away from home—determined who opted for *Almajirci*.[29] One father, recognising that poverty did play a role in sustaining the system, explained the continued demand for *Almajiri* education in relation to population growth, albeit in a more indirect way than the crisis rhetoric suggests. He argued that if fathers have to provide for ever-larger households, they do not have the time to teach their sons and therefore prefer to send them to another teacher.[30] Rather than by directly coercing families to send away their children, poverty seems to operate by limiting the educational options available for families to choose from, making *Almajirci* a comparatively attractive alternative.

---

[27] Mallam Gali, 30 August 2009. Furthermore, none of the fathers I interviewed made his sons return during the rainy season to help farming. Children, I was told, only return if their parents are either not very committed to their studies or too poor to afford other helpers, and *Almajirai* migrating during the rainy season do so with their teachers on whose land they also farm.
[28] Mallam Hamza, Mallam Haruna, 16 September 2009
[29] Mallam Ibrahim, 9 September 2009; Mallam Sani-Umar, 16 September 2009
[30] Bystander in interview with Mallam Sani-Umar, 16 September 2009

5.3 Opting for Almajirci in a context of limited choice

Several of the fathers I spoke to in Kunchi sent their sons on *Almajirci* because of the poor quality of the modern education available to them, because children could not combine modern/secular and religious studies, and because modern education at a post-primary level was costly and not available locally.[31] One father explained that even modern education would not enable his son to escape his economic condition, an argument reminiscent of Dore's (1976) warning against the 'diploma disease'.[32]

Though this is likely to be changing, some parents still opt for *Almajirci* because they disapprove of the ideological content and colonial origins of modern education.[33] Habibu (15 years old), for instance, told me that his father, having himself attended only Qur'anic education, would not allow him to go to a modern school (let alone be interviewed by me) as he strongly disliked anything Western.[34] All the teachers I interacted with were opposed to the idea of me teaching their students English as they feared their parents' disapproval.

While my research showed that many families send all of their male children over a certain age on *Almajirci*, often the decision-making processes are more complex. In most cases, I found the conventional wisdom confirmed that children have little if any say in decisions over which school they are sent to (see Last 2004: 3). However, in some instances even young children seemed to exercise choice in decisions concerning themselves. Several young people asked their parents to take them to Qur'anic school, because they disliked modern education, felt a Qur'anic education would prepare them best for what they want to do in life (i.e. become a Qur'anic teacher or preacher), or feared they might miss the

---

[31] Mallam Ali, 9 September 2009; Mallam Haruna 16 September 2009; Mallam Isa, Mallam Mahammadi-Difari, Mallam Isa, 17 September 2009. Despite its predominantly poor quality, modern education is increasingly perceived as a viable alternative. Several of the fathers I spoke to had sent even those sons who later became *Almajirai* to primary school for a brief period or had at least enrolled the children (including girls) still at home. Many of the students I worked with had attended modern school for some time. Some of the older students—like some of the fathers—told me that whereas older siblings had become *Almajirai*, younger siblings went exclusively to modern and *Islamiyya* school. They attributed the growing interest in modern education to its increased availability and (comparatively at least) improved quality and a general change of perspective by not only parents but also children.

[32] Mallam Mahammadi-Difari, 17 September 2009. Dore suggests that in the 'developing world', where employment opportunities—and modern-sector jobs in particular—are scarce, the value of school certificates increases in inflationary fashion, resulting in a 'diploma disease' where education is pursued for the sake of certification rather than knowledge.

[33] My interviewees in government and academia emphasised this repeatedly, e.g. Mallam Murtala, 17 July 2009; Dr Galadanchi, 7 September 2009; see also Iguda n.d.: 13; CDRT 2005: 54.

[34] 23 August 2009; 9 September 2009

opportunity to learn the Qur'an well if they did not start young.[35] Whereas with respect to initial enrolment, it was quite likely that parents ignored their children's preferences (e.g. to continue modern education—see Chapter Seven), the students' scope to exercise agency increased substantially as they grew older (e.g. by initiating school changes—see below).

5.4 Links between children and parents

As I have argued already, several students in the two schools I focussed on had returned home during the dry season. Most of the remaining students went home at least once per year for either of the two big Muslim celebrations (*Eid al-Fitr/Kabir*). Some children's parents came to visit them regularly[36] as they had business to do in Kano and passed the school on their way. While most of the fathers I spoke to reported much longer intervals between their children's visits (they had spent up to three years without seeing them), they claimed to know where their sons were and how to get in touch with them if need be. One father claimed that as we are in the "chat age", he would just call his sons.[37] Intermediaries commuting between home villages and the places where the students are schooling also serve to exchange information and sometimes goods. I only recall one occasion when a boy in a school I visited said he had not seen his parents at all during the six years he had been enrolled as *Almajiri*.[38] From the regularity if not frequency of contact, I thus gained the impression that the link between parents and children was in the large majority of cases not permanently ruptured upon school enrolment.

5.5 School choices, school changes, and accountability mechanisms

My fieldwork suggests further that, through their school choices, parents aim to ensure that their children are in good hands. My informants reported consistently that most children are initially enrolled with teachers who are either a relative or a fairly close acquaintance of their fathers (e.g. someone who has lived in the same village or attended the same school

---

[35] Dahiru, 21 August 2009; Bashir, 23 August 2009; Yakubu, 26 August 2009; Bashir, 3 September 2009
[36] e.g. every fortnight. Ibrahim, 19 August 2009; Auwal, 19 August 2009; Mallam Gali, 2 September 2009
[37] Mallam Ali, 9 September 2009
[38] Mallam Usman, 6 August 2009

when young). Sons are frequently sent to the school their father attended himself (see Okoye and Yau 1999: 37).

Whereas I did not encounter this in my research, I was told several times that some parents also send their sons along with other children without necessarily knowing the teacher themselves, choosing a school based on its teacher's reputation rather than on personal acquaintance. The teachers' reputation also played a large role for many of the enrolments in the two schools I focussed on during my research. In both schools there were 'clusters' of students coming from the same area. When a boy visits home, the other people in the village see whether he has studied well and accordingly send their children to the same school or not.[39] Graduates spread the word about a particular school or teacher.[40] Some of the older students had enrolled *themselves* in a school based on its reputation, without being introduced by their parents.

It is typical for the *Almajiri* system that students enrol with several different teachers throughout their educational trajectories (for the reasons for this, see below). The teachers, who had successfully completed their Qur'anic education, for instance, had attended up to 14 different schools.[41] Almost all of the older students who had lived as *Almajirai* since they were young children had changed schools at least once. At first sight, the frequency of school changes may be taken to imply that the teachers' accountability is weakened in the process as links between parents and teachers and also children and parents become increasingly stretched, with children moving on from school to school. I argue that, on the contrary, the practice of frequent school changes allows students to 'vote with their feet' and thus hold teachers accountable, teachers who depend—directly or indirectly—on their students for their livelihood.

Reichmuth argues that while, for his economic success, a *Mallam*'s ability to provide spiritual guidance and help for adult clients is most important, it is through his teaching activities that he "gains respect and reverence" (1989: 51; see Paden 1973: 58). In addition to being 'living proof' of a teacher's aptitude and thus a means to attract donations, students make, albeit small and (according to the students) largely voluntary, financial contributions to their teachers' livelihoods. Most of the teachers I met during my research relied mainly on other income activities, including payment for their spiritual services. Yet, it is very likely that migratory teachers, and teachers settled in poorer neighbourhoods in particular, depend

---

[39] Mallam Gali, 17 August 2009
[40] Mallam Ni'imatullah-Rabiu, 5 August 2009
[41] Mallam Hamiz, 12 September 2009

heavily on their students' contributions—and on the customary gifts (especially grain) made by parents upon enrolment and graduation—for their survival and thus have an interest in attracting and retaining students.

School changes are mainly determined by a student's progress in his Qur'anic studies. Parents check their sons' advancement on the occasions of their home visits and accordingly make school changes. Students themselves may also initiate a change if they feel they are not making productive use of their time. Bashir (18 years old), for instance, changed schools because he felt he did not progress satisfactorily in his studies, owing to the older, more advanced students' lack of engagement in the teaching activities.[42] Abubakar (16) asked his parents to enrol him in a school in Maiduguri because he sensed he was not studying well at home (Potiskum in Yobe State) but 'playing around' too much. After two years in Maiduguri he decided to come to Kano to acquaint himself with the system of teaching there.[43]

In addition to a concern with increases in Qur'anic learning, more practical considerations such as reducing the students' hardship may lead to school changes. One father told me that he made his son return from a rural school in Katsina as he was affected by food shortages there and fell ill. After his recovery, he enrolled him in a nearby school.[44] Shehu (ca. 15), enrolled in Mallam Hamza's school for two years at the time of our interview, quit schooling in Bichi owing to a lack of washing/bathing facilities there.[45] Yakubu (19) changed to Mallam Hamza's school as this was where his relatives studied, whereas he was 'alone' in the previous school.[46] Bashir (ca. 16), previously enrolled in a school in Katsina, told his father he wanted to enrol in a school closer to his home village Dambatta and thus changed to Mallam Gali's school.[47] As they were currently enrolled in the Qur'anic schooling system, older students seemed to have an information advantage over their parents that enabled them to effect school changes according to their wishes. If they approached their parents with a school suggestion based on their peers' recommendations, their parents tended to consent.[48]

There are obvious limits to a teacher's accountability where there are large numbers of students or long periods elapsing between direct contact of children and parents. Yet, when evaluating the claim of the crisis rhetoric that teachers have little concern for their students,

---

[42] Bashir, 23 August 2009
[43] Abubakar, 12 September 2009
[44] Mallam Haruna, 16 September 2009
[45] Shehu, 12 September 2009
[46] Yakubu, 26 August 2009
[47] Bashir, 3 September 2009
[48] Jamilu, 8 September 2009; Mallam Hamiz, 12 September 2009; Mallam Isa, 17 September 2009

one should bear in mind that the former enter a strong commitment to take good care of the latter as the duty to teach is first and foremost a religious one. The relationship between *Almajirai* and their *Mallam* cannot be conceptualised simply as the provision of educational services and the consumption thereof. A teacher who has been *entrusted* (*amana*) a child incurs responsibility not only towards the child's parents but also towards God, as, ultimately, it is to God that he renders his service (see CDRT 2005: 84). One student put it the following way:

> *If you give other people's children knowledge, you will get blessing in the sight of God. And when you get to Heaven, God will cross you over* [the narrow bridge over Hell].[49]

The *Mallam*'s commitment reaches beyond the confines of the classroom, as he is responsible not only for the young people's educational success but also their moral and religious upbringing. According to Habibu:

> *It's the teacher who will take care of him* [the student]. *If the child becomes a bad person, it's because of the teacher. And if a child doesn't find food, it's the teacher who will be worried. They will blame the teacher, and no matter how many students are in school, the teacher has to sit down and teach them even if he's the only one. That is why they can't pay a teacher; it's only Allah who can pay a teacher.*[50]

Mallam Gali told me that he could be held accountable for his students' behaviour. As students were *entrusted* to a teacher, it was considered the teacher's fault if an *Almajiri* did anything wrong.[51] The question that imposes itself is how a teacher can realistically be expected to take care of the all-embracing education of often several dozen students? If one recognises Qur'anic teaching as ultimately a form of worship (which God will reward), it is easy to see why older and more advanced students are expected to take an active part in the instruction of the younger ones (not only with respect to Qur'anic recitation but also more generally) and often embrace this role willingly. Mallam Gali told me that whenever he was not around he would put older students in charge of the younger ones to maintain order.[52] While younger students complain about the physical punishment they often have to endure from the older students in addition to that from the teacher,[53] this diffusion of control

---

[49] Nura, 'radio interview', 3 September 2009
[50] 'Radio interview', 9 September 2009
[51] 23 September 2009
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Shu'aibu, 'radio interview', 17-18 September 2009

certainly makes it more difficult for students to slip out of the 'moral community' of the Qur'anic school.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an alternative reading of the *Almajiri* system to the one offered by the crisis rhetoric. While I found poverty to play a role for families' decisions to send their children on *Almajirci*, it did so indirectly by reducing educational choices rather than directly through food-shortages. I observed that links between children and parents are not severed upon enrolment in the vast majority of cases and that parents act with circumspection when choosing schools for their sons. Whereas my insights are based on a relatively small sample, I surmise that they are valid more generally, particularly as far as the mechanisms holding teachers accountable are concerned. As school changes are a readily available option within the system and as teachers depend on their students for their livelihood, the latter may effectively 'vote with their feet'. Teachers, furthermore, incur responsibility not only towards parents but also towards God. By challenging the main assumptions of the crisis rhetoric, this chapter has cleared the way to exploring the educational ideal *actually* sustaining the *Almajiri* practice, which is the subject of the next chapter.

6 Producing educational ideals

6.1 Introduction

This section explores the definition of the fully educated person, the "person endowed with maximum 'cultural capital'" (Levinson et al. 1996: 21), underpinning the *Almajiri* practice. By demonstrating that conscious spiritual, moral, and social ideals sustain the system, I challenge the conjecture that parents send their children on *Almajirci* owing to ignorance and negligence. Limited choice under conditions of poverty combines with culturally contingent ideas about childhood, high religiousness, and particular conceptions of an accomplished social life to form specific educational aspirations aiming for the acquisition of spiritual, moral, and social capital. These aspirations, I argue, can be understood as a 'tactic' of the weak, in de Certeau's sense—the 'tactic' of communities that are largely economically disenfranchised by the inequitable development in Nigeria's Muslim North. The existing social order does not give them access to economic power. Educational strategies aiming to prepare children for economically successful lives are therefore likely to fail. In such an environment, the constituencies of the *Almajiri* system focus their educational aspirations on those realms in which they have a chance of actually achieving them—the social, moral, and spiritual realms—and can thus maintain a self-definition as 'potentially achieving', rather than 'necessarily failing'.[54]

6.2 Cultural/spiritual aspirations: embodying the Holy Qur'an

Amongst Muslims in Northern Nigeria, it is widely accepted that it is a religious duty to acquire knowledge (whereby the Qur'an constitutes the necessary first step) and that every Muslim child should be sent to school (Last 2000: 375). Religious learning and facilitating

---

[54] That the system does not encompass economic *aspirations* is not to say, however, that the system does not have *implications* for the economic realm (see Chapter Seven).

the acquisition of religious knowledge, either directly through teaching or indirectly through enrolling a child in school, are seen as meritorious deeds that will be rewarded by God.

The memorisation of the Qur'an takes a central position. Historically, memorisation fulfilled practical purposes. It helped preserve the Qur'an in the near-absence of affordable books and, through recitation, made it accessible even to people who could neither read nor write (see Last 1993; Boyle 2004). How can the importance of Qur'anic memorisation nowadays be accounted for?

