





## **Tracce e fenomeni**

**16**

**Collana diretta da Vincenzo A. Piccione**





*To my mother,  
Patricia Anaekperechi Ihejirika,  
for not abandoning me on the streets  
and for loving me always more.*

*And to the Congregation of  
the Somascan Fathers,  
for being mother to many homeless youths.*



**Tobias Chikezie Ihejirika, crs**

**Embracing street children.  
Between myths and reality**

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## **Note from the author**

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## Presentation

*Embracing street children*<sup>1</sup> is a text that captures you and fascinates you immediately: it unites, at the same time, with precision and the efforts of a systematic work, made of research and scientific mediation, and with the heart of one who has walked on the *streets* of the globalized world, constructing relations and meeting *faces* of many children and minors in search of recognition.

The author, Tobias Chikezie Ihejirika, a doctoral student at the Pontifical Salesian University, is the first Nigerian religious of the Congregation of the Somascan Fathers: a catholic institution, which for five centuries, following the example and method initiated by the founder, the lay Venetian Jerome Emiliani, occupies itself with abandoned youths and victims of the “streets”. Tobias demonstrates, in this work, to be a competent interpreter of the charisma and mission of the Congregation, fixing his eyes constantly on a new logic rooted in African experience and culture, without forgetting the contributions of psycho-social and western philosophical researches. This is a merit that must be recognised for this work. It donates an African frame of reference to the Somascan thought and reflection. It is really this new prospective that enriches a vast horizon of educational and missionary challenges with the youths of today.

Tobias is an expert of the *streets*, and he presents himself in this way: *I grew up in a village and I know how it is. All the children are children of the village before being children of their parents!* In the village, the street is a place for meeting and mutual education. But soon, there begins the knowledge of the

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<sup>1</sup> Whatever is written in cursive corresponds to a citation taken from this book without indicating the page.

streets of the city: *as a child, I was able to visit for a few days, a relative who was living in the city. I still have a clear image of the horrible nights and the days of total freedom on the streets of the city.* In the Nigerian cities, the street and the extended family could still have something of the village, *and sitting around the fire with an empty pot one could still succeed in sleeping off without dinner:* it is not like this in our European streets. The street, that *mother of all the abandoned*, presents the most shocking contradictions: *the children can be seen, but they are invisible; they can be met but never reached at;* we find them daily face to face but never do we meet them; we use the same words, but our language is different from theirs and so we become “*familiar strangers*”! The street seems to these children a call to freedom, a frontier of possibilities of creativity and life, but it transforms itself almost immediately into a prison with rigid rules and without possibility of recourse to excuses and merciful understanding.

Tobias’ work of interprets children, habitants and citizens of the street (it is possible to construct for them an identity card) developing three theses and proposing a method for the street educators, for all those who wish to attempt to give back to the street its original role of meeting place, of recognition, of growth, of true space for freedom, not of *road without exit*. I now try to give a rapid synthesis of these theses and of the method of research that underscores this text.

The theses:

1. *to be a child of the street means to be outside the family system;*
2. *there is no useless life. Every life is richness for humanity, a custodian of talents:* this is valid also for children – *citizens of the streets;*
3. *violence can not help to dissuade street children from the streets,* because the street is not almost ever chosen freely,

some arrive *on the streets because there seems to be no other exit road.*

The method:

1. on the *streets* one can talk using some *key words: communication, empathy, dynamism and system;*
2. on the *streets* one can come close to the citizens using an *open global approach* towards the individual and his world;
3. on the *streets* one has to use a *language* capable of comprehending difficulties even before they are manifested verbally in a mode that overcomes the prejudices which distort communication;
4. educators can only walk the streets meaningfully if they constitute *work teams* capable of *sharing common objectives, division of roles, convinced that what has to be done shall reveal itself in the process of the formative journey.*

What I have tried to synthesize above, in the hope of favouring a smooth reading of the text, without limiting the free flow of the images of life stories collected, has as its research support and hermeneutical mediation, the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl, the therapeutic experience of C. Rogers and the educational position of R. Carkhuff. To these theoretical currents is added as an authentic art of helping, the educational model of Saint Jerome Emiliani (this is specified in the IV chapter, putting side-by-side, the original model of the XVI century with a contemporary experience of the XXI century), and African wisdom. I present here the wonderful passage of “African prophecy” told in the book: *an ancient African proverb tells of a beggar who never asked for fish, but of hook and line to enable him fish, never asked for vegetables, but a piece of land to cultivate. When they asked him why, he responded: today you give me to eat, tomorrow, when I will be hungry again, I will come back to ask you for what to eat. But if you help me to produce what I*

*eat, I will never ask you again for what to eat! This little story demonstrates in very simple terms what a global intervention tries to do for the street children. We do not give them food to eat today so as to die of hunger tomorrow. If we do so, we are only making them always more dependent. It would not be of any use.*

The meeting which the author proposes between the instruments of scientific research, the Somascan educational model and African wisdom constitutes an authentic empowerment for successfully *embracing* the many *street children*, who today have remained *invisible* and *marginal* even when they are citizens of our streets and squares sharing common space with us everyday in our cities.

I wish to conclude this presentation with two added observations which I draw from my experience as the superior general of a Congregation that has in the *prison* and in the *streets* the images and the environment of her origin and her mission.

While I was reading this work written by Tobias, I was invited by some Somascan street educators who work for the re-education of prostitutes and in the abusive camps of the gypsies in the outskirts of Milan: contested places, invisible but well visited! Especially to a meeting with many Nigerian girls, street workers, victims of human trafficking! I had a great wish to modify a famous sentence by Pierpaolo Pasolini: *I descend on the streets of Africa, but pay attention because these streets have arrived to you!*<sup>2</sup>. It could be so beautiful if these *African streets* do not only constitute in this negative model of easy and cheap prostitution, but also enrich with their warmth and communicative capacity, the deep emptiness of the *western streets*.

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<sup>2</sup> The text of Pierpaolo Pasolini from the last interview given to the weekly *Tutto Libri* from the "Stampa" of Turin is as follows: *I descend to hell, but pay attention, hell is climbing up to you!*



For a Christian, *the street* in as much as it is also a “way”, before becoming a place, is a person who walks on the streets, and on the street, meets and communicates: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14,6). Therefore I wish to conclude in a Latin that seems to be a bit of the street: *sine via nulla salus!*

Padre Franco Moscone, crs,  
General Superior of the Somascan Fathers  
Rome, June 20, 2009



## Second Presentation

It is not easy for anybody to embrace a child. It is even more difficult if the child is a “street child”. From the profundity of our subconscious, almost immediately, many ghosts seem to be dancing before us: he is an unpredictable being, he is “different”, certainly dangerous; he provokes an irrational fear, instinctive and intestinal; it is better to stay away from him; “ignoring him” should be the most reasonable and prudent attitude.

The action “to embrace” indicates an intentional gesture, heavy with a precise meaning: it does not only imply acceptance of the “other”, it also means allowing him to enter in my life experiences, to permit him to invade the boundaries of my very being. All this renders me extremely vulnerable to the affairs of the other and “naked” with myself. The other, especially if he is a child or an adolescent, digs into the irrationality which we carry along with us, into our fears and instincts which we otherwise would never have wanted to reveal; challenges our rigid schemes, our inconsistencies, our unresolved traumas, our falsified self image ...

Certainly in order to be capable of “embracing”, we must first open our eyes, break the scales of our blindness and force ourselves to see. It is the first intention of the author of this book (see Chapter 1. The world of the street). Actually, the children of the street seem to be the “photograph” of the world and of the society in which they live and move about; a world (our world) and a society (our society) which has neither sustained nor accompanied them, but in a way, has generated them, provoked them and pushed them out on the streets.

But there is more to it: the street child is generally accused, demonised and heaped with all the social evils. It is the unconscious dynamics of the “victim of expiation”, in the need to free

self from personal responsibilities. In this regard, these particular words of a famous poet resound with accusing pointedness: “*A single leaf can not become yellow without the tacit permission of the entire tree. The just man is not innocent of the actions of the wicked, and he who is innocent is not free from the business of the foolish. Most times a condemned man carries the yoke of an innocent man. If any of you would like to punish the tree of evil in the name of justice, let him examine first its roots; and in truth, he would find the roots of both evil and good, of the fertile and the sterile, all intertwined among themselves in the silent heart of the earth*” (Kahlil Gibran, *The garden of the prophet*).

The variegated panorama which the author paints, examining concretely, champions of street children, underlines that the street children undoubtedly constitute one of the most concrete, disturbing and demanding challenges for our civil society and contemporary social policies. We are before a phenomenon in rapid growth: a true and proper social emergency (according to “*Amnesty International*”, 100 million children are abandoned on the streets, while according to *International Labour Organization* – ILO, they are about 150 million). The two major types (children of the streets and children in the streets) are not an exclusive preoccupation of developing countries but also of developed countries.

What is to be done? The 1989 Convention of the UNO on the rights of the child though approved and undersigned by most countries, remains almost totally unapplied and unassimilated in local policies. The work with street children is certainly not easy; most times, one has the sensation of an inconclusive and frustrating educational project. In most of the cases, the educational actions are well thought-out, programmed and realized by street workers profoundly motivated, most times, professionally formed, moved by their sensibility towards the pains and suffer-

ings of the others, by passionate love for life and by authentic respect for every human being. Some times they are people Christianly motivated and inspired by faith and by the gospel of mercy (the shepherd who leaves the sheep-fold and goes in search of the lost lamb, and when he finds it, carries it on his shoulders and makes feast with friends). This is the example which the author presents in the last chapter: the experience of the Arca di Noè, in the city of Pasto (Colombia).

In the company of another educator, Pierangelo Musco, just deceased and whom I would like to immortalize with these words, all the evenings (and in the nights when we were going to meet different children), we used to go on the streets, making a tour of the city of Pasto to “see”, to meet and “to embrace” many children. In this particular terrain, it is not the initiative of the lost sheep to find the road to the fields, but of the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep. One goes where the sheep has chosen to stay or where it has been forced to remain for many reasons. There begins therefore a very patient journey of nearing the lost sheep. One enters the world of the other at the tips of his feet, humbly asking permission, knocking discreetly at his door ... because he is in the house of an other.

In the central part of the book (chapter 3), the author, after a panoramic view of different approaches, methods and styles of intervention to the problem of street children, presents the educational model of global intervention: “*an intervention addressed at the person in his totality, departing from his concrete and particular situation*”. The key for reading this method is empathy, which “*associates itself to the consideration of the man in need not as an object of pity but as a custodian of rights and potentialities*”.

Finally, it is interesting to see his reference to the Somascan pedagogy tied to the experience of Saint Jerome Emiliani, a saint declared “universal patron of orphans and abandoned

youths”. With empathy, he assumes the street children not just as an educator, social assistant or guide ..., but as a “father”. As father, he proposes that the street children be generated and accompanied in their anguish and joy, fears and hopes of life, opening to them a future, rich with prospects and in complete freedom. He interprets the reality of his times with the “heart of a father”: the down-trodden, the abandoned, the misery-ridden, the poor, the orphan ... become the objects of his attention and of his action.