Bin Omar differentiates between two types of knowledge in Islam: revealed knowledge, and knowledge originating from reason, whereby reason is considered a necessary tool to understand and interpret revealed knowledge (i.e. to undertake Qur'anic exegesis—Hausa: *tafsiri*). Revealed knowledge "comes directly from God" and as such "is unique in certitude" and "fundamentally beneficial" in nature (Bin Omar 1993: 29 in Boyle 2004: 14). The Qur'an, then, is the "penultimate example of revealed knowledge for Muslims because it is considered to be the actual word of God" (Boyle 2004: 14-5).

Eickelman argues for the Moroccan context that the concept of essentially fixed (i.e. revealed and therefore necessarily true) knowledge as represented by the Qur'an accounts for the lack of explicit explanation of memorised material. Reason is regarded as "man's ability to discipline his nature in order to act in accord with the arbitrary code of conduct laid down by God and epitomized by such acts of communal obedience as the fast of Ramadan… [T]he discipline of Quranic memorization is an integral part of learning to be human and Muslim" (1985: 62-63). If its memorisation is associated with knowledge of the Qur'an, one should not confuse this with a Western concept of knowledge as the ability to understand and explain. Rather, knowledge is a more nuanced concept, also encompassing notions of "mnemonic possession" such as the ability to recite from and commit to memory. Mastery manifests itself not as an ability to explain, but rather in an "ability to make appropriate practical references to the memorised text" (64). Similarly, Last states for Northern Nigeria that "knowledge of texts and the ability to quote *in extenso* is a mark of learning… [T]he traditional mode is not to argue… Academic debate then is somewhat limited, advanced chiefly by capping quotations; memory, not logic, has the advantage" (1993: 122-123).

Qur'anic memorisation is central to religious practice. According to Wagner, "[o]ne meaning of the word Koran is 'recitation', and for Moslems, prayer is usually interpreted to mean the recitation of the Koran. Thus, the teaching of proper recitation through the memorization of the Koran has been a central feature of Islamic education" (1991: 265). As recitation is crucial to religious collective enterprises such as praying, training in recitation

53

also prepares for participation in social life (Boyle 2004: 96). In Hausa the standard way of enquiring whether somebody is Muslim is to ask whether she/he prays (*tana/yana salla*?). Whoever prays is considered part of the Muslim community (see Paden 1973: 37). Apart from revealing a very bodily conception of faith,[55] this expression makes apparent how crucial learning to pray (and to recite the appropriate verses) is to being part of this community.

As the Qur'an becomes embodied through memorisation, as it becomes a "mnemonic possession" (Eickelman 1985: 64), it comes to serve as "a source of ongoing knowledge and protection" (Boyle 2004: 83) and as a kind of compass engraved in the body that can provide direction later in life. Memorisation prepares "for a lifetime of Qur'anic discovery" (128). It is thus a necessary "first step in understanding (not a substitute for it) as it ensures that sacred knowledge is passed on in proper form so that it can be understood later" (84). All of these themes—the value of Qur'anic memorisation in itself, its importance for social relations, and its foundational nature for the acquisition of further religious knowledge—came up in my research.

The value of memorising the Qur'an

The sense that ensuring their children's religious education was their religious duty figured centrally in fathers' accounts of why they send their children on *Almajirci*. Young people also interpreted their parents' decision to send them to acquire Qur'anic knowledge (at the expense of other kinds of knowledge) as fulfilling a religious duty which they would be held accountable for if they failed to fulfil it:

> *People bring their children to Qur'anic school… because they want them to have*
> *the knowledge… Allah said if you didn't take your child to school, what will you*
> *tell the child on Judgement Day?*[56]

Many of the students I spoke to asserted that memorising the Qur'an earned them rewards in the afterlife and was useful also in this life as a 'protective shield' against mischief. Ibrahim (24), for instance, said that "whoever has Qur'anic studies in this life, if he really studied because of Allah, I don't think he will suffer in this life".[57] The meaning of Qur'anic knowledge was clearest in the students' comparisons between Qur'anic and

---

[55] The expression suggests that rather than being a matter of the mind (and thus potentially subject to decision-making), faith is considered to reside in the body and its ritualised movements (such as following the appropriate movements during prayer, or swaying gently back and forth while reciting) in a context where every aspect of everyday life is attributed to God (see Paden 1973: 64).
[56] Habibu, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009
[57] 22 August 2009

modern/secular knowledge. They reasoned that Qur'anic knowledge, by virtue of having been acquired, earned them direct benefits in the sight of God in this life and the next, whereas modern/secular knowledge would have to be translated into facts pleasing God through pious deeds.[58] The young people's accounts are reminiscent of Boyle's suggestion that the "mnemonic possession" of the Qur'an is considered beneficial in itself.

Several of the older students (particularly those who had begun their Qur'anic studies only recently) told me that it is preferable for a child to learn the Qur'an early on, as "when you are very little, that is when you understand better".[59] The way Ibrahim employs the term 'understand' (*gane*) chimes with Eickelman's description of the concept of reason in Islam. While Western conceptions of education assume that a child's abilities to understand *improve* as she/he grows older, Ibrahim suggests that the young mind is better able to grasp the Qur'an, as it can still be moulded and learn the discipline necessary to exercise reason.

Qur'anic memorisation is understood first and foremost as a personal quest for spiritual benefits, the pace and scope of which are determined by a student's intellectual capacities and commitment to his studies. This is evidenced by the fact that there is almost no group instruction except within small, temporarily constituted groups based on their present level of knowledge rather than on age-grades. Every student progresses at his own pace and also decides himself how much knowledge he wants to gain, i.e. whether he wants to commit the Qur'an to memory or leave school after having learned to read, write, and recite it.

The students embrace an interpretation of their studies as personal endeavour and through this develop a certain relationship towards their teacher. On the one hand, it offers them grounds to resist harsh treatment by the teacher: is it not their own business if they renounce the benefits they could reap from studying harder?[60] On the other hand—and probably on a more fundamental level—an interpretation of their studies as purely for their *own* benefit reduces the *Almajirai*'s room for manoeuvre, as it becomes more difficult to justify a refusal to learn and to study hard if not with reference to a student's laziness and stubbornness. Habibu, for instance, argues that

he [a brilliant student] *knows that whatever he does, he is doing it for himself. He knows that if he is not serious with his studies, he is cheating himself and he is also*

[58] Nura, 'radio interview', 3 September 2009
[59] Ibrahim, 12 September 2009
[60] Drama, 2 September 2009

cheating his parents, and he is also cheating his teacher, because they will say he is not teaching him well.[61]

An interpretation of studying as a personal affair also lends even greater legitimacy to their relative powerlessness vis-à-vis their teacher. Abubakar (11 years old), for instance, in a 'radio speech' justifies even the physical punishment of students as it is they who will reap the benefits of a successful education:

An Almajiri is not supposed to be taken from one school to another just because his father sees that he is being beaten ... because the studies are going to be useful to him, not to his father.[62]

Rationale for studying the Qur'an firstly and exclusively

Consistently, the Qur'an was perceived as a necessary first step for acquiring more knowledge throughout the life-course and not as a final stage. The students conceived of Qur'anic memorisation as a kind of 'entry ticket' they had to earn first before they would be allowed to move on to other fields of knowledge to which they explicitly aspired (see Chapter Seven).

Adults repeatedly presented me with the same rationale for exclusively studying the Qur'an (i.e. learning to read, write, and recite it) while delaying access to other forms of knowledge (also to translation and explication of the meaning of the Qur'an). They argued that proper focus on the memorisation of the Qur'an is only possible if a student has no access to other materials that may confuse or distract him. One father (who was also a Qur'anic teacher) explained to me that if a student is taught other subjects at the same time as the Qur'an, he tends to abandon the study of the Qur'an in favour of the other subjects—just as an English-speaking person like me would probably abandon a book written in Hausa in favour of an English book, as English is easier to understand and therefore more captivating.[63] Owing to the great importance attached to the Qur'an, no one wanted to incur the risk that his sons would not learn it properly. One student explained to me that as the Qur'an is very holy, students who are offered a translation before having properly memorised it risk citing it incorrectly.[64]

---

[61] 'Radio interview', 9 September 2009
[62] 'Radio interview', 3 September 2009
[63] Mallam Haruna, 16 September 2009
[64] Habibu, 23 September 2009. Some students, however, attend *Islamiyya*/modern school at the same time as Qur'anic school, and most students aspire to forms of knowledge they are not yet supposed to study (see Chapter Seven).

Social implications of Qur'anic memorisation

The social implications of acquiring (or failing to acquire) Qur'anic knowledge figured centrally in the students' accounts. Nasiru, for instance, claimed that "if someone grows up without knowing what to recite during *salla* [prayer]… it's a problem".[65] Dahiru (ca. 20) asserted that he would be ashamed hearing his friends recite the *salla* verses and not being able to recite them himself:

> *In Islam, it's better if you learn the Qur'an very well. If they know the Qur'an and I*
> *don't know the Qur'an, I only know boko, it is a shameful thing for me. It's a*
> *shameful thing if they say I don't have the Arabic knowledge.*[66]

While in the above accounts the ability to recite well seems to be considered as a form of social capital, the students were also aware of the limited number of 'fields' in which such capital could bear fruit (see Chapter Seven). Ibrahim (24), for instance, maintained that "nowadays, if you have only the Qur'anic studies, there are places that when you go there, people will think you are nobody. Presently, it's better for you to have both the Qur'anic and the *boko* studies".[67]

Leaving home to memorise the Qur'an

Qur'anic memorisation enjoys popularity amongst almost all Muslim communities and is certainly not a controversial issue in Northern Nigeria. The *Almajiri* system has instead been criticised for not imparting *enough* Qur'anic knowledge, as the students spend a large part of the day trying to secure their livelihood. What sparks controversy are the conditions under which the *Almajirai* live in order to memorise the Qur'an. What drives parents to send their children away rather than to enrol them in a local Qur'anic school (of which there are plenty in Northern Nigeria)? A number of practical considerations (or what are considered to be such) play a role: both parents and students told me that at home children would be distracted from their studies by their participation in the daily productive activities of the household.[68] A second line of argument, which also motivates school *changes*, concerns a student's familiarity with a place. Having too many friends would distract him.[69] Being exposed to different teachers with different strengths and in general encountering new circumstances and

---

[65] 21 August 2009
[66] 21 August 2009
[67] 22 August 2009
[68] Mallam Usman's students, 6 August 2009; Mallam Hussaini, Mallam Ali, 9 September 2009
[69] Sani-Musa & Jamilu, 8 September 2009; Mallam Hamiz, 12 September 2009; Mallam Haruna, 16 September 2009

people are believed to broaden a student's knowledge.[70] The largest part of the explanation is, however, accounted for by the moral and social aspirations underpinning the system, to which I will turn next.

6.3   Moral aspirations: preventing children from 'becoming spoilt'

Last writes that the functioning of Muslim Hausa society is premised upon strict controls over individual behaviour, which in turn are premised upon the sanctioned use of force by its powerful members (2000: 372). Children in this context are seen as "beings who require disciplining in order to become human". Undisciplined children are perceived as animal-like, as "they simply sleep, eat and drink" (*ibid*. 374). Without "external shaping" in the form of discipline and physical hardship, including physical punishment, "a child is scarcely human, and certainly not a proper Muslim" (*ibid*. 376; see Schildkrout 1978/2002).[71]

"The crucial site… for the disciplining of Muslim children is", Last asserts, "not the home but the school" (2000: 375). What Last argues for Qur'anic schools in general is particularly true for the *Almajiri* system. Two strands of belief sustain the assumption that the Qur'anic 'boarding' school is best placed to ensure the moral upbringing of children.

Firstly, Last describes a concern with not spoiling a child: "Adults may hesitate to coddle a child, as it is synonymous with spoiling him… and preventing him from having to behave in public as a human being properly should" (*ibid*.). Parents are particularly afraid that their deep affection may lead to the child being spoilt, a sentiment that gives rise to a "strong tradition of public restraint or emotional reserve" between parents and children (*ibid*. 378). In the face of such strongly felt concerns, it becomes plausible that parents entrust their children to a Qur'anic teacher to 'save their souls', knowing that they will have to endure considerably more hardship at school than at home.

Secondly, the Qur'anic 'boarding' school seems ideally placed to ensure that a child is exposed to the necessary hardship without his parents interfering. The distance acts as a safeguard both against 'soft' parents and fugitive children and as an additional privation

---

[70] Mallam Suleiman, 16 September 2009

[71] This mode of reasoning is intriguingly similar to Puritanical images of the 'evil child' as sinful creature needing correction in order to be saved in seventeenth-century Europe (see James, Jenks & Prout 1998).
While Last writes about *urban* Muslim Hausa society in particular, I find his observations applicable mainly to the *rural* constituencies opting for *Almajirci*. I presume that some part of the wealthier and modern-educated adults in urban Northern Nigeria have abandoned such images of childhood, as evidenced by their participation in the crisis discourse described in Chapter Four.

steeling the child's character. The *Almajirai*'s deprived living conditions serve particularly educative functions. I contend that they can be understood as training to acquire forms of *embodied* moral and social capital—stamina in the face of subjugation—in Bourdieu's sense. 'Eating' (*ci*), Last says, plays a central role in metaphors of power, the word 'eating' being used to describe situations such as winning a victory, or 'penetrating' a woman. In this context, that the *Almajirai* often toil to find enough food for the day teaches them *not* to eat: "Not to eat is to experience what it is to lack power" (*ibid*. 374). Similarly, sleeping is considered the privilege of the powerful. The *Almajirai* usually start their first lesson after the first morning prayer and are kept busy until after the evening prayer. Hardship is part and parcel of their education.

My findings tally closely with what Last describes. Several fathers justified their decision to send their sons away with the fact that their teacher would be stricter, thus making them study harder. One father explained that being poorly clothed and being sometimes hungry helped his sons to learn morals and behave well. Feeling hungry would improve their character and help them study well, as eating to full satisfaction each day would make them stubborn towards their teacher.[72]

Strictness and physical punishment are perceived as necessary and even beneficial for a child and his learning, and while it is recognised that parents are reluctant to exert much harshness, this is perceived as weakness. Mallam Gali, for instance, explained his decision to teach *Almajirai* rather than students from the neighbourhood by his experience that close-by parents could not help but interfere in the teaching. Rather than blaming them, he took this to be a structural problem to be solved by sending children away.[73] One student claimed that one studies better away from home, as at home, enjoying one's parents' support, one may simply decide to drop out of school if one feels treated badly by the teacher.[74]

Interestingly, fathers who did not send all of their children on *Almajirci* did not seem worried about the character of those children (including girls) staying at home. The thorough moral training associated with *Almajirci* was not considered a necessary, inevitable stage in childhood. This reinforces an interpretation of the *Almajirai*'s training as investment in one specific form of capital (existing amongst others).