This is the pedagogy of the lost sheep, with its consequence: the other necessarily takes away your tranquillity, your peace, your time and your sleep ... It is the pedagogy of the black sheep. The abandoned sheep, the incriminated, those made objects of laughter and scorn, those reduced to the chaff of the society become the first and primary preoccupation of this pedagogy (*preferential option for the poor*).

I wish the readers of this book the possibility of recuperating the capacity of “embracing children”, looking them in the face with real evangelical compassion, with renewed attention, capacity to listen, and true empathy. There exists an orphan world which lives at the margin, in the streets, waiting. To every one of us *today*, there is an urgent request and a burning challenge, tomorrow may be too late.

Padre Mario Ronchetti, crs  
Founder of Arca di Noè, Colombia  
Rome, 15 June, 2009

## **Introduction**

The study we deal with in this book develops a series of analysis on the dynamics of empathy in orientation. We concentrate more or less on the problems that derive from a life on the streets. The analysis departs from the observation of the children, minors, who for one reason or the other are abandoned to themselves; we try therefore to give a possible response geared at helping them come out of this precarious situation, in order to help them insert themselves into a normal participation in the societal life.

In the last century, the developments of the natural sciences, the multiple intellectual currents, the numerous international and national conflicts, have created great confusion but have also at the same time opened new and interesting prospects. Among these prospects are the new visions of man that try to understand him in all the dimensions of his complexity and in his continuous evolution despite the evident contradictions such prospects bring with themselves.

One of the visions of man that we have considered interesting, is the existentialist-phenomenological-historical vision of man. An approach that tries to overcome the point of view of “methodism”, where a methodological format is created and every manifestation of man is forced into this format created before experience. This new approach is manifested in psychology and in pedagogy in the different methods of intervention that allow themselves to be guided and guarded by the process of discovery and training in order to arrive at wished ends.

One of such approaches is developed in the studies of Carl Rogers, a psychotherapist who was successful in analysing in-process manifestations during his psychotherapist sessions, and who came to the realization that a successful therapy is that which follows the indications given by the client himself, such

indications can only be noted if the therapist succeeds in putting himself in the shoes of the client, climbing imaginatively a series of ladder rungs with the client in a journey towards the light of a changed life, a new life.

This work started with the intention of using this method of psychotherapy, and adapting it to the responses a social operator or a professional educator must give to the silent cries for help made by street children, victims of our society, who are excluded by the dynamics of social inclusion/exclusion which determines the degree of social assistance.

A project of this type requires: a profound knowledge of the realities of street children; a constructive criticism of the instruments of orientation already being used by social didactics and in social service; the necessity of establishing the necessary contents and constitutive elements of a global intervention based on empathy; an analysis of all the legal provisions (national and international); and the mistakes to be avoided in order to succeed better with the stabilized objectives.

Such a project would lose its validity if it were not to be also sustained by correlative studies and researches already realised in the same environment, and if it were not to be demonstrated with concrete examples and valid argumentation.

Beginning with the last deposition, in this work, we have integrated the studies done by Robert Carkhuff on the art of helping, the research of Prof. Francesco Gatti on global intervention and the orientation of the differently able, and the work of Prof. Vincenzo Piccione on the pedagogy of the disabled. These authors depart from the thesis of Carl Rogers and they help us to orientate ourselves towards a global, empathic and personalized intervention on street children.

In the first chapter, we tried to analyse the world of street children. The intention is to discover what it really means to be



a street child, which are the different forms of belonging to the street, which are the psycho-social dynamics of the street life, what are the causes of the phenomenon and its manifestations in different cultures. This process brought us to an examination of the family as the central nucleus of the society. Almost all the causes of the phenomenon of street children seem to be connected directly or indirectly to the family.

In the second chapter, we interrogated ourselves on the great difference between the myths of orientation and the reality of indifference, persecution and assistentialism evident in the pessimistic spirit of our society towards the phenomenon of street children. We lingered a little on the international, national and regional laws on orientation and the tutelage of minors. We tried to trace the journey towards the discovery of interventions centred on man and what is yet to be done to guarantee the integrity and dignity of man. It is in this critical context that we have tried to insert a systemic thought on the concept of orientation and especially on true orientation, adequate for the recognition and respect of the dignity of man.

The third chapter is the heart of this book. It is here that we have examined the different components of a global orientation centred on the human person and motivated by empathy. We begin with an exposition of the many factors that indicate the process from plurality of disciplines, inter-disciplinarity, meta-disciplinarity to empathy: an integral, dynamic but simple process.

In the fourth and last chapter, we present an experience of intervention. This chapter is a demonstrative chapter which begins with the premise that the methodology of global, dynamic and empathic orientation is not only a theory, but a practice already in use. This is presented in an interpretation of the work

of the Somascan Fathers according to the patrimony which they received from their founder, Saint Jerome Emiliani.

The truth is that we do not have a true and proper conclusion. The conclusive statement is an invitation to researchers to discover new possible modes of criticising and enriching this line of thought with evolutive educational practices, innovative in intention and open to growth. In this way, we did not conclude with a synthetic analysis of the work done in the book, but with a meaningful little story.

Finally, we gave a few pieces of advice to professional educators and social operators, coupled with wishes of safe journey in their adventure into those infinite horizons that open up when one meets the face of a child in difficulty, a face which begs us to look into the history of the owner in order to help him by entering his world with pointed toes and drawing from him the necessary energy for helping him realise himself and walk on his own! As we tell him “Get up and walk!”.





## **Chapter 1. The world of the street**

### *1.1. Citizens of the street*

*Victor had never been so boastful. Before his surprised colleagues, he had added much colour to the story of the stranger and his money with a strong tint of exotic drama. Just while he was proudly displaying his coins, he became aware of his great mistake. Then it was already too late. The others started coming towards him, to encircle him ... words were being rained at him like stones:*

*“Why are you not like us?”*

*“Why do you not smoke?”*

*“Why do you not use bad language?”*

*Victor stepped back frightened. With one great outcry, the others threw themselves at him. The newspaper children who were sleeping on the bare floor all woke up immediately and the proprietors of the kiosks all started to shout. This confusion continued until a police man arrived shouting and trying to separate them. He dragged Victor with himself and started to question him ... As soon as the boy was able to liberate himself from the firm hold, he disappeared into the dead night.*

*He loitered on the streets, highways and the dark corners of the crowded districts. He passed by children of his same age concentrated on upturning the waste bins and he passed by dingy motels from which people were entering and coming out in couples.*

*He had a disfigured face and a strained body ... filled with wounds from the beating he had received. From his nose, a line of angrily red blood was oozing out ... which he tried to clean with his shirt sleeves. Thanking God that the quarrel was stopped in time. He was filled with many thoughts. He promised*

*himself that he would never again return to the street, but this resolution could not last long. He did not know what to do.*

*The night after, he came again to work, ready for anything. But nothing happened. The incident of the day before seemed to have been forgotten and no body seemed to remember it any more. Then one of the boys, whom Victor knew to be the gang leader, came close to him and gave him a cigarette, as a sign of peace. Victor hesitated, he said that he does not smoke.*

*Again, the others started to gather around him, this time out of curiosity ... no more threatening.*

*“Take it. It is beautiful to smoke, then it is easy. You have only to breathe in deeply and breathe out slowly”*

*Having abandoned his last defences, Victor bowed down to their will and accepted the cigarettes.*

*All around him, the city of Manila was palpating: a city submerged by high sounding humanitarian campaigns, a city in which the workers are forced to undersign documents in which they declare to receive minimum wages, where millionaire politicians go for communion all Sundays, where mothers teach their children the art of begging, where destroyed families sleep on the sidewalks and under the bridges, where also the best of friends quarrel and betray one another<sup>1</sup>.*

In the world, there are millions of children like Victor, who for one reason or the other live in the streets. This is a reality that has always accompanied the history of man. The story of Victor repeats itself in the children forgotten in the corners, under the bridges, in the squares, at the train stations, in abandoned buildings, etc. They do not benefit from the interventions of the social structures, they lack personal care, they are not ca-

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<sup>1</sup> A. Guerriero, *Figli della città*, quoted in S. Agnelli, *I ragazzi della strada . L'altra faccia della città*, Bompiani, Milano 1987, p. 27.

pable of realising an existence worthy of full human beings. *“Children of the street, physically, are the most visible of all children in the sense that they live and work on the streets and in the public squares of the city. At the same time, they are also the most difficult to reach by essential services like basic education and sanitary assistance, and the most difficult to protect”*<sup>2</sup>.

Very little is known of these children. Their sufferings are so silent that for many people, by “street children” we evoke exclusively images of careless youths without a vision and hope for the future. Others see them as a disturbance, children who should be locked up for their own good, especially when they “put themselves in trouble”. This public opinion, according to S. Agnelli, clearly defines and mirrors the level of tolerance with which they are considered. At Naples, the term *scugnizzo* derives from a word that indicates a person in continuous movement like a rolling stone; in Peru, the “pajaro frutero” — “the fruit bird” is a nick name which one gains by stealing fruits in the market and being careful not to be caught by the police; in Colombia, “gamin” (little child) is a term taken from French language, but here has a negative connotation. The same words appear in Rwanda as “saligman” (sale gamin, bad child); in Congo, street children are called “moineaux” (birds); in Cameroon, “poussins” (chicks) by the village farmers and “mosquitoes” by the police. In Nigeria, there are many names for street child; from “gutter boys” — children of the gutter sewage to “agboro boys” — crude boys, etc.

At this point, let us ask ourselves a few questions: how do these people live? Do they have families? Do they remember their relatives and or maintain contact with them? Do they have dreams and ambitions for a better tomorrow? Where are they

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<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, *Lo stato dei bambini del mondo*, 2006.

headed to? Who are they? How are they? What do they do on the streets? To what extent do they make value judgements between themselves in the street and their mates who are not in the street? Do they perceive themselves as free, infradig, or as happy/sad with themselves? Why are they on the streets? To what measure do they belong to the civilized world? And in what manner does the civilized world belong to them?

These are the questions we shall try to respond to in this first chapter. In order to introduce ourselves to these studies, the last three questions are most cogent in making the intention of the research to emerge:

- 1) to what extent do they belong to the civil world?
- 2) To what extent does the civil world belong to them?
- 3) Which is the best way to reconcile them with the civil world?

Our basic premise is that street children have a parallel existence to the civil society. From this point of view, we shall look at the integration of street children in the “civil” world from two correlated angles: rights and obligations — their obligations to the world in which they find themselves and the rights due them by this their mere existence in the world. This theme will be fully discussed when we shall be talking about the urgency of a value-based intervention centred on the human person and about the rights and obligations of street children.

a. Who are the citizens of the streets?