"That most parents today went through the Islamic school system—and survived it—has made its style of discipline not only familiar but appropriate", Last argues (2000: 375). This

---

[72] Mallam Abdul-Samadu, 17 September 2009
[73] 30 August 2009
[74] Nasiru, 21 August 2009

is consistent with the impression I gained from my interviews with fathers (almost all of whom had lived as *Almajirai* themselves) who sent their sons on *Almajirci*. Several fathers told me how much they had suffered as students, arguing however that the conditions nowadays were slightly less tough, with people being richer and giving more, with more profitable activities being available to the *Almajirai* to earn a living particularly in the cities, and with the physical infrastructure of the schools having improved.[75] This account contradicts the claims of the crisis rhetoric that parents are either unaware of the conditions under which their children are studying or simply do not care. Rather than being ignorant about it, fathers seemed to approve of their sons' deprivation as a necessary evil, while being relieved that the deprivation nowadays was not quite as harsh as when they were students.

Interestingly, the children who also brought up the danger of becoming spoilt as a reason for *Almajiri* enrolment mainly linked this danger to specific external corrupting influences rather than to some intrinsic characteristics of children, thus making use of their 'tactical creativity' to shift the blame away from themselves. Habibu, for instance, suggests that parents enrol small children as *Almajirai*

> *because leaving the child at home is risky. If you leave a child, he is going around with spoiled children … the child is following the spoiled children, going to watch football, and going to roam about, and going to engage in rough play—instead of allowing your child to do all this, it's better to bring your child to Qur'anic school.*[76]

Similarly, in a small role-play about *Almajiri* enrolment, the children invented a drunkard, a gambler, and an arrested man as corrupting influences justifying a father's decision to send his son away.[77]

6.4   Social aspirations: preparing for an accomplished social life

Fending for yourself

Boyden et al. (1998) indicate that the path to adulthood in many societies is secured by making contributions to the good of the family/household rather than by children evolving autonomy as Western thinking has it. Children are expected to increasingly take over

---

[75] e.g. Mallam Ibrahim, 9 September 2009; Mallam Haruna, Mallam Suleiman and his father, 16 September 2009; Mallam Isa, Mallam Mahammadi-Difari, 17 September 2009
[76] 'Radio interview', 9 September 2009
[77] Drama, 2 September 2009

responsibilities for others as they grow up, rather than being gradually 'released' into an independent adult life. As regards the *Almajiri* system, a large concern is that children should learn early on to take care of themselves. Rather than being supported by their teachers, the students contribute towards their teacher's livelihood (see Chapter Five). The students perceived their contribution as an expression of their valuation of the teachers' efforts, which only God could adequately reward. The contributions were given voluntarily, and the students mostly determined the amount and timing themselves.[78] The children thus willingly embraced a role for themselves as contributors and supporters rather than merely recipients.

Learning to fend for themselves is a trope that came up several times in my research, pointing to the importance of economic self-reliance for social maturation. Being left without means of sustenance is thus intended not only to 'steel' the character but also to teach the child how to take care of himself so as not to be a 'drain' on others.

Two teachers told me that if a student did not find anything to eat, they would give him food.[79] Yet, this was considered exceptional and done reluctantly, conveying displeasure about the fact that pity had for once won out over principles. Mallam Gali was reluctant to give the younger students food and had even told off a British VSO-volunteer, who had lived in my house before me and regularly provided food for the *Almajirai,* for doing that. Surprisingly, however, the older students (who were too old to either beg or work as household helps) ate regularly from his house. The point was thus not that he did not have the means to provide food in exceptional circumstances or that his sense of responsibility towards his students was strictly limited to his Qur'anic lessons. Rather, the idea was that the students had to get socialised into their social obligation not to be a drain on others but to be self-sufficient. The students largely agreed. Isma'ila (13 years old), for example, stated:

> *My parents bring clothes for me; I have enough now. So even if they want to bring something for me, I tell them not to. They also bring food for me… Now, I don't want them to bring food for me again, because I want to fend for myself.*[80]

Constructing the children's income-generating activities and contributions to their teachers' livelihoods as exploitative and involuntary (as the crisis rhetoric does) fails to recognise that these contributions are often relatively minor and may indeed present a source of pride and self-esteem to the children.

---

[78] Interviews with children begging for money; Ibrahim, Abubakar & Shehu, 12 September 2009; Ibrahim, Bashir & Shu'aibu, 22 September 2009
[79] Interviews with Mallam Usman & Mallam Gali
[80] 'Radio interview', 12 September 2009

Learning respect and to be well-behaved

Several fathers commented to me that children were sent out to study so they would learn 'respect' for their parents, as having experienced the hardship and strict discipline of the Qur'anic school made them realise what they had at home.[81] The perceived ability of a teacher to teach 'morals' (*tarbiyya*) and religion (in an applied sense, going beyond mere Qur'anic recitation) also figured centrally in my respondents' accounts of what they considered to be good schools.[82]

The students pointed out several times that the role of Qur'anic schools was to mould students into *socially* suitable beings. Abubakar, for example, considered it the teacher's responsibility to ensure his students' social reputation:

> *The teacher is supposed to put his students to do the right thing so that the people in town will not see his students as bad students. And that they will not see them always going to play football.*[83]

Habibu makes a very explicit link between a family's decision to send a child to Qur'anic 'boarding' school and the perception by the community that he will therefore be well-behaved:

> *…if a child has acquired knowledge, people will say this child has good knowledge. And they will compare him with his father, and they will say, it's because the whole family is well-behaved that that child is also well-behaved. That the family doesn't make trouble and that they like Qur'anic schools, that's why* [the child is well-behaved]. *If their children are growing up, they don't leave them at home; they always take them to Qur'anic schools.*[84]

In the next chapter, I will explore in more detail what these 'morals' and 'good behaviours' consist in. Here suffice it to note that the perception that Qur'anic schools instil certain desirable social values and behaviours in children contributes to parents' decisions to enrol their children as *Almajirai*.

---

[81] e.g. Mallam Sani-Umar, Mallam Suleiman, Mallam Hamza, 16 September 2009
[82] e.g. Mallam Gali, 30 August 2009; Mallam Hussaini, 9 September 2009
[83] 'Radio interview', 3 September 2009
[84] 'Radio interview', 9 September 2009

6.5   Conclusion

This chapter explored the ideal of an 'educated person', which underpins the *Almajiri* system. In a context where even modern education—given its poor quality and limited availability—hardly presents itself as an avenue to economic prosperity, families focus their educational aspirations on realms in which they have real prospects of success. People's educational choices cannot be understood with reference merely to children's prospects in the labour market. Rather, the *Almajiri* system is sustained by spiritual, moral, and social rather than economic aspirations. These are informed by a high regard for Qur'anic memorisation, by specific conceptions of childhood giving rise to anxieties about 'spoiling' children, and by particular conceptions of an accomplished social life, including a concern for self-sufficiency and respect. The next chapter will inquire to what extent the *Almajirai* actually learn what the educational ideal sets out for them to learn.

7 Producing 'educated persons'

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore what it is that the *Almajirai* actually learn while enrolled, in terms of their emerging sense of self or 'subjectivity' (Hollway 1984), aspirations, and different forms of capital (expressed through skills and knowledge). I contend that one cannot understand what kinds of 'educated persons' the system produces unless one looks beyond the narrow confines of the classroom at the wider societal context in which the *Almajirai* grow up and one takes into account their extensive movements in contexts (e.g. earning their own livelihoods) that are not part of the school, although they are part of an *Almajiri* education.[85]

Many researchers assume that Qur'anic schools *invariably* instil certain values, such as blind obedience (Harber 1984), Islamic traditionalism (Umar 2001), or a propensity for terrorism (Awofeso 2003). I argue that, on the contrary, what the *Almajirai* learn is the product of their 'tactical' engagement with different experiences and influences and therefore inherently *variable* and context-dependent. What I present in the following is my guess at what the *Almajirai* I got to know at Mallam Gali's school, *Sabuwar Kofa*, learn.[86] Firstly, this is crucially influenced by the experience of frequent rejection during their rambles throughout Kano city. We should understand the *Almajirai*'s struggles to maintain a positive self-definition in the face of disapproval and denigration as 'tactical' in de Certeau's sense. Unable to 'leave' the confrontation with rejection behind, they 'escape' its detrimental effects by, amongst other things, conceiving of themselves in specifically moral ways.

Secondly, living in a social environment at *Sabuwar Kofa* that, overall, views modern and *Islamiyya* education in a very positive light significantly influences what the *Almajirai*

---

[85] The time spent at school may indicate how much room there is for other influences to become important: while Mallam Gali's students spent most of the day in the neighbourhood (and only the lessons in the teaching space of the 'school', i.e. the mosque), Mallam Hamza's school was virtually deserted throughout most of the day, as students spent their free-time elsewhere (e.g. in their employers' houses).

[86] Most of the material in this section stems from students aged 10–15 years, with whom I had a very close relationship (a requisite to gain insights into such delicate matters as self-esteem and notions of morality) and who were eager to participate in my research. I recognise that nuances and variation in opinion may have eluded me, given my inability to speak Hausa and my focus on relatively few young people within the temporal constraints of my research.

learn. Attracted by such forms of education, the *Almajirai* make ample use of their 'tactical creativity' to achieve forms of knowledge and skills their elders—e.g. parents and teachers—either do not value or can exclude them from by virtue of the powers that the gerontocratic order (Last 2004: 2) bestows upon them. While many of the skills and forms of knowledge the *Almajirai* aspire to remain unattainable for them *currently*—as a consequence of their structurally weak position—by nourishing the hope that they will attain them in the future, they can deflect the exclusion they are presently experiencing.

Addressing three different 'fields'—first the cultural/spiritual, second the moral/social, and third the economic—I explore in the following what the *Almajirai* learn as the result of intentional, explicit instruction, implicit learning processes, and, most importantly, unintended side-effects and their use of subversive 'tactics'.

7.2 Cultural/spiritual capital

The only explicitly taught content of the *Almajiri* system is the memorisation of the Qur'an. While teachers may communicate some moral lessons through the rules they enforce (e.g. cleanliness, punctuality, respectful and calm behaviour, and prohibitions on rough play), I gained the impression that there is little interaction between teachers and students, particularly between teachers higher up in the school hierarchy and younger students, as students keep a respectful distance. Often, it is older students that ensure order. As Qur'anic memorisation and its spiritual-capital value have already been addressed in some detail in the previous chapter, I explore here mainly how, in the context of increasing competition for what I argue is also a form of cultural capital, the students aspire and struggle to broaden their religious knowledge beyond mere memorisation.

The "mnemonic possession" of the Qur'an, in addition to being a *spiritual* asset, has been shown to be a form of *cultural* capital (Bledsoe & Robey 1986; Boyle 2004: 16) which can be converted not only into power and prestige but also into economic capital. Though its 'conversion rate' is likely to be devaluing in the face of increased competition (triggered by the greater availability and accessibility of religious forms of education) and cultural change, the fact that several of the teachers I met throughout my research lived off the money they received in exchange for prayers, recitations, and other spiritual services (e.g. Mallam Gali) proves the economic exchange value of Qur'anic knowledge. It has also been argued that ex-*Almajirai* become "religious as well as opinion leaders" in charge of various ritual

engagements in their home localities and thus can transform their religious knowledge into social standing (Iguda n.d.: 13).

Access to the cultural-capital value of religious knowledge is highly stratified in the traditional 'knowledge economy' of the Qur'anic schooling system. Only upon completion of memorising the Qur'an are students able to use their accumulated knowledge as capital. Only those who know the translation are able to demonstrate their degree of mastery—and thus to reap prestige—by making appropriate practical reference to the memorised text (see Chapter Six). Within the traditional 'knowledge economy', knowledge of Islamic subjects apart from the Qur'an was the sign of a very advanced learner. With the spread of *Islamiyya* schools that readily give away access both to translations of the Qur'an and to Islamic subjects other than the Qur'an, the Qur'anic scholars' monopoly on religious knowledge has been removed.

In this context of stratified access to knowledge—not only across age but also across different educational institutions—it is not surprising that the *Almajirai* aspire to achieving Islamic knowledge apart from the memorisation of the Qur'an. This is a wish they expressed repeatedly. They even went so far as to express clear dissent with their teachers:

Habibu: *If they brought the hadith teachers now, would your teachers agree to them staying and teaching* [the students]?

Abubakar: *We are not of the same opinion as our teachers, but we want the hadith teachers.*[87]

The *Almajirai* used the 'tactics' available to them to acquire religious knowledge excluded from their curriculum. Some students in Mallam Gali's school secretly enrolled in an *Islamiyya* school in the neighbourhood but had to drop out after their teacher found out.[88] The *Almajirai* learned the meaning of the text they memorised as far as possible from the Qur'anic exegesis (Hausa: *tafsiri*) at the Friday mosque, from books they owned which contained both Arabic verses and Hausa translations (which the boys who had received some modern education could decipher), from the radio, from preachers on the street or in the market, and by guessing from similarities between Arabic and Hausa.[89] From the way some boys frequently invoked God's presumed position on certain contentious issues to make their point,[90] I gained the impression that they claimed to possess some degree of insider

---

[87] 'Radio interview', 12 September 2009
[88] Habibu, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009
[89] Salmanu & Auwal, 1 September 2009; Sani-Musa & Jamilu, 8 September 2009; Ibrahim, Bashir & Shu'aibu, 22 September 2009; Habibu, 23 September 2009
[90] e.g. "Even Allah says you should know him first before you worship him" (Habibu, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009). "God will also punish them for giving him bad food" (Nasiru, 'radio interview', 3 September 2009). "Allah said what you cannot eat, don't give it to someone to eat, even if he's a mad man" (Habibu, 'radio

knowledge—an ability to interpret and thus turn religious knowledge to their own purposes—even though they were formally not entitled to such knowledge. As if to prove their 'tactic' successful, several officials at the Kano Ministry of Education to whom I presented some of the children's statements frowned upon their presumption to make their own interpretations.

7.3   Social/moral capital

Both intentionally *and* unintentionally, the *Almajirai* acquire a substantial amount of what I call moral/social capital. While I found that in several respects the teacher's attitude towards morality coincided with that of the students, 'moral lessons' were not an explicit part of the teaching curriculum, and some *Almajirai* even lamented that their schools did not teach enough 'religion' (*addini*), referring to the practicalities of religious practice as contained in the *hadisai* (the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed). As indicated above, teachers certainly communicate certain moral values through the rules they enforce and through setting an example themselves. I gained the impression, however, that the teacher was only one factor in how the students developed notions of self and morality.