The most common definition of a street child is “*whatever boy or girl who has not reached the adult age, to whom the streets have become a habitual habitation, or means of sustenance, and who is inadequately protected, controlled or directed by a responsible adult*”<sup>3</sup>. This common definition reveals some interesting aspects of the street children:

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<sup>3</sup> Inter-NGO, *Conferenza sui ragazzi della strada*, Switzerland, 1983.



b. “Boy or girl”.

The category of “street children” includes minors of both sexes. According to the culture or country in which they find themselves, the number of boys could be more than the number of girls and vice versa.

c. “Who has not reached the adult age”.

Generally, the adult age, though with exception of certain cultures, begins at the completion of eighteen years. Street children also include little children of four and five years. We shall reveal the data and some relevant statistics later.

d. “To whom the streets have become a habitual habitation”.

Some street children do not have family or home to return to at night. They do not have any contact with relatives. The streets are their permanent habitation. Others pass the major part of their time on the streets, but not in a definitive manner, they have regular families to which they return from time to time. The length of time in which they live on the streets could be long or short, but they share in almost all the experiences of the street life.

e. “Or means of sustenance”.

Many children work and earn their daily bread passing the major part of their time on the streets. We refer to child-beggars, windscreen cleaners, bag carriers at the train stations and bus stops, children who play musical instruments at public places, in underground metros, those who accompany blind adult beggars, child prostitutes, hawkers, motor conductors, etc.

f. “And who is inadequately protected”.

Street life is dangerous. A child who lives on the street lacks guidance from his parents or tutors. He has to defend himself by himself.

Millions of street children are abandoned to themselves, underfed from birth; without affection, instruction and help; without love. Children who live precariously, from stealing and violence.

Children who gather themselves in gangs to re-invent a family; a support which they never knew; a security that has always been missing<sup>4</sup>.

g. “Or controlled or directed by a responsible adult”.

In the street life, responsible adult figure is absolutely lacking. There are adults, but with a strong negative role as profiteers, bosses to whom one must bring respect and financial account of daily incomes. In the dirty streets of Ajegunle, in the city of Lagos, Oke, a street child asked us for money and I asked, who is your guardian? And he said to me: “*My Oga na Mike. The money wey I collect, I must give am. We dey work for am and na im dey take care of us oooo. We no fit live for street if im no permit us*”. A responsible adult is needed in the education of a child. He is to be his guarantee before the law, he is to take care of the child and guarantee him proper civil responsibility. Unfortunately, the major part of street children do not have any positive adult influence in their lives nor any role model for positive reference and control. It is important here to note an important aspect which we shall explore later in the book “street children take their destiny in their hands”. There is no reference to a responsible adult who indicates a direction for life.

h. “Children of the streets” and “children in the streets”.

Another distinction that could help us understand the phenomenon of street children is that between the children of the streets and the children in the streets.

i. Children of the streets.

Some scholars of the phenomenon of street children sustain that a child could only be referred to as a “street child” if he lives on the streets for a long time. Such a child is “of the streets” in the sense that he belongs to the streets as waste product of the family and of the society. To him, the streets

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<sup>4</sup> S. Agnelli, *cit.*, p. 11.

are mother, father, brother and sister. All he has is the streets. If there were to be a danger for the child of the street, he will not have any alternative if not that of migrating from one street to another. Some other scholars include also children who maintain a contact with their families or with some members of their families. Such children of the streets can visit their “families of origin” once in a while, but they cannot but return to the streets again and again. The impulse is always too much for them. The streets are considered by this category of street children to be “the real home”. Only the streets belong to them. It compensates solitude, abandonment and the lack of affection. It attracts them. It gives them money which they have never had at home. It gives them the rhythm, the time and the money immediately: “I am some one. I am something. I have just earned my supper”<sup>5</sup>.

j. “Children in the streets”.

Children in the streets can also be described as “children on the streets”. These are marginal children who sometimes sleep at home and some other times sleep on the streets, sustaining themselves by working in the streets without the supervision of a responsible adult and under inhuman conditions. In the city of Manila for example, “... many trailers bring 10,000 tons of waste. But for about 80,000 children who inhabit and work there, these wastes are the only means of sustenance”<sup>6</sup>.

k. “Living by streets”, “Street walking”, “Street families” and “Working the streets”.

These are other distinctions which can help us to understand the concept “street children”. “Living by streets” refers to those who sleep on the streets. They could also have normal work and be regular students, but they do not have where to

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<sup>5</sup> “Vita Somasca”, 134, 2006, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> MTV Network Asia, August 10, 2006, 12:00-12:30.

sleep or they do not wish to return to their families for one reason or the other. These children live by the streets. "Street walking" in this case refers to child prostitution. Many boys and girls in their early adolescence walk the streets in Asia, Africa, Europe and America; as goods that could be bought and sold for a pittance. We shall examine the data relative to this theme when we shall be examining the causes of the phenomenon of street children. "Street families" is a case whereby the whole family lives by the street, in abandoned buildings, under the bridges, etc. As a consequence, the minors in such families are to be considered street children. Their particular situation is not different from that of their families. Many of these children enjoy the affection of their parents and live a "normal" life, but at the same time, they are street children because they are exposed to the dangers of who lives on the streets. Many "normal" children from poor families live as slaves and servants in rich families (there where this is still permitted by the law), they have to complement the income of their families or of their masters, working the street every day. Some of these children go to school but when they return, they must work as street hawkers.