Importantly, an environment of societal disapproval, and sometimes open contempt and maltreatment, consolidates and encourages the *Almajirai*'s compliance with some of the 'lessons' offered through school while simultaneously prompting them to challenge others. This context of societal disapproval, within which the *Almajirai* struggle to maintain their sense of self and self-worth, I argue, shapes the *Almajirai*'s subjectivities in important ways. The young people I met during my research were painfully aware of the public attitudes towards them. They frequently voiced their distress about being insulted, chased away and even physically assaulted while begging, and denied even a minimum of respect as human beings. Bashir (12 years old) felt they were treated as even less than animals, for no reason other than being *Almajirai*:

> *Some of them don't think Almajirai are human. To some, a dog is better than an Almajiri[91]… It's not good, when you are supposed to treat someone well, you just treat him bad. You don't know whether that person is a good person or a bad*

---

[91] interview', 9 September 2009). "It is said that 'whoever obeys his parents, obeys Allah'" (Habibu, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009).

[91] Unlike cats, which may be kept as pets, dogs entertain little sympathy in Hausa society. They are considered polluting, and Prophet Mohammed also disliked them (personal communication with Murray Last, 7 December 2010).

person. To some, an Almajiri, as long as he is an Almajiri, they just take him to be a bad person. They think he is an animal, that a donkey is even better than an Almajiri.[92]

Widespread stigma and social exclusion have been shown to jeopardise the development and maintenance of children's self-esteem (see Mann 2009: 6-7 for further references). It has, however, also been suggested that young people are not passive victims in the face of assaults on their dignity (Mann 2009). In the following, I illustrate the 'tactics' the young people I got to know during my research employed to uphold dignity and self-respect in a context of disapproval and rejection.

The *Modern Hausa-English Dictionary* (CSNL 2006) provides two translations for the term *Almajiri*: first, "pupil, student, learner, esp. of Koranic school", and second, "destitute or poor person". In the popular Hausa lexicon, further connotations have been added to the term in both its positive and negative dimension. Chapter Four explored the negative meanings; this section engages with the role of the *Almajirai*'s "fight for dignity" in an "economy of meaning" (Mann 2009: 11), in which they produce alternative meanings competing for recognition.

Surprisingly, many of the *Almajirai* I got to know during my research embraced the concept of '*Almajiri*' willingly and felt no shame in identifying as such. Many of their 'radio speeches' began or ended with a forceful self-identification as *Almajiri* (e.g. Habibu: "*This is my answer. From Muhammed Habibu, Dambatta, the Almajiri, Alhamdulillah*".[93]) Indeed, Mann writes about refugee children in Dar es Salaam that it is their "efforts to maintain their morals and notions of what is 'good' and 'correct' behaviour" that keep them feeling strong" (*ibid*. 8). The *Almajirai* I got to know during my research embraced an explicitly moral conception of what it means to be an *Almajiri*, which allowed them to take pride in their identity as *Almajirai* despite widespread societal disapproval. They had very clear-cut ideas about what it means to be an *Almajiri*, what moral code of conduct obtains, and what legitimate expectations one can have towards those identifying as *Almajirai*.

Often older *Almajirai* would reprimand younger ones for not behaving as an *Almajiri* should. When Shu'aibu (10 years old), for instance, began singing into my tape-recorder and fooling around, his older brother Bashir (12) told him that he, *as an Almajiri*, should not be singing like that.[94] From the children's behaviour, I gained the impression that the prestige

---

[92] 'Radio interview', 17–18 September 2009
[93] 'Radio interview', 9 September 2009
[94] Field-notes, 2 September 2009

and self-esteem deriving from the moral code of conduct pertaining to every *Almajiri* was an asset they could access whenever they needed to.

While they did 'take time off' from following the principles they had adopted for themselves (e.g. in order to play football on a lesson-free Thursday out of the sight of the teacher, who disapproved of their play), the *Almajirai* placed an enormous emphasis on 'behaving well', pointing out that horseplay and playing football were inappropriate particularly for *Almajirai* and that children should rather focus on their studies.[95] Even though they were aware of their own 'trespasses', to know that they knew how to behave well and possessed the 'moral knowledge' society often claimed they lacked helped them to maintain dignity in the face of negative attitudes. The following 'instruction' Habibu gives as teacher in a role-play to 'his' students reveals the link between behaving well and coping with societal rejection:

> *Please, if you go out to beg, I want you to always pull yourself together, because some people are used to saying, Almajirai are not well-behaved, that they like engaging in rough play.*[96]

The economic bases of the system also reinforce the importance moral capital has for the *Almajirai*. I heard several times that *Almajirai* are 'in demand' as household helps because they are 'well-behaved'.[97] Their moral/social capital thus can be converted into economic capital—paid employment. Trustworthiness is a particularly important aspect of the *Almajirai*'s 'moral code'. Access to employment as household helps and errand boys depends on a reputation of trustworthiness, as it entails entering the employer's house freely. *Almajirai* are frequently sent on errands by persons whom they are not acquainted with, who trust in the *Almajiri* coming back with the requested item rather than running away with the money. The *Almajirai* I got to know during my research surprised me time and again with their concern for being regarded as honest. Let me illustrate this with two scenes from my fieldwork:

First, in the backyard of the house in which I was living stood a mango tree. Some of the younger *Almajirai* asked me several times for the fruits, which I promised to share with them once they were ripe. The *Almajirai*, concerned that I might have left Kano before the mangoes were ripe and before I could fulfil my promise, asked for unripe mangoes, which I refused to give them as I did not think they were very healthy. One day, two of the *Almajirai*

---

[95] Isma'ila, 21 August 2009; Nazifi, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009; Maharazu & Abdullahi, 24 August 2009

[96] 'Radio interview', 12 September 2009

[97] e.g. Mallam Gali, 17 August 2009; Mallam Ni'imatullah-Rabiu, 5 August 2009

came in and asked me for unripe mangoes—as medicine (*magani*) for rashes on their heads. I laughed and told them I did not believe them that unripe mangoes were medicine, but, intrigued by their inventiveness, gave them the fruits and they left. Some minutes later, they knocked on the door, with serious looks on their faces, to show me how they had distributed pieces of unripe mango on their heads—to make sure I did not believe they had wanted to trick me into giving them mangoes.[98]

Second, my flatmate received a clothes' donation from her relatives in Britain. She gave them to Habibu (who worked in our house) and asked him to distribute them among his fellow students. As she did not see the students wearing the clothes during the following days, she suspected Habibu might instead have sold them on and asked him about their whereabouts. He replied that he had distributed them to the students in his school (and the remaining ones to students in other schools in the neighbourhood), but that they wanted to wait until a Friday before putting them on. On the following Friday, a large number of *Almajirai* paraded into the house to present themselves in their new clothes.[99]

While I do not claim that no *Almajiri* would ever lie, the impression I gained from my fieldwork is that the children are very concerned about maintaining a reputation of being honest. One *Almajiri* voiced how he resented other children's behaviour that might undermine the *Almajirai*'s reputation of honesty:

> *I don't like the children in town that behave like Almajirai* [children pretending to be Almajirai] *and collect money from people that want to buy something and just run away with the money.*[100]

The *Almajirai*'s reasoning about how to react appropriately when people gave them evidently spoiled food[101] offers a striking example of their making use of their 'tactic'—their claim to conduct themselves in an explicitly moral way in the face of denigrating treatment. The boys discussed how one should react when given food that was so obviously spoiled that there was no way for the 'donor' not to be aware of it and which put the one eating it at risk of contracting diarrhoea. They had observed *Almajirai* plastering the spoiled food on the door of the people who had given it or littering it in front of that house. Such behaviour, they asserted, would make those giving spoiled food realise their fault:

---

[98] Field-notes, 20 September 2009
[99] Field-notes, 22 September 2009
[100] Shu'aibu, 'radio interview', 17–18 September 2009
[101] e.g. food that has been kept for too long and gone off. Some *Almajirai* wash, dry, and re-heat such food before eating it. Often young children are sent to gather food remnants to give them to *Almajirai*. They might indeed be unaware that what they give away is inedible.

If you come out [of your house and see the littered food] *and you are reasonable, you know that what you did was wrong.*[102]

While the children were concerned that it might be interpreted as their fault, they were well aware of the public message of such an act and its potential to embarrass the 'perpetrators' in front of neighbours and passer-bys. Despite having such a potentially subversive means of retribution at their hands, the *Almajirai* reasoned that such behaviour was actually wrong:

They misbehave. It's better for them not to collect the food if they don't want to eat it… Some of the Almajirai move away from the house before pouring the food away. Some will go and give it to goats.[103]

In the context of widespread negative attitudes towards them, to occupy the moral high ground was more valuable to the *Almajirai* than to publicly retaliate against bad treatment. After all, they could resort to the belief that God would eventually ensure justice:

God will also punish them for giving him bad food.[104]

The *Almajiri* system has frequently been reproached for instilling 'blind obedience' in the students (e.g. Harber 1984; Winters 1987). It should be clear from what I have shown so far that 'blind obedience' does not form part of the *Almajirai*'s moral code of conduct. The students' sense of respect/obligation towards their teacher is admittedly strong, as he acts in place of a father (see Chapter Five). This does not, however, eclipse the students' sense of judgement. Abubakar, for instance, while recognising the teacher's right to administer physical punishment, asserts that there are clear limits to the legitimate use of this right:

If [the teacher] *sees anything wrong, he should correct them. If they refuse to accept the correction, he can get them and smack them. So that they will stop what they are doing. But the teacher is not supposed to smack the students over everything.*[105]

There is, furthermore, a clear age limit put on the power of teachers and even parents. Some students express the clear intention to disobey their parents once they graduate—e.g. by going to *Islamiyya* or modern school (see below).

In addition to claiming superior 'moral knowledge', the *Almajirai* I got to know during my research embraced a specific interpretation of their begging that helped them maintain

---

[102] Habibu, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009
[103] Habibu, 'radio interview', 12 September 2009
[104] Nasiru, 'radio interview', 3 September 2009
[105] 'Radio interview', 3 September 2009

self-respect. "[T]he Islamic status of the Koranic student", Lubeck writes, "carried with it certain material and social expectations by the subordinate strata towards the affluent and dominant strata", considered by many as religiously ordained rights (1985: 376). It is important to the *Almajirai* that such an interpretation of their begging is available, I think, as it offers them a 'tactic' to maintain self-respect in the face of rejection when they go out begging. The *Almajirai* I got to know during my research, as students of the Holy Qur'an, were able to imagine themselves as legitimate recipients (and even claimants) of *sadaka* (alms), who, by begging, reminded the affluent of their religious obligations rather than merely appealing to their sympathy. On one occasion, I gave an old woman begging in front of my house money, which led Abubakar and Bashir, who had observed me, to run up and tell me I should give them alms too, as they were *Almajirai*. They had never begged from me before but seemed to have concluded from seeing me giving that I acknowledged my obligations and could thus effectively be confronted with claims.[106]

Even though all students I spoke to preferred work in houses over begging, begging was deemed morally acceptable and less compromising than some other forms of work. Habibu and Ibrahim, for example, argued about a boy picking empty toiletry flacons from the rubbish dump to be refilled and resold under false labels that his work was immoral, as it involved cheating the customers, and that he should rather engage in more respectable activities: "If he's an *Almajiri* he can still go and beg or get a house to work".[107]

To give to begging *Almajirai* was widely perceived as a form of worship by insiders of the system. One father, for instance, explained to me that *Almajirai* would receive more support nowadays as everyone was searching for a way to earn rewards in Heaven.[108] Such a conception of their begging was also apparent in the phrases the *Almajirai* used when begging. They thanked, for example, by saying "may God accept this gift" (*Allah ya karba*), suggesting the donors had rendered a service to God rather than merely to them. Bashir (18 years old) and Nura (ca. 19) equated supporting *Almajirai* with having strong faith:

Bashir: *In Nigeria, how many Almajirai do the rich take responsibility for*?

Nura: *Actually, the rich in Nigeria, not all of them are very God-fearing* [imani].

Out of a hundred, you can only get 1% that are very God-fearing.[109]

Mann writes about young refugees in Tanzania that "[a]nother strategy that children use is to assert their cultural superiority over that of their hosts in Dar es Salaam" (2009: 9). The

---

[106] Field-notes, 11 August 2009
[107] Ibrahim, 23 August 2009
[108] Mallam Suleiman, 16 September 2009
[109] 'Radio interview', 3 September 2009

Almajirai I got to know during my research used similar tactics, criticising those denying them respect for being malign and lacking faith and knowledge. Nasiru argues that *Almajirai* in urban areas are treated worse than in rural areas because

> *most of the village people are* [Qur'anic] *teachers, they know the Qur'an and its importance very well. In Kano, some of them are illiterate. They only have the boko studies.*[110]

Often they invoked God, whom they thought 'on their side', to substantiate their criticisms. Habibu, for instance, argued about people giving spoiled food to *Almajirai*:

> *Allah said what you cannot eat, don't give it to someone to eat, even if he's a mad man. The people who are doing this do not know. May Allah show them the way. May Allah give them understanding.*[111]

Other *Almajirai* interpreted this behaviour as malignant:

> *They just want to treat us badly... And they know that this is bad treatment.*[112]

One boy invoked the principle of equality of all Muslims in the eyes of God to criticise those denying the *Almajirai* respect by giving them spoiled food. Paradoxically, he invoked a value usually associated with Islamic reformism, whose supporters tend to oppose *Almajirci* (see Chapter Four), and its concern with breaking up the rigid hierarchies sanctioned by Sufism, rather than with traditional Qur'anic schools:

> *I want people to remember that the way Allah creates you is the same way Allah creates an Almajiri; the way Allah loves you, that is the way he loves an Almajiri; and also remember it's Allah who gave you the money for the food. But you keep the food and allow it to spoil first before you give it to an Almajiri.*[113]

One last 'tactic' discussed here is that of distinguishing themselves from *Almajirai* considered to be at risk or fault. By setting themselves apart from other children, they could escape some of the stigma associated with the *Almajiri* system in general. For instance, the young people drew a strong dividing line between children begging for food at houses and children begging for money on the street. While they considered the former acceptable and safe, they deemed the latter corrupting and dangerous. There was some disagreement as to why *Almajirai* take to the street to beg, whether it was because of 'profligacy' (*iskanci*) or

---

[110] 'Radio interview', 3 September 2009
[111] 'Radio interview', 9 September 2009
[112] Isma'ila, 'radio interview', 12 September 2009
[113] Habibu, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009

because of a need for cash.[114] The children concurred, however, that begging on the street was physically dangerous, as children risked being hit by a car,[115] and that it went hand in hand with truancy.[116] One boy went so far as to claim begging on the street was not even 'proper begging', as begging (*bara*) was "house by house".[117]

The young people agreed that in order to earn cash income, working in a house was preferable to begging for money on the street—even though the latter was considered financially more rewarding. Habibu refers explicitly to the respect available for different cash-earning activities as a reason to prefer house-work over street-begging:

> *It is better to work in a house than to beg on the street; you earn more respect when you work in houses to get money than if you beg on the street. Your parent may see you on the street begging and think you are not studying well.*[118]

Mallam Gali also held strong views about *Almajirai* begging for money on the street and made the link between their presence on the street and the moral corruptibility hinted at in the children's accounts explicitly, as exposure to money and street life would spoil their character. From being good and trustworthy persons, they would turn into beggars and thieves.[119]

7.4 Economic capital

A number of authors suggest that the *Almajiri* system serves to initiate its students into urban life and the spheres of trade, craft, and labour (Winters 1987: 179; Reichmuth 1989: 49; Iguda n.d.: 21-22). I also came across the argument that the *Almajirai*, thanks to their down-to-earth education, did not have the inflated expectations for formal-sector jobs existent amongst high-school and university students, which lead the latter to turn to crime and violence once their high hopes get shattered. The *Almajiri* system, it is claimed, actually safeguards against the production of additional, unemployable, modern-educated school-leavers who "believe they can't do the petty things the *Almajirai* do" and who therefore become '*yan daba* (hoodlums). "You rarely find an unemployed *Almajiri*", Adamu explains.