1. Children of the neighbourhood.

In every neighbourhood, no matter how rich or poor, there are "children of the neighbourhood" who are most of the times on the public squares, sitting on low fences of the neighbourhood and littered here and there, loitering like stray sheep. Many of these children are school drop-outs, others were expelled from school while the rest are running away from difficult situations of their families. The fact is that staying for a long time on the streets, involving themselves in the intricacies of street life, they easily fall into bad habits, form gangs, begin to use drugs, etc.

*Antonio has a particular style of walking, unhurriedly. He*

*has sure footsteps and eyes that fix on you when he talks. Many a times, it is easy to talk to him about the future. At other times, it is totally impossible. He slips from projects to dreams, and continues to talk for unending hours with passion, with seriousness, as if these dreams were just behind the next wall. Would he ever stop to live this illusion? The fatalistic and miraculous “turn” does not exist. Like courage, one has to give the “turn” to himself.*

*Antonio has built his second “family” in the neighbourhood square, with others of his group. He has written a poem titled “We. The last verses are sad and true”.*

*We with you,*

*Always there, only us,*

*With the rain, the wind, the whirl fire*

*Always there, in every minute*

*In the square holding meetings,*

*Talking, recounting in a public square,*

*Before the eyes of the people that comment “what madness!”*

*But we who know it well, we laugh,*

*To us nothing is important and nothing interests us*

*If not our very life as it is.*

*We alone ... we!*

*Always there, altogether but alone<sup>7</sup>.*

In this way, many children and adolescents, though part of the visible society, remain totally excluded from the same society. They do not mean anything to the society. Most times, they are totally forgotten in their unknown world. They become visible only for crime or because their behaviour disturbs the habitants of the neighbourhood. In this sense, the children of the neighbourhood are also street chil-

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<sup>7</sup> Caritas Diocesana di Roma, *Annuario 2006-2007*, p. 15.

dren. The streets and public squares give them an identity, a belongingness and a history. The street gives them that which the society has denied them!

m. Orphans, abandoned and lost children.

Abandoned children are totally homeless and they do not have any contact with their families of origin. Some of these children are abandoned at a very tender age and never came to know who their parents or relatives are. Some do not even know their ages or birthdays, in many cases, they were not even registered in any birth register and have no birth certificates. Practically, they do not exist for the society or for any real family. In situations of war for example, there are some children that get lost and are never found again. Some of them end up in good hands while the major part becomes prey to the endless travails of the streets. The question of orphans is a different topic altogether. In many poor countries, the government is not able to manage and assist the growing number of orphaned children. The growth of such situations as recorded in recent studies in East Africa is due to the growth in the epidemic called HIV/AIDS.

n. Identity card of the citizens of the streets.

From what we have said already, one may begin to have a clear idea of what it means to be a street child. For the purpose of this book, we think it is necessary to arrive at very clear and simplified analysis. When for example I talk of a “house”, certainly, many different images come to the minds of my listeners. Some would think of a palace, some of an apartment, to some other, a house means a villa, a hut, etc. But at the end, there are always some elements common to all these examples of a “house”. For example, “a house” is a place where one could protect himself from rain, sun and elements of nature; a place to live and/or work, etc. In this way, we can arrive at a prototype of all houses! At a more exact but concrete definition of a house. In this sense, we ask

ourselves if it is possible arriving at a precise, definite, concise, representative and prototypic but concretely possible definition of what it means to be a street child. As we have seen before, some of the indices of being a street child could be:

- living for a prolonged time on the streets,
- working on the streets,
- living without the supervision or control of a responsible adult,
- living without protection,
- being excluded from the civil society,
- being reduced to an object in the hands of the profiteers,
- being without a family,
- being abandoned,
- being vulnerable,
- being an orphan.

It is true that there are some children who live in situations that embrace all the elements numbered above at the same time, we may call them pure blood citizens of the street world. However, if we limit ourselves to these pure blood street children, we shall be excluding a wide range of children who suffer different levels of abandon. In order to arrive at the identity card of street children, citizens of the streets, we would like to give an expository and critical analysis of the “Rapid Assessment of Street Children in Lusaka” – a research conducted by a group of specialists from UNICEF, NETAID, The West Foundation and many other international foundations for the study of the phenomenon of street children in the city of Lusaka, Gambia. The result of this research was published in March, 2002.

o. Data collection.

In order to identify street children who could be interviewed, the city of Lusaka was divided in zones. Many street chil-

dren already in foster homes or under the care of the NGOs are included in the champions interviewed. The identification of the street children was easier in zones of lower profile and high presence of open markets. The actual interview of the street children took place between April and May, 2001.

p. Number of children interviewed.

In this research, 1,264 street children were interviewed. The number includes 175 children from the centres run by the NGOs, and 1,089 children still on the streets. For this study, 32 children who have already reached the adult age are excluded. Therefore, the number of street children whose interviews were analysed is 1,232.

q. Age and sex of the street children.

When they were asked their ages, only 1,240 of the 1,264 children interviewed were able to say how old they were.

<b>Table 1. Age distribution of the street children of Lusaka</b>		
<b>Age in years</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
4	4	0.3%
5	8	0.7%
6	12	1.0%
7	26	2.2%
8	29	2.4%
9	69	5.7%
10	77	6.4%
11	87	7.2%
12	139	11.5%
13	150	12.4%
14	168	13.9%
15	168	13.9%
16	125	10.3%
17	88	7.3%
18	58	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1208</b>	<b>100.0%</b>



They were all between the age of 4 and 27 years. Of the 1,208 respondents who were still minors, almost 20% was of children between 4 and 10 years. The medium age was 13.18 years. The champions examined indicate that the boys are four times more than the girls (82% and 18% respectively). The percentage of the girls under the age of 10 years was two times more than that of the girls between 11 and 18 years old (30.7% and 14.8% respectively).

<b>Age in years</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
4-10	156 (69.3%)	69 (30.7%)	225 (100.0%)
11-14	459 (84.4%)	85 (15.6%)	544 (100.0%)
15-18	379 (86.3%)	60 (13.7%)	439 (100.0%)
Undetermined age	16 (66.7%)	8 (33.3%)	24 (100.0%)
<b>Total</b>	1010 (82.0%)	222 (18.0%)	1232 (100.0%)

r. Information on their families.

Of the 1,232 children interviewed, only 1,154 were capable of saying something about their parents:

- 487 (42.2%) had both parents still living;
- 300 (26.0%) had their mothers alive while their fathers are deceased;
- 115 (10.0%) had their fathers alive and their mothers deceased;
- 251 (21.8%) are orphans of both parents.

Of the 1,232 respondents, 800 (64.9%) have close relatives while 432 (35.1%) do not know of any close relative. From this, it is evident that 90.7% of the children have parents or close relatives while 9.3% do not have either known parents or close relatives.

## s. Their residence.

The research demonstrates that two-thirds of the children (66.4%) live with their parents or with their relatives, 43.2% live with both parents. A total of 113 (9.1%) live in centres for street children and with structures set up by the Catholic Church, 250 (20.3%) stay with friends, or more accurately, on the streets.

	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Both parents	285	23.1%
Father only	36	2.9%
Mother only	212	17.2%
Brother	46	3.7%
Sister	34	2.8%
Uncle or aunt	68	5.5%
Grand parents	122	9.9%
Other relatives	10	0.8%
Friends	250	20.3%
Church	3	0.2%
Centre	110	8.9%
Alone	30	2.4%
Bus station	3	0.2%
Non specified	17	1.4%
Father's or mother's companion	6	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	1232	100.0%

A very significant percentage regards the streets as proper home, most times, identifying the streets with the neighbourhood as their actual and true residence. Only less than a fifth of these children are already received in centres for street children.

Current residence	Occurrence	Percentage
Neighbourhood	520	42%
Public structure	115	9.3%
Centres for street children	204	16.6%
Streets, abandoned houses, public squares, bus stations, autobus, etc.	107	8.7%
Outside Lusaka	32	2.6%
No response	254	20.6%
<b>Total</b>	1,232	100.0%

t. How much time do you pass on the streets?

The children were questioned on the amount of time they stay on the streets, if it were only during the day, only during the night or always, whether day or night. Of the 1,070 who responded to this particular session, the greater part (761 of 1070, that is, 71.1%) affirms to be staying on the street during the day. More than a quarter (296 of 1070, or 27.7%) say they stay on the streets both night and day. Only 1.2% say they stay on the streets only by night. According to the data collected, it would seem in relations to their sexes, that girls more than boys, stay part time on the streets (either only in the night or only during the day). According to the age, relatively few children under the age of 10 years say they are on the streets only in the night. Street night activities seem to grow in a significant way between the ages of 10-12 years.

When?	Boys	Girls	Total
Day and night	270 (30.4%)	26 (14.2%)	296 (27.7%)
Day time only	611 (68.9%)	150 (82.0%)	761 (71.1%)
Night time only	6 (0.7%)	7 (3.8%)	13 (1.2%)
<b>Total</b>	887 (100.0%)	183 (100.0%)	1070 (100.0%)

When asked how long they have been on the streets, almost half (49.1%) affirms to have been on the streets for about two years, and two thirds (65%) for about four years; and less than ten percent affirms to be on the streets for more than four years.

A large number of boys affirms to have been on the streets for so long as to not remember how long. Others have always been on the streets!

u. But what do you do on the streets?

A large number of the children interviewed take care of themselves by themselves. Some do some part-time work; washing cars or carrying bags for people at the market place, polishing shoes and selling fruits or vegetables on the streets or at the bus and train stations.

A large number of these children depend on their families, while others admit to be begging on the streets. A small part, especially girls, are involved in prostitution. Only about 4% say they are sustained by help coming from NGO centres. The following means of sustenance grow with age: part-time work, asking help from NGO centres and prostitution.

<b>Means of sustenance</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
Part-time work	486 (48.1%)	48 (21.6%)	534 (43.3%)
Street hawking	49 (4.9%)	30 (13.5%)	79 (6.4%)
Helping family business	23 (2.3%)	15 (6.8%)	38 (3.1%)
Business	26 (2.6%)	8 (3.6%)	34 (2.8%)
Prostitution	1 (0.1%)	13 (5.9%)	14 (1.1%)
Street-begging	212 (21.0%)	39 (17.6%)	251 (20.4%)
Stealing	1 (0.1%)	----	1 (0.1%)
Gambling	1 (0.1%)	----	1 (0.1%)
Family helper	114 (11.3%)	49 (22.1%)	163 (13.2%)
NGO centres	39 (3.9%)	7 (3.2%)	46 (3.7%)
No response	58 (5.7%)	13 (5.9%)	71 (5.8%)
<b>Total</b>	1010 (100%)	222 (100%)	1232 (100%)

While these reduce with tender age: street hawking, working for the families and depending on the families. Street begging is most common among children in the age group between 10-14 years or just above 14 years. Such activities were done in places where there are high concentrations of people: in the markets (24.3%), in the bars and on the streets (9.8%), at the commercial centres (4.3%), at the bus stops (4.1%).