---

[114] Ibrahim, Bashir & Shu'aibu, 22 September 2009
[115] Habibu, 23 August 2009; Isma'ila, 21 August 2009
[116] Ibrahim & Shu'aibu, 22 September 2009
[117] Shu'aibu, 22 September 2009
[118] 23 September 2009
[119] 23 September 2009

"The *Almajirai* learn to fend for themselves at an early stage. This may be hard, but they are skilled in the school of life"[120] (see Iguda n.d.: 14; Okoye & Yau 1999: 41).

One problem with such an argument is its essentialist leaning, reminiscent of the 'youth bulge hypothesis' (e.g. Urdal 2004) that portrays both *Almajirai* and modern-educated youth as homogenous with predetermined futures. While it seems likely that the *Almajirai* integrate into the urban petty economy with relative ease, my research suggests that they—probably as the consequence of their interactions with them—actually nurture fairly similar hopes to those of their counterparts in modern schools. But let me first address the economic skills the *Almajirai* actually acquire.

The *Almajiri* system socialises its older students to a considerable degree into economic activities they may likely pursue in their future lives. The students' informal initiation into the urban economy was never pointed out to me as an active reason for opting for *Almajirci*. I doubt, however, that parents and children are unaware of the fact that being enrolled as *Almajiri* in metropolitan Kano opens up new economic activities for the young people. While I am reluctant to praise the kinds of skills the *Almajirai* acquire as anything more than basic qualifications and networks allowing them to earn a living in the urban petty economy, they have to be evaluated in light of the alternatives available to the *Almajirai*. The returns from modern education are limited; formal-sector jobs are scarce; the rural agricultural economy is declining, while the pressure on the land is growing.

The older students I met throughout my research all looked back on impressive track-records of petty employment and small trading (into which the younger students are gradually socialised by undertaking minor tasks such as running errands). They have washed and ironed clothes, have been involved in the sale of tea, juice, food colours, vegetables, Hausa novels, drinking water, and clothes, have washed cars, watered flowers, carried loads, worked as motorbike-taxi drivers ('*yan acaba*), and occasionally helped a teacher on his farm. In Mallam Hamza's school, most of the older and some of the younger students were involved in yoghurt trade, which they managed in all its steps from the purchase at a factory in adjacent Kaduna State down to the street peddling. A few students learned a craft systematically from relatives or friends. Some manufactured caps. One student was learning to sew; one trained as a mechanic; another trained as a carpenter.

Through their frequent exchange and close cooperation with modern-educated persons (either in the houses where they worked or in the marketplace), the students acquired some

---

[120] 26 July 2009

basic literacy and numeracy skills. When we asked Ibrahim (24 years old), who played a crucial role in the distribution of yoghurt to retail sellers, how he managed the calculations, he maintained that "living among people that go to school", he had learned some English and to read and write in Hausa.[121] Habibu had learned to write the Latin alphabet fairly well from his friends. Certainly, most *Almajirai* do not, however, acquire enough literacy to be eligible for formal-sector employment, and I am doubtful about the extent to which they are able to participate in any form of institutionalised politics.[122]

Through their involvement in various activities, passing from petty job to petty job with great ease, constantly keeping their eyes open for new and better opportunities, acquiring trading and very basic literacy and numeracy skills, and enlarging their network of informants, collaborators, and potential employers, the students, I think, become experts in eking out a living in Kano's urban economy. At the same time, they risk becoming increasingly de-skilled for a rural livelihood: spending most of their time in the city, they miss out on the informal socialisation into farming cycles. One father commented that he sent his sons to a rural school even though he was convinced they would study better in an urban area, as he wanted them to learn properly how to farm and rear animals. A more important deterrent, however, was the prospect that his sons would get used to city life and not want to return to their village after their studies[123]—a fairly well-founded fear, given the future aspirations of most students (see below). On one occasion, students in Mallam Hamza's school, after a quarrel, insulted each other as 'villagers'. That 'villager' is used as an insult firstly signals that the intention of fathers (from rural areas) to send their children on *Almajirci* so that they learn to respect them may well be defeated. Secondly, it suggests that the prospect of returning to village life has little appeal to most *Almajirai*.[124]

Future aspirations

Their aspirations can inform us about young people's present experiences as well as their visions for the future and sense of self-efficacy, Crivello argues. Aspirations, she claims, provide a conceptual bridge between structure and agency, linking "socioeconomic structures (what society has to offer) and individuals at the cultural level (what one wants)" (2009: 2-3). It is useful to distinguish between 'aspirations' and 'expectations', as MacLeod suggests.

---

[121] 1 September 2009

[122] Further research is needed to explore in more depth the *Almajirai*'s opportunities to engage in institutionalised politics.

[123] Mallam Haruna, 16 September 2009

[124] Field-notes, 8 September 2009

While the former express personal hopes and desires with little consideration of limitations arising from (lacking) personal skills, knowledge, mobility, etc., the latter take such constraints into account (1987: 20). To enquire into the *Almajirai*'s future aspirations (as distinct from their realistic expectations) reveals how they position themselves within society and what kinds of ideals they are pursuing.

Firstly, what can *Almajirai* realistically *expect* to be doing in their future lives? A number of government officials and successful businessmen in Kano have gone through the traditional Qur'anic education system.[125] My assumption, however, is that as modern education has become more widespread and traditional Qur'anic education increasingly sidelined, such 'success stories' become less and less imitable for the students currently enrolled in the system. An in-depth study of what actually happens to ex-*Almajirai* is still lacking. From what teachers and current students told me about graduated students, however, I could gain an idea about what they are likely to do. According to Mallam Gali, some of his former students have returned to their villages to become farmers. The majority stayed in Kano, engaging in petty business. Some became Qur'anic teachers themselves. When I asked whether former students supported the school, he explained that most of them did not have the means, and if anything he would help them out.[126]

How does this contrast with the students' future *aspirations*?[127] While some of them aspired to becoming Qur'anic teachers or preachers, only one told me that he wanted to return home and farm.[128] Some voiced the wish to become a judge, soldier, primary school teacher, or government official.[129] Most students hoped to get involved in a well-paying business activity of some sort.

Interestingly, despite the fact that moral, spiritual, and social rather than economic aspirations underpin the *Almajiri* system, its students nevertheless aspire to living economically successful lives. While one may argue that amongst the younger begging students, a claim to communal solidarity amongst Muslims (and thus a sense of entitlement to alms) may prevail to some extent, amongst the older ones engaged in the urban petty economy, this seems to give way to a more individualistic, entrepreneurial spirit, reminiscent

---

[125] Alhaji Isyaka Rabi'u, founder of the airline IRS (Prof Adamu, 23 July 2009), and Sadi Yahaya, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer on the State Education Sector Project of the Kano Ministry of Education, are, for instance, ex-*Almajirai*.

[126] 17 August 2009; 30 August 2009

[127] In the following, I rely on the statements of older students, most of them in Mallam Hamza's school, as they engaged more concretely with their future prospects than the younger students, most of whom stated they wanted to become Qur'anic teachers.

[128] Abubakar, 12 September 2009

[129] Ibrahim, Auwal, Abubakar, 19 August 2009; Nasiru, 21 August 2009

of the reformist ideologies presented in Chapter Four. Making money was considered an important step in growing up. Sani-Musa (24 years old), for instance, dropped out of the comforts of stable employment as household help because he felt too old to depend on the small sums his employers would give him and wanted to earn his own money and set up his own business.[130]

Furthermore, there seemed to be agreement amongst the students that mutual obligations in the school existed only between brothers and close friends. Only a close friend could be expected to share his food.[131] Only older brothers could be expected to take responsibility for young *Almajirai*'s bodily hygiene.[132] Older *Almajirai* trying to start up a business felt no sense of entitlement to support from former or fellow *Almajirai*.[133]

While students had high-flown hopes for their economic futures, they were aware that it would be difficult for them to realise them. Jamilu, for instance, indicated, after the students had talked about their future aspirations, that there was no way they would be able to accomplish what they had set out for themselves, particularly as they had attended only Qur'anic school. They could work neither in the government nor in public schools and would depend on external support to set up successful businesses.[134] An optimistic belief that they would in the future be able to pursue/further their modern education, combined with the belief that such education would eventually help them obtain the jobs they aspired to, I felt, kept the students' spirits up (see below).

Modern education

Though this was rarely articulated, I gained the impression that the *Almajirai*'s interactions with the households in which they worked importantly influenced their perspectives and attitudes. Despite some cases of abuse (i.e. employers denying the children their wage or shouting at them),[135] most children and youths experienced their employment relationships as positive. Employing households helped *Almajirai* find other forms of employment, sewed clothes for them on *Eid al-Fitr*, and offered a space to socialise and relax in the shade during the day.[136] This positive relationship with families sending their own children to modern education, I think, partly accounts for the *Almajirai*'s enthusiasm for

---

[130] 8 September 2009
[131] Ibrahim, 23 August 2009
[132] Isma'ila, 21 August 2009; Nasiru, 'radio interview', 3 September 2009
[133] Safiyanu, 23 August 2009; Ibrahim, 1 September 2009
[134] 1 September 2009
[135] e.g. Maharazu & Abdullahi, 24 August 2009
[136] Dahiru, 21 August 2009; Auwal, 25 August 2009; Mikail, 26 August 2009; Sani-Musa, 8 September 2009

modern education, despite reportedly critical attitudes on the side of some parents and teachers.[137]

One vehement opponent of the *Almajiri* system told me that in his view the most promising strategy to end it was to encourage households to take in an *Almajiri* as employee and protégé, as over time a relationship would develop and the employers would eventually see to it that 'their' *Almajiri* received a modern education.[138] Even though not crowned with success, this is what happened in the case of Habibu:

> *In the house where I work, and other people that are nice to me, they asked me to ask my teacher and my brother if they would allow me to go to boko school, but my brother said no and my teacher also said no.*[139]

While further research is needed to explore this issue, I gained the impression that the relationship between the *Almajirai* and the children of the households in which they work is complex, with the *Almajirai* struggling to defend their self-definition vis-à-vis a form of childhood they may secretly desire (I surmise), yet which is unattainable. I have never seen Habibu and Ibrahim as lost for an answer as when I asked them whether they would want to swap places with the children of the houses in which they work.[140] Isma'ila negated my somewhat impertinent question, stating he would "prefer to fend for [him]self",[141] thus reasserting the social superiority of 'his' form of childhood. The *Almajirai* agreed unanimously, however, that the education pursued by these children—a combination of modern school in the morning and *Islamiyya* school in the afternoon—was good.

Most of the *Almajirai* I got to know during my research saw modern education in a very positive light and were convinced of its importance for an economically successful life—to which they aspired. They deemed modern education important in order "to progress",[142] because it would "help [them] on Earth",[143] and because they felt "if you have only the Qur'anic studies, there are places that when you go there, people will think you are nobody".[144]

---

[137] These relationships are obviously not *restricted* to families with whom an employment relationship exists but may be strongest with them. For older students no longer working in houses, relationships with modern-educated peers in the workplace may be more important, although relationships with former employer-households seem to persist also after a student's employment has ended. The fact that even some Qur'anic teachers send their own children to modern school certainly also plays an important role.

[138] Anonymous, 27 August 2009

[139] 23 August 2009

[140] 23 August 2009

[141] 21 August 2009

[142] Aminu, 25 August 2009

[143] Nura, 'radio interview', 3 September 2009

[144] Ibrahim, 22 August 2009

Several of those who had attended primary school for a number of years expressed regret about their parents' decision to interrupt this education to send them on *Almajirci*.[145] Many of the students, aware that they were missing out on something they deemed important, consoled themselves with the thought that they would be able to pursue modern education some time in the future. One of the boys (whose parents were strictly opposed to anything Western) resolved the tension between his need (and wish) to obey his parents and his sense of frustration about being denied a valued opportunity to learn, by reinterpreting his obedience towards his parents as a service to God, and, as such, easier to render:

> *If your parents took you to Qur'anic school, and you refuse to study and say you only prefer boko, what will you tell Allah in Heaven?… After I complete my school, I can go to boko, because my parents will not give their consent for me to go to boko now. I have to obey them, because it is said that "whoever obeys his parents, obeys Allah"… we still have hope that we will go to boko. We will not lose hope.*[146]

Habibu asserted that he would not send his own children on *Almajirci*, and I am tempted to think many of the other *Almajirai* will do the same:

> *May God bless our parents and we thank them very much for bringing us to Qur'anic school, and we also will teach our children, even if they don't go to Makarantar Allo* [Qur'anic 'boarding' school].[147]

---

[145] e.g. Sunusi, 6 August 2009; Ibrahim, 12 September 2009
[146] Habibu, 'radio interview', 9 September 2009. Despite his 'resolution' to obey his parents, Habibu eagerly took up my offer to give him English lessons.
[147] 'Radio interview', 9 September 2009

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated what the *Almajirai* actually learn through their enrolment and how this translates into spiritual/cultural, moral/social, and economic capital. It found that in many respects their social environment is at least as important for what the *Almajirai* learn as the school setting in the narrow sense. It suggested that in a context where the 'market value' of Qur'anic memorisation is declining, the *Almajirai* apply their 'tactical creativity' to gain access to forms of capital they consider important for living successful lives, but which they are (formally at least) excluded from.

My research focused on the experience of the *Almajirai* themselves. I am therefore not in a position to make comparisons with other groups in Nigerian/Hausa society. However, my research suggests that there may be similarities—such as an appreciation for modern education, the hope to advance through it, and a fairly individualistic entrepreneurial spirit—that reduce the tensions between insiders and outsiders of the system and potentially make it possible for ex-*Almajirai* to insert themselves seamlessly into mainstream society. At the same time, my research shows that there are unresolved tensions that may prove problematic in the future: the hope to advance through modern education (to be pursued in the future) offers large scope for disappointment; and it remains to be seen how the ambiguity inherent in the relationship between *Almajirai* serving as household helps and their better-off employers can be resolved.

From what I understood from the students, they do not feel rejected systematically by any one identifiable group. I am therefore inclined to believe that they are not likely to project the blame for their marginalisation on any group in particular. Furthermore, the *Almajiri* identity and the 'moral capital' associated with it, I think, work to cushion assaults on their self-esteem and dignity. The ability to conceive of themselves positively makes it possible for the *Almajirai* not to resent the better-off and to embrace the hope to advance themselves through modern education in the future. The concluding chapter will spell out directions for further research to verify such conjectures.

8 Conclusion

Northern Nigerian traditional Qur'anic 'boarding' schools and their students have attracted intense negative attention over the last three decades. The *Almajirai* have been at the centre of anxieties not only about child abuse and exploitation (e.g. Daily Trust, 21 November 2009), but also about sectarian and inter-religious violence in Northern Nigeria. As "gullible children" (Awofeso et al. 2003: 320) and "angry… youths" (Weekly Trust, 13 December 2002, in Adamu n.d.) enrolled in a system out of tune with the "exigencies of modern times" (The Nation, 11 January 2010), they have been depicted as both a burden on and a threat to society.

This thesis provided a grounded analysis of the *Almajiri* system, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork which included semi-structured interviews as well as participatory research with *Almajirai* in two schools in metropolitan Kano. It addressed two questions: why families opt for *Almajirci* and what the *Almajirai* learn through their enrolment. Such empirical investigation was long overdue, given the emotionally charged overtones of many discourses about *Almajirci* and the role such discourses play in carving out new realities—by informing policy and by becoming a factor itself in the 'cultural production' of 'educated persons' in the *Almajiri* system.

Firstly, why do families opt for *Almajirci*? This poses a puzzle, as the Qur'anic scholars, once a highly regarded and influential social category, have largely slid into political, social, and economic marginality. Many have resorted to a rhetoric of crisis to explain the continued existence of the system, invoking acute poverty and parental neglect and ignorance. This thesis has provided an alternative account.

I found that the structural factors highlighted by the existing literature on Qur'anic 'boarding' schools in West Africa are indeed important: poverty and a declining rural economy, coupled with rapid population growth, are the background against which the *Almajiri* system has to be evaluated. However, structural factors do not tell the entire story. Rather, we should understand *Almajirci* as the explicitly *educational* endeavour of economically marginalised communities, who—in a context where poor-quality modern education is not a route to economic prosperity—focus their educational aspirations on realms where they have prospects of succeeding. Conscious spiritual, social, and moral rather

than economic objectives sustain the system. *Almajirci* aims to mould children into socially suitable beings by teaching them respect and self-sufficiency. It seeks to prevent them from 'becoming spoilt', by exposing them to a certain degree of hardship, and endeavours to ensure that they acquire spiritual capital by memorising the Holy Qur'an.

What the *Almajirai* actually learn throughout their enrolment formed the second question for this thesis. My tentative answer is that what the crisis rhetoric suggests—that the system produces students that are 'gullible', 'angry', and unprepared for modern life—is unlikely to be true.

As I have outlined, the *Almajiri* system socialises its older students to a considerable degree into economic activities they are likely to pursue in their future lives. While they are unlikely to acquire more than basic 'survival skills' in Kano's urban economy, these have to be evaluated in light of the alternatives available in a context where the returns from modern education are limited and formal-sector jobs scarce, while the rural agricultural economy is declining and population pressure on the land growing. Further research is needed to enquire into how their education sustains former *Almajirai* in adult life.

The *Almajirai* have been described as resisting modern developments, especially those originating in the West, with the Maitatsine riots in the 1980s being the most prominent example (e.g. Lubeck 1985). While I have no doubt that there are Qur'anic teachers, and parents opting for *Almajirci,* who hold such views, the *Almajirai* I got to know during my research regarded modern education highly, possibly as a result of their interactions with modern-educated persons in their workplaces. Several students who had attended primary school before becoming *Almajirai* regretted their parents' decision to interrupt this education; many nurtured the hope of pursuing modern education in the future.

In July 2009, several hundred people died in a violent conflict between members of the Muslim sect *boko haram* ('modern/Western education is forbidden') and the police in several cities and towns in Northern Nigeria. Many members of the sect were modern-educated but unable to translate their education into economically successful lives (Oxford Analytica 2009). Judging from the high regard in which the *Almajirai* I got to know hold modern education, I find it difficult to imagine that *boko haram* (or Maitatsine) views hold much appeal for them. Further research is needed into the views of graduated *Almajirai,* given that the hope to advance through modern education (to be pursued in the future) offers large scope for disappointment.

In my research I encountered neither the 'gullible children' nor the 'angry youths' ready to engage in sectarian or inter-religious violence portrayed by the crisis rhetoric. Rather than

being downtrodden and frustrated, the young people I met managed to cope with disapproval and rejection—and less-than-rosy future prospects—by embracing explicitly moral ideas of what it means to be an *Almajiri*. The ability to conceive of themselves positively, I think, made it possible for the young people I became familiar with not to resent the better-off and to retain the hope that future modern education will enable them to improve their lives. Further research should investigate under what circumstances this 'protective shield' may break down. To explore the interactions of *Almajirai* working in houses with their employers (and their children) could provide valuable insights into a potential source of tension and the young people's 'tactics' to deal with apparent inequalities of opportunity.

While the Qur'anic schooling system certainly stresses the importance of respectful behaviour towards social elders, it does not instil 'blind obedience' (Harber 1984).[148] The young people I got to know were critical of the *Almajiri* system, to the degree possible in a gerontocratic order; and probably encouraged by a social environment that valued other forms of education (i.e. modern and *Islamiyya* education), they challenged it through their aspirations for skills and forms of knowledge they were, formally at least, excluded from.

The recognition that what the *Almajirai* learn is the result of their 'tactical' agency as well as intentional instruction, and therefore inherently context-dependent, is at the same time the main finding and the main limitation of my research. More research will be needed to explore alternative outcomes of the open-ended learning process of the *Almajiri* system under different circumstances. Students in rural and peripatetic schools and *Almajirai* begging for money on the street may have quite different experiences from the *Almajirai* who participated in my research.

In summary, this research has shed light on the processes taking place within an Islamic schooling system that has attracted much criticism and anxiety, and as such this research may contribute towards the demystification of Islamic educational institutions more generally. What is its wider relevance for development studies?

On a theoretical level, my research demonstrates the potential added value of integrating insights of the anthropology and sociology of education into development studies. It offers a rationale to think about 'education' outside the boxes of formal schooling and intentional instruction. Alongside explicit instruction, implicit learning processes and unintended consequences of educational arrangements may be crucial in what young people learn.

---

[148] While I doubt that *any* education system can instil 'blind obedience', given that young people are not passive 'containers' to be 'filled' with certain values, the *Almajiri* system, given the emphasis laid on the students' ability to be self-reliant, seems a particularly improbable candidate.

Whereas their acquisition of spiritual capital is largely the product of intentional instruction, the *Almajirai* accumulate moral/social capital particularly as a result of their 'tactical creativity' in dealing with the disapproval and rejection they encounter during their rambles throughout Kano city. What the *Almajirai* learn in terms of economic capital and in terms of aspirations for such capital (the hope to acquire modern education)—they learn outside school.

My research supports the work of Levinson et al. (1996) in suggesting that forms of capital other than 'human capital' should be taken seriously in debates about education, as the contextually embedded importance of such capitals may inform the educational choices families make. Families opt for *Almajirci* not with economic goals in mind, but to ensure that their children acquire moral, social, and spiritual capital. In practical terms, an approach recognising various forms of capital can help one to understand why families may resist attempts to universalise basic education—despite its centrality to the current development paradigm.

Moreover, my research contributes towards theoretical debates about the role education plays for inter-generational transfers of poverty and life chances. I offered an analytical framework that integrates a broad view of what counts as education and educational achievement with an analysis of wider power structures and students' opportunities to exercise agency within them. While further research involving graduated *Almajirai* is needed to confirm this, it suggests that the *Almajirai* may effectively disrupt processes of social and cultural reproduction through subversive 'tactics', such as aspiring to skills and forms of knowledge not offered and life-styles not envisaged by the *Almajiri* system. This insight is an extension of Last's (2004) finding that 'moving away' rather than open confrontation is the dominant form through which the young may express discontent in a gerontocratic order, which may help one understand inter-generational change in Northern Nigeria.

My last observation concerns the methodological merits of this work. My research builds on previous studies by taking young people and their views seriously and choosing methods that allow them to express their views freely. Many if not most of my insights could only be gained because my methods reflected the young people's preferred forms of expression. If this work increases understanding of the *Almajiri* system, it is because the *Almajirai* were involved in creating the data on which it builds.

References

Primary sources

Civil society representatives, government officials & academia				
Name	**Function**	**Date**	**Format**	**Place**
Mrs Aysha Ahmed Hassan	President of FOMWAN, Federation of Muslim Women Nigeria	15/07/2009	Interview	Kano Office FOMWAN, Kano
Mrs Mariam Asabai Bala Borodo	Vice-president Muslim Sisters Organisation of Nigeria	15/07/2009	Interview	Muslim Sisters Organisation of Nigeria, Kano Office, Kano
Mrs Jamila Ibrahim-Yahaya	Secretary General Muslim Sisters Organisation of Nigeria			
Reverend Samuel Enaboakpe	COCFOCAN, Coalition of Community-based Organisations Focused On Child Almajirai In Nigeria	16/07/2009	Interview	COCFOCAN, Sharada, Kano
Dr Habu Mohammed &	Assistant Director Centre for Democratic Research and Training	17/07/2009	Interview	Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Mambayya House, Kano
Mallam Murtala Abubakar Ringin	Research Fellow Centre for Democratic Research and Training			
Muhammed A. Sharif	Director of Enlightenment Department, Sharia Commission	20/07/2009	Interview	Sharia Commission, Kano
Sani Idris Baba	Director of Education Department			
Prof Abdalla Uba Adamu	Professor at Bayero University Kano	23/07/2009 26/07/2009	Interview	At his house, Municipal LGA, Kano
Dr Haruna Wakili	Director Mambaya House	24/07/2009	Interview	Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Mambayya House, Kano
Aminu Muhammed Fagge	University Lecturer at Bayero University Kano	25/07/2009	Interview	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano City
Mallam Adamu Kiyawa		27/08/2009	Interview	Gateway International School, Tarauni LGA, Kano

| Anonymous | Primary school teacher | 27/08/2009 | Interview | Tarauni LGA, Kano |
| Dr Bashir Galadanchi | Commissioner for Science and Technology | 07/09/2009 | Interview | Ministry of Education, Gidan Murtala, Kano |

Qur'anic teachers				
Name	**Function**	**Date**	**Format**	**Place**
Mallam Usman	Qur'anic teacher	19/07/2009 25/07/2009 06/08/2009	Interview	Mallam Usman's school, Tarauni LGA, Kano
Mallam Muhammed Sarana	Qur'anic teacher	21/07/2009	Interview	Garun Mallam, Kano State
Mallam Hamza	Qur'anic teacher, school director	26/07/2009	Interview	Makarantar Mallam Hamza, Municipal LGA, Kano City
Mallam Ni'imatullah Rabiu	Qur'anic teacher	05/08/2009	Interview	Makarantar Fatuhul Islam, Masallacin Yar'akwa, Unguwa Uku, Kano
Mallam Gali	Qur'anic teacher	11/08/2009 17/08/2009 30/08/2009 23/09/2009	Interview	Sabuwar Kofa, Municipal LGA, Kano City
Mallam Muhammed Hamiz	Qur'anic teacher, teacher of the Almajirai	12/09/2009	Interview	Makarantar Mallam Hamza, Municipal LGA, Kano City

Fathers of *Almajirai*				
Name	**Function**	**Date**	**Format**	**Place**
Mallam Hussaini	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	09/09/2009	Interview	Ƙunchi village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano state
Mallam Ali	Father of *Almajirai*	09/09/2009	Interview	Ƙunchi village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano state
Mallam Ibrahim and bystanders	Father of *Almajirai*	09/09/2009	Interview	Ƙunchi village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano state
Mallam Haruna	Father of *Almajirai* & retired Qur'anic teacher	16/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Suleiman, and his father	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	16/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State

Mallam Haruna	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	16/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Hamza	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	16/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Sani-Umar, bystanders	Father not sending his children on *Almajirci* & Qur'anic teacher	16/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Isa	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	17/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Saibu	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	17/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Mahammadi-Difari	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	17/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Awal	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	17/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Abdul-Samadu	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	17/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Salisu	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	17/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State
Mallam Shehu	Father of *Almajirai* & Qur'anic teacher	17/09/2009	Interview	Sodawa village, Ƙunchi LGA, Kano State

Almajirai				
Name	**Function**	**Date**	**Format**	**Place**
Tasi'u (ca. 17) Abdulaziz (ca. 12) Ibrahim (ca. 11) Isa (ca. 10) Sunusi (ca. 17)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Usman's school	06/08/2009	Group interview	Mallam Usman's school, Tarauni LGA, Kano
Abdulhadi (ca. 9) Abdullahi (11) Nasiru (13) Musa (ca. 9) Maharazu (ca. 8)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	11/08/2009	Painting activity and conversation about paintings	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano

Muktar (ca. 11) Aminu (14) Musa (ca. 11) Bilya (ca. 14)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	15/08/2009	Painting activity and conversation about paintings	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Sadik (ca. 11)	Day-student, Mallam Hamza's school			
Shehu (ca. 16) Abubakar (16) Ibrahim (ca. 16) Auwal (19) Ibrahim (24) Musa (18) Salmanu (18) Yakubu (19) Mikailu (20)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	19/08/2009	Focus-group discussion	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Isma'ila (13) Abubakar (11) Bashir (12)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	21/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Nasiru (15) Yakubu (ca. 20) Dahiru (early twenties)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	21/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Salmanu (18) Ibrahim (24) Auwal (19) Musa (18)	*Almajiri,* Mallam Hamza's school	22/08/2009	Focus-group discussion	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Muktar (ca. 11) Bilya (ca. 14)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	23/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Bashir (18) Safiyanu (19)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	23/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Habibu (15) Ibrahim (13)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	23/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Maharazu (ca. 8) Abdullahi (11)	*Almajirai* Mallam Hamza's school	24/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Musa (ca. 9) Musa (ca. 11)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	24/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano

Nasiru (14) Abdulhadi (ca. 9)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	24/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Auwal (ca. 12) Aminu (14)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	25/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Yakubu (19) Mikailu (20)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	26/08/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Ibrahim (24) Murtala (early twenties)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	01/09/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Salmanu (18) Auwal (19) Jamilu (19)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	01/09/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Isma'ila (13) Abubakar (11) Bashir (12) Shu'aibu (10)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	02/09/2009	Drama	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Abubakar (10)	Mallam Gali's son			
Bashir (ca. 16)	*Almajiri,* Mallam Gali's school	03/09/2009	Interview	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Bashir (12) Abubakar (11) Shu'aibu (10)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	03/09/2009	'Radio interview'	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Nura (late teens) Isma'ila (13) Dahiru (late teens) Nasiru (15) Bashir (ca. 16)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	03/09/2009	'Radio interview'	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Sani-Musa (24) Jamilu (19)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	08/09/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Habibu (15) Ibrahim (13)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	09/09/2009	'Radio interview'	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Habibu (15) Isma'ila (13) Abubakar (11) Ibrahim (13)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	12/09/2009	'Radio interview'	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano

Ibrahim (ca. 16) Abubakar (16) Shehu (ca. 16)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Hamza's school	12/09/2009	Group discussion of photographs	Mallam Hamza's school, Municipal LGA, Kano
Isma'ila (13)	*Almajiri,* Mallam Gali's school	14/09/2009	'Radio interview'	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Shu'aibu (10) Bashir (12)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	17-18/09/2009	'Radio interview'	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Ibrahim (13) Bashir (12) Shu'aibu (10)	*Almajirai,* Mallam Gali's school	22/09/2009	Group interview	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Habibu (15)	*Almajiri,* Mallam Gali's school	23/09/2009	Interview	My house, Sabuwar Ƙofa, Municipal LGA, Kano
Mustapha (ca. 14)	*Almajiri* begging for money on the street	23/09/2009	Interview	See Sweet Bakery, Nassarawa LGA, Kano
Sani (ca. 13) Muhammed (ca. 13) Audi (ca. 13)	*Almajirai* begging for money on the street	23/09/2009	Group interview	See Sweet Bakery, Nassarawa LGA, Kano
Auwal (ca. 10) Abdul-Rahman (ca. 7)	*Almajirai* begging for money on the street	23/09/2009	Group interview	See Sweet Bakery, Nassarawa LGA, Kano
Yahaya (ca.14) Idris (ca. 11)	*Almajirai* begging for money on the street	24/09/2009	Group interview	Motor Park Mallam Kato, Nassarawa LGA, Kano
Yakuba (ca. 10) Nura (ca. 11)	*Almajirai* begging for money on the street	24/09/2009	Group interview	Motor Park Mallam Kato, Nassarawa LGA, Kano
Bashir (ca. 12) Isma'il (ca. 16) Saminu (ca. 12)	*Almajirai* begging for money on the street	24/09/2009	Group interview	Motor Park Mallam Kato, Nassarawa LGA, Kano

Secondary sources:

Adamu, Abdalla Uba (n. d.): *The Almajirai Sector Study—Concepts and Focus of Target Groups*. Association for Educational Development Options (AEDO), Kano, Nigeria.

Arewa House (ed. 1997): *National Conference on Begging and Destitution in Nigeria*. 5-7 September 1997 at Arewa House, Kaduna.

Awofeso, Niyi, Jan Ritchie & Pieter Degeling (2003): The Almajiri Heritage and the Threat of Non-State Terrorism in Northern Nigeria—Lessons from Central Asia and Pakistan. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 311-325.

Ball, Stephen J. (2006): *Education Policy and Social Class: The Selected Works of Stephen Ball*. London: Routledge.

Bambale, Abdu Ja'afaru, (n.d.): *Almajiranchi and the problem of begging in Kano State: The role of Shekarau Administration (2003-2007)*. Paper Presented at the 7th Ben Africa Annual Conference held at Ghion Hotel, Addis Ababa. Online at: http://www.benafrica.org/downloads/bambale_begging_in_kano.pdf (accessed on 19/01/2010).

Bano, Masooda (2007): Beyond politics: the reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 43-68.

Bano, Masooda (2008a): *Engaged yet disengaged: Islamic schools and state in Kano*. International Development Department, Department for International Development. Online at: http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/research/pdfs/Nigeria_State-Madrasas.pdf (accessed on 08/04/2010).

Bano, Masooda (2008b): *Islamiyya, Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education (IQTE) Integration Strategy*, June 2008. Unpublished report.

Barker, J. & S. Weller (2003): 'Is it fun?' Developing children centred research methods. *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 1/2, pp. 33-58.

Bird, Kate (2007): *The intergenerational transmission of poverty: An overview*. ODI Working Paper 286, Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper 99, London: Overseas Development Institute.

Bledsoe, Caroline & Kenneth Robey (1986): Arabic literacy and secrecy among the Mende of Sierra Leone. *Man*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 202-226.

Bourdieu (1990): *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1986/2004): The forms of capital. In: Ball, Stephen J. (ed. 2004): *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Sociology of Education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Bourdieu, Pierre & Jean Claude Passeron (1977): *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: Sage.

Boyden, Jo & Judith Ennew (eds 1997): *Children in focus: a manual for participatory research with children*. Stockholm: Rädda Barnen.

Boyden, Jo, Birgitta Ling & William Myers (1998): *What Works for Working Children*. Stockholm: UNICEF & Rädda Barnen.

Boyle, Helen (2004): *Quranic schools. Agents of preservation and change*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Carneiro, Pedro & James J. Heckman (2003): *Human Capital Policy*. Discussion Paper Series No. 821, Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit. Online at: ftp://repec.iza.org/RePEc/Discussionpaper/dp821.pdf (accessed on 17/01/2010).

Casey, Conerly (2008): "Marginal Muslims": Politics and the Perceptual Bounds if Islamic Authenticity in Northern Nigeria. *Africa Today*, Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 67-92.

Casey, Conerly: 'Policing' through violence: fear, vigilantism, and the politics of Islam in Northern Nigeria. In: Pratten, David & Atreyee Sen (eds 2007): *Global vigilantes: perspectives on justice and violence*. London: Hurst.

CDRT, Centre for Democratic Research and Training (2005): *Report of a Commissioned Study on The Ulama in Contemporary Northern States of Nigeria*. Kano: Bayero University, Mambayya House.

Chambers, Robert (1995): Poverty and livelihoods: whose reality counts? *Environment and Urbanization*; Vol. 7, pp. 173-204.

Chambers, Robert (1997): *Whose reality counts? : putting the first last*. London: ITDG.

Chambers, Robert & Gordon Conway (1992): *Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century*. IDS Discussion Paper 296, Brighton: IDS.

Clark, A. & P. Moss (2001): *Listening to young children: The mosaic approach*. London: National Children's Bureau and Rowntree Foundation.

COCFOCAN, Coalition of Community Based Organizations Focused on Child Almajiri in Nigeria (n.d.): *The Child-Almajiri*. Kano: COCFOCAN. Awareness raising leaflet.

Collins, James (2009): Social Reproduction in Classrooms and Schools. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 38, pp. 33-48.

Cooke, Bill & Uma Kothari (2001): *Participation: the new tyranny*? London: Zed Books.

Cowell, Alexander J. (2006): The relationship between education and health behavior: some empirical evidence. *Health Economics*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 125-146.

Crivello, Gina (2009): *'Becoming somebody': Youth transitions through education and migration—evidence from Young Lives, Peru*. Young Lives Working Paper No. 43. Online at: http://www.younglives.org.uk/pdf/publication-section-pdfs/working-paper-pdfs/YL-WP43_Crivello.pdf (accessed on 08/04/2010).

Crivello, Gina, Laura Camfield & Martin Woodhead (2009): How can children tell us about their wellbeing? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches with Young Lives. *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 90, No. 1, pp. 51-72.

Cruise O'Brien, Donal B. (1971): *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

CSNL, Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages (2006): *Modern Hausa-English Dictionary*. Bayero University College Kano. Ibadan: University Press PLC.

D'Hondt, Walter & Michel Vandewiele (1984): Beggary in West Africa. *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol. 7, pp. 59-72.

De Certeau, Michel (1984): *The practice of everyday life*. London: University of California Press.

Dore, Ronald (1976): *The diploma disease. Education, qualification and development*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ehrhardt, David (2007): *Authoritative voices: Informal Authorities and Conflict Resolution in Kano, Nigeria*. MPhil thesis, Oxford Department of International Development, Oxford.

Eickelman, Dale F. (1985): *Knowledge and power in Morocco: the education of a twentieth-century notable*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Einarsdottir, J. (2005): Playschool in pictures: Children's photographs as a research method. *Early Child Development and Care*, Vol. 175, No. 6, pp. 523-541.

Ennew, Judith & Dominique Pierre Plateau (2004): *How to research the physical and emotional punishment of children*. Save the Children, online at: http://www.dhr.go.cr/nopeguemos/pdf/how_to_research_the_physical_and_emotional_pu nishment.pdf (accessed on 14/05/2009).

Erickson, Frederick (1987): Transformation and School Success: The Politics and Culture of Education Achievement. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 335-356.

Fafunwa (1974): *History of education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd..

Frankel, S. (2007): Researching children's morality: Developing research methods that allow children's involvement in discourses relevant to their everyday lives. *Childhoods today*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1-25.

Froerer, Peggy (2007): Disciplining the Saffron Way: Moral Education and the Hindu Rashtra. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 5, pp.1033–1071.

Gabhainn, Saoirse Nic & Jane Sixsmith (2006): Children Photographing Well-being: Facilitating Participation in Research. *Children & Society*, Vol. 20, pp. 249-259.

Geertz, Clifford (1973): *The interpretation of cultures*. New Yord: Basic Books.

Harber, C. R. (1984): Development and Political Attitudes: The Role of Schooling in Northern Nigeria. *Comparative Education*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 387-403.

Hastrup, Kirsten; Peter Elsass, Ralph Grillo; Per Mathiesen & Robert Paine (1990): Anthropological Advocacy: A Contradiction in Terms? [and Comments] *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 301-311.

Hiskett, Mervyn (1987): The Maitatsine Riots in Kano, 1980: An Assessment. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 209-223.

Hollway, W.: Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In: J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn & V. Walkerdine (eds 1984): *Changing the Subjects*. London: Methuen, pp. 272-283.

Hulme, David, Karen Moore & Andrew Shepherd (2001): *Chronic poverty: meanings and analytical frameworks*. CPRC Working Paper 2. Online at: http://www.pik-potsdam.de/research/research-domains/transdisciplinary-concepts-and-methods/project-archive/favaia/workspace/documents/kavis-documents/chronpovdavidhulme.pdf (accessed on 20/01/2010).

Hunt, Paul (1993): Children's Rights in West Africa: The Case of the Gambia's Almudos. *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol.15, pp. 499-532.

Hunwick, John (1992): An African Case Study of Political Islam: Nigeria. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 524, pp. 143-155.

Iguda, Sunusi (n. d.): *Tsangaya Education in Focus. Conceptual Approaches and Policies of Malam Ibrahim Shekarau Towards A Better Qur'anic Education*. Kano: Office of The Special Advisor on Education and Information Technology.

Isichei, Elizabeth (1987): The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria 1980-85: A Revolt of the Disinherited. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 194-208.

James, Allison & Alan Prout (eds 1997): *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. London: Falmer Press.

James, Allison, Chris Jenks & Alan Prout (1998): *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Policy Press.

Jeffery, Patricia & Roger Jeffery: Silver bullet or passing fancy? Girls' schooling and population policy. In: Jackson, Cecile & Ruth Pearson (1998): *Feminist visions of development*. London: Routledge.

Jeffrey, Craig (2005): Reproducing Difference? Schooling, Jobs, and Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh, India. *World Development*, Vol. 33, No. 12, pp. 2085–2101.

Jega, Attahiru (2000): General introduction. Identity transformation and the politics of identity under crisis and adjustment. In: Attahiru Jega (ed. 2000): *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*. Uppsala: Nordic Institute of African Studies, pp. 11-23.

Jenkins, Richard (1992): *Pierre Bourdieu*. London: Routledge.

Johnston, Bill (1985): Organizational Structure and Ideology in Schooling. *Educational Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 4.

Kaba, Lansiné (1976): The Politics of Quranic Education among Muslim Traders in the Western Sudan: The Subbanu Experience. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 409-421.

Kane, Ousmane (2003): *Muslim modernity in postcolonial Nigeria: a study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*. Boston, M.A.: Brill.

Khalid, Suleiman (1997): *A socio-economic study of the transformation of migrant Qur'anic Schools system (Almajiranci) in Sokoto Metropolis, 1970-1995*. PhD-thesis, Department of Sociology, Bayero University Kano, Nigeria.

Killen, Ann & Nigisti Mulholland (1995): *Street Children in the Gambia*. Gambia Dept. of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare & UNICEF.

Kurfi, Rabiu Abdulkadir (2000): *Psychological profile of juvenile street beggars in Katsina State: Toward a baseline data for counselling and rehabilitation*. PhD-thesis, Bayero University Kano, Department of Education, Nigeria.

Last, Murray (1967): *The Sokoto Caliphate*. London: Longmans.

Last, Murray: Charisma and Medicine in Northern Nigeria. In: D. Cruise O'Brien and C. Coulon (eds 1988): *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 183-204.

Last, Murray: The traditional Muslim intellectual in Hausaland: the background. In: Falola, T. (ed. 1993): *African Historiography*, Harlow: Longman, pp. 116-131.

Last, Murray (2000): Children and the Experience of Violence: Contrasting Cultures of Punishment in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 359-393.

Last, Murray: Towards a political history of youth in Muslim northern Nigeria, 1750–2000. In: J. Abbink and I. van Kessel (eds 2004): *Vanguard or Vandals: youth, politics and conflict in Africa*. Leiden: Brill.

Last, Murray (2008): The search for security in Muslim northern Nigeria. *Africa*, Vol. 78, No. 1, pp. 41-63.

LeVine, Robert Alan (1996): *Child Care and Culture. Lessons from Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levinson, Bradley A. & Dorothy Holland: The Cultural Production of the Educated Person: An Introduction. In: Levinson, Bradley A., Douglas E. Foley & Dorothy C. Holland (1996): *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person. Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*. Albany: State University of New York.

Levinson, Bradley A., Douglas E. Foley & Dorothy C. Holland (1996): *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person. Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*. Albany: State University of New York.

Loimeier, Roman: Islamic reform and political change: the example of Abubakar Gumi and the 'yan Izala movement in Nigeria. In: Westerlund, Dabid & Eva Evers Rosander (eds. 1997): *African Islam and Islam in Africa: encounters between Sufis and Islamists*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, pp. 286-307.

Lovejoy, Paul E. & Jan S. Hogendorn (1993): Slow death for slavery: the course of abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lubeck, Paul M. (1985): Islamic Protest under Semi-Industrial Capitalism: 'Yan Tatsine' Explained. *Journal of the International Africa Institute*, Vol. 55, No.4, pp. 369-389.

Macleod, Jay (1987): *Ain't no makin' it: Leveled aspirations in a low-income neighbourhood*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Mann, Gillian (2009): *On being despised: Growing up a Congolese refugee in Dar es Salaam*. Paper presented at conference: Focus On Children: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty, Oxford, 25-27 March 2009.

MoE, Ministry of Education Kano State (2008): *Education Sector Analysis*. Kano: Ministry of Education.

Mohammed, Habu (2001): The Transformation of Almajiranchi in Kano Under the Structural Adjustment Programme. *FAIS Journal of Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Kano: Bayero University.

Moncrieffe, Joy (2009): Introduction: Intergenerational Transmissions: Cultivating Children's Agency? *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 1-8.

Moore, Karen (2005): Thinking about youth poverty through the lenses of chronic poverty, life-course poverty and intergenerational poverty. *CPRC Working Paper 57*, Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester.

Morrow, V. (2001): Using qualitative methods to elicit young people's perspectives on their environments: Some ideas for community health initiatives. *Health Education Research*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 255–268.

NCWD, National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (2001): *Almajiri and Qur'anic education*. Kaduna: National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute, Almajirci Directorate.

O'Brien, Susan (2007): La Charia contestée: Démocratie, débat et diversité musulmane dans les «étas Charia» du Nigeria. *Politique africaine*, Vol. 106, pp. 46-68.

Ojanuga, Durrenda Nash (1990): Kaduna Beggar Children: A Study of Child Abuse and Neglect in Northern Nigeria. *Child Welfare*, Vol. 69, No. 4, pp. 371-380.

Okoye, F. and Y. Z. Yau (1999): *The condition of almajirai in the North West Zone of Nigeria.* Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor & UNICEF.

Olujuwon, Tola (2008): Combating Trafficking in Person: A Case Study of Nigeria. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, Vol. 24, No.1, pp.23-32.

Onolemhemhen, Durrenda C. & Kelli E. Pugh (2002): Children of the Mallam: A Study of Street Children in Northern Nigeria. *Social Development Issues*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 33-38.

Oxford Analytica (2009): Nigeria: Military cracks down on Islamist fighters. *Oxford Analytical Daily Brief Service*, p.1.

Paden, John N. (1973): *Religion and political culture in Kano*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Perry, Donna L. (2004): Muslim Child Disciples, Global Civil Society, and Children's Rights in Senegal: The Discourses of Strategic Structuralism. *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 77, No. 1, p. 77/78.

Poluha, Eva (2004): *The power of continuity. Ethiopia through the eyes of its children*. Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Punch, S. (2002): Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 321–341.

Reichmuth, Stefan (1989): New trends in Islamic education in Nigeria: a preliminary account. *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 29, No. 1/4, pp. 41-60.

Robson, Elsbeth (2004): Children at work in rural northern Nigeria: patterns of age, space and gender. *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 193-210.

Ryan, Gery W. & H. Russell Bernard: Data Management and Analysis Methods. In: Denzin, Norman & Yvonna Lincoln (eds 2000): *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp. 769-802.

Sanankoua, Diarah Bintou (1985): Les écoles "Coraniques" au Mali: problèmes actuels. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 359-367.

Sanneh, Lamin O.: The Islamic Education of an African Child: Stresses and Tensions. In: Brown, Godfrex N. & Mervyn Hiskett (1975): *Conflict and Harmony in Education in Tropical Africa*, London: Allen & Unwin, pp. 168-186.

Saul, Mahir (1984): The Quranic Farm and Child Labour in Upper Volta. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 54, No. 2, pp. 71-87.

Schildkrout, Enid (1978/2002): Age and gender in Hausa Society: Socio-economic roles of children in urban Kano. *Childhood*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 342-368.

Scoones, Ian (1998): *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: A Framework for Analysis*. IDS Working Paper 72, Brighton: IDS.

Scoones, Ian (2009): Livelihoods perspectives and rural development. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1.

Sen, Amartya (1999): *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shehu, Salisu (2004): *The State of Tsangaya Education in Nigeria: Trends, Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward*. Paper presented at National Workshop on Tsangaya System of Education 26.-27.07.2004, Arewa House, Kaduna.

Sime, Daniela (2008): Ethical and methodological issues in engaging young people living in poverty with participatory research methods. *Children's Geographies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 63-78.

Skinner, Debra & Dorothy Holland: Schools and the Cultural Production of the Educated Person in a Nepalese Hill Community. In: Levinson, Bradley A., Douglas E. Foley & Dorothy C. Holland (1996): *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person. Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*. Albany: State University of New York, pp. 273-300.

Sule-Kano, Abdullahi (2008): *Poverty and the Traditional Qur'anic School System in Northern Nigeria: The Politics of the Almajiri-phenomenon*. Paper prepared for the Conference on Nigerian Youth and National Development organised by the Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Mambayya House. Bayero University, Kano. August 5th – 6th 2008.

Suleiman, Yahaya & Namadi Usman (1985): *Makarantar Allo: A Study of Islamic Concepts of Education and Review of Islamic Education Curriculum*. B.A. thesis, Abubakar Bello University Zaria.

Tilak, Jandhyala B.G. (1989): Education and its relation to economic growth, poverty, and income distribution: past evidence and further analysis. *Work Bank discussion papers*, No. 46.

Umar, Muhammad S. (2001): Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970s – 1990s. *Africa Today*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 126-150.

Umar, Muhammad S.: Changing Islamic identity in Nigeria from the 1960s to the 1980s: from Sufism to anti-Sufism. In: Brenner, Louis (ed. 1993): *Muslim identity and social change in sub-Saharan Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 154-178.

UN, Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2008): *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*. Online at: http://esa.un.org/unpp; http://esa.un.org/unpp/p2k0data.asp (accessed on 21/03/2010).

Urdal, H. (2004): The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflicts, 1950-2000. *Social Development Papers, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction* No. 14, Washington DC: World Bank. http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/07/28/000012009_20040728162225/Rendered/PDF/29740.pdf (accessed on 30/03/2010).

USAID (2009): *Almajiri State Education Sub Accounts for Kano and Gusau 2007/2008*. United States Agency for International Development.

Usman, Lantana M. (2008): Assessing the universal basic primary education and Koranic schools' synergy for Almajiri street boys in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 62-73.

van Santen, José C.M. (2001): Not Just Any 'Street' Child: Universals and Particulars of Childhood in North-Cameroonian Society. *International Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 16, No. 2/3, pp. 113-125.

Veale, A. (2005): Creative methodologies in participatory research with children. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (eds), *Researching children's experience: Approaches and methods*, London: Sage, pp. 253–272.

Wacquant, Loic J. D. (1989): Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 26-63.

Wagner, D.A.: Islamic Education. In: A. Lewy (ed. 1991): *The International Encyclopedia of Curriculum*. 1st ed., Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, pp. 265-267.

Wakili, Haruna (2007): Islam and the political arena in Nigeria: the *ulama* and the 2007 elections. In: Souleymane Bachir Diagne and M. Sani Umar (eds 2007): *Islam and the Public Sphere in Africa*. Selected Proceedings of a Conference Organized by The Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston IL, USA, May 17-19, 2007. Online at: http://www.northwestern.edu/african-studies/Docs/master_12.30_w_cover.pdf (accessed on 16/03/2010).

Watts, Michael (1996): Islamic Modernities? Citizenship, Civil Society and lslamism in a Nigerian City. *Public Culture*, Vol. 8, pp. 251-289.

Wilks, Ivor: The Transmission of Islamic Learning in the Western Sudan. In: Goody, Jack (ed. 1968): *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 162-197.

Willis, Paul (1977): *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*. Farnborough: Saxon House.

Willis, Paul (1981): Cultural Production is Different from Cultural Reproduction is Different from Social Reproduction is Different from Reproduction. *Interchange*, Vol. 12, Nos. 2-3, pp. 48-67.

Winters, Clyde Ahmad (1987): Koranic education and militant Islam in Nigeria. *International Review of Education*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 171-185.

Wood, D. (1988): *How Children Think and Learn*. Oxford: Blackwell.

World Bank (2008): *Nigeria Country Data Profile*. Online at: http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?REPORT_ID=9147&REQUEST_TYPE=VIEWADVANCED&DIMENSIONS=160 (accessed on 20/04/2010).

Ya'u, Yunusa Zakari (2000): The youth, economic crisis and identity transformation: the case of the Yandaba in Kano. In: Attahiru Jega (ed. 2000): *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*. Uppsala: Nordic Institute of African Studies.

Yacub, Shanin (2002): 'Poor children grow into poor adults': harmful mechanisms or over-deterministic theory? *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 14, pp. 1081-1093.

Young, Lorraine & Hazel Barrett (2001a): Issues of Access and Identity: Adapting Research Methods with Kampala Street Children. *Childhood*, Vol. 8, No. 3 pp. 383-395.

Young, Lorraine & Hazel Barrett (2001b): Adapting visual methods: action research with Kampala street children. *Area*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 141-152.

Internet sources

Afrik, Desmond North (25/12/2008): *Islamic schools sending children to beg in the streets. An estimated eight million Nigerian children open to the risk.* Online at: http://en.afrik.com/article15081.html (accessed on: 08/04/2010).

allAfrica, Muhammad Mahmud (12/10/2008): *Nigeria: Almajiri bill: another view.* Online at: http://allafrica.com/stories/200810131093.html (accessed on 23/01/2010).

BBC, (23/12/2008): *Child beggars of Nigeria's Koranic schools.* Online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7796109.stm (accessed on 23/01/2010).

Business Day, Opeyemi Agbaje (13/01/2010): *The seeds of terror.* Online at: http://www.businessdayonline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=74 95:the-seeds-of-terror&catid=96:columnists&Itemid=350 (accessed on 23/01/2010).

CNN World, Christian Purefoy (08/01/2010): *Nigeria's Almajiri children learning a life of poverty and violence.* Online at: http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/01/07/nigeria.children.radicalization/index.htm l (accessed on 14/01/2010).

CONSS, Coalition of NGOs (non-governmental organisations) in Sokoto State: *The Almajiri Education Foundation.* Online at: http://www.conss.net/almajiri.htm (accessed on 16/04/2001).

Daily Trust, Aminu Abubakar (21/11/2009): *Nigeria struggles to curb rise in child beggars.* Online at: http://www.weekly.dailytrust.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=178 0:nigeria-struggles-to-curb-rise-in-child-beggars&catid=41:news&Itemid=30 (accessed on 14/01/2010).

DFID (n.d.): *Partnership for Transforming Health Systems Phase II (Paths2). PATHS2 Kano State.* Online at: http://paths2.org/state2.html (accessed on 21/03/2010).

Nigerian Village Square, Mustapha Shet Shehu (22/12/2009): *Re: Almajiri Bill: The Masochism of Integration.* Online at: http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1 4063&Itemid=55 (accessed on 08/04/2010).

Nigerian Village Square, user maikanodahiru (26/09/2009): *Comment on 'Iliya, the Almajiri'.* Online at: http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/salisu-suleiman/iliya-the-almajiri.html (accessed on 20/04/2010).

Pew Forum (n.d.): *Religious demographic profile. Nigeria.* Online at: http://www.pewforum.org/world-affairs/countries/?CountryID=150 (accessed on 20/04/2010).

Sahara Reporters, Salisu Suleiman (25/09/2009): *Iliya, the Almajiri.* Online at: http://www.saharareporters.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3793:i liya-the-almajiri&catid=81:external-contrib&Itemid=300 (accessed on 22/11/2009).

Sunday Triumph, Salihu Othman Isah (2008): *Reforming almajirai through tsangaya system in Kano.* Online at: http://www.triumphnewspapers.com/sunday/ref16112008.html# (accessed on 12/11/2009).

The Nation, Khadijat Saidu (11/01/2010): *Dislodging Almajiris' bowls with skills.* Online at: http://thenationonlineng.net/web2/articles/31945/1/Dislodging-Almajiris-bowls-with-skills/Page1.html (accessed on 23/01/2010).

The Nation, Yusuf Alli (13/11/2009): *Boko Haram fall-out: Fed Govt to adopt Indonesian model for 6.7m almajiris*. Online at: http://thenationonlineng.net/web2/articles/25223/1/Boko-Haram-fall-out-Fed-Govt-to-adopt-Indonesian-model-for-67m-almajiris/Page1.html (accessed on 23/01/2010).

UBEC, Universal Basic Education Commission (2010): N*ational Framework for the Development and Integration of Almajiri Education into UBE Scheme*. Abuja: Universal Basic Education Commission. Online at: http://ubeconline.com/almajiri/Almajiri%20Policy%20Thrust%20FINAL.pdf (accessed on 12/06/2011).

UNESCO (n. d.): http://www.unesco.org/en/right-to-education (accessed on 12/01/2010).

UN, United Nations (n. d.): *Youth and the United Nations. Frequently Asked Questions.* Online at: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/qanda.htm#1 (accessed on 26/11/2009).

VOA News (28/11/2007): *NGO Works to Improve Muslim Education in Nigeria*. Online at: http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/africa/a-13-2007-11-28-voa46.html (accessed on 08/04/2010).

Weekly Trust, Mustapha Shet Shehu (01/01/2010): *Almajiri Bill: The masochism of integration*. Online at: http://weekly.dailytrust.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2084:almajiri-bill-the-masochism-of-integration-&catid=1:comments&Itemid=109 (accessed on 23/01/2010).

Weekly Trust, Shehu Abubakar (05/12/2009): *Pains of Arewa's beggar-children*. Online at: http://weekly.dailytrust.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1883:pains-of-arewas-beggar-children&catid=40:cover-stories&Itemid=26 (accessed on 20/04/2010).