Almost 12% affirms to work where ever it has the possibility of working. The girls work more on the streets than the boys, the boys work more in the markets, at bus stops and commercial centres, etc.

The money they earn is most times spent on food and cloths (62.6%). About 10% affirms to be giving their earnings to their families:

<b>Table 7: What do you do with your earnings?</b>		
<b>What do you do with the money?</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I buy cloths	438	35.6
I buy food and cloths	301	24.4
I buy food for my family	32	2.6
I buy food and cloths and give part of the money to my boss	5	0.4
I give the money to my mother	108	8.8
Domestic needs	42	3.4
Enjoyment	10	0.8
Give money out as loans	7	0.6
Savings in banks	4	0.3
School fees	3	0.2
School books and scholastic materials	2	0.2
Share with friends	1	0.1
No response	279	22.6
Total	1232	100.0

v. Education.

Of the 1,232 children interviewed in this research, about three quarters (72.7%) are school drop-outs: 73.3% of the boys and 70.3% of the girls.

w. Health

Life on the streets has exposed many children to different health hazards, this is because of their environment that is totally lacking of any form of hygiene, an unhealthy alimentionation, improper self medication, and continuous exposition to the elements of nature, to violence and to sexually related risks. Among the most recurrent health problems suffered by the street children are malaria (12.4%), headache (6.8%), cold (3.5%). To the question whether they have been ill recently, about a third (33.1%) responded affirmatively. Of those who are constantly ill, about 78.7% state that it is receiving treatment of various illnesses. 81.8% percent of those who were recently ill say they received treatment for their illnesses. Family and friends are cited as sources of help for the cure in the case of 40% of the sickly children, while self medication and the use of traditional doctors take up 55%. The question then is: What is the quality of the treatment received by these children? Since the children lack guidance and supervision of their parents, and because of their low level of education, since they are constantly exposed to sexual abuse, and many of them fall back to prostitution as a means of sustenance, street children are vulnerable to STDs, HIV/AIDS, etc. In this research, only 36 (3.6%) of the 1,010 boys and 21 (9.5%) of 222 girls admit to have contracted STD. Among the boys, almost all the cases that have contracted the diseases were between 12 and 18 years of age. The same for the girls, between 12 and 18 years. In this group, especially between 12 and 18 years of age, 21/123, or 17.1%, have contracted STD, that is about one out of every five children.

x. Use of drugs and sexual activities.

Sexual activities among street children seem to be very intense and also to begin at a very tender age. We have already seen the occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases STD, another index that could help is the high possibility of premarital pregnancy among the female street children. Among the 222 street girls interviewed, 14 (6.3%) admitted to have remained pregnant (bearing in mind the difficulties in obtaining these data) in the past. Among these girls is a little girl of 10 years, while all the others are between 16 and 18 years of age. Five confessed to have aborted their babies while four responded that their babies died in the first few weeks after their birth. Almost two thirds of the children interviewed (62.4%) affirmed good knowledge of drugs; especially among the boys and less among the girls (67.5% and 39.2% respectively). For all the children, the knowledge of drugs grows with age: only 20.3% of the children below 10 years knew of drugs as compared to 62.2% of those between 10 and 14 years, and 77.4% of those between 15 and 18 years. Of the children interviewed, 292 (23.7%) confessed to the constant use of different types of drugs and stupeficient.

y. Violence

More than half of the children that were interviewed (57.1%) admit to have provoked or endured acts of violence, 60.2% among the boys and 39.8% among the girls. With advancement in age, the rate of violence increases: only 38.5% of children under 10 years have lived cases of violence in contrast to 58.3% of children between 10-14 years and 62.4% of children between 15 and 18 years. Among the different forms of violence, the physical violence shows a very high index: fist-fights among companions (31.6%), beatings of adults and clients (30.0%), other forms of physical violence (27.4%). There are also other forms of violence like that received from the police and other law enforcement agencies

(3.6%) and sexual violence (3.0%). There is no research data referring to the inevitable psychological violence attendant to street life; the interior psychological trauma, the fears, the mental bruises and the internal destruction they are destined to live with. We shall look into these facts later.

## 1.2. *Street language and communication*

*Every day we find ourselves face to  
face yet never did we ever meet*  
Zen (a koan of Buddhism)

Is it possible to communicate? Between what I think, what I say and what is understood by the person with whom I am speaking, there are deep differences! In communication, one presupposes that there should be at least two people that wish to communicate and have a good common base of relation. Jakobson's model of communication could help us in this reflection<sup>8</sup>. In communication, the following elements come to play:

- emitter: the person who emits a message to be communicated;
- receiver: the person (healthy or not) to whom the message is sent;
- message: the content of the communication;
- referent: the argument;
- code: the language of signs (English language);
- canal: the means, the physical element through which the message flows (air)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> R. Jakobson, *Saggi di linguistica generale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1980, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> B. De Angelis, *La scuola: luogo della parola e dell'ascolto*, in A. Porcheddu (ed), *Comunicazione, formazione e tecnologie avanzate*, Edizioni Libreria Croce, Roma 2000, p. 187.



Between the subject that produces the message and that which receives, there has to be a two-dimensional relationship. They must wish to transmit a content, a wish or a message. Then the emitter and the receiver must know and understand the language or code that they wish to use in their communication.

It is really in the interaction between the emitter and the receiver that a big problem may come up. If there is no common base, a shared life-world<sup>10</sup> (of significations, classifications, signs, lived experiences, myths, stories and values; the emitter can also say all he wishes, but the receiver may never understand him. The receiver will understand all but what the emitter wishes to say. Now we wish to analyze the possible content and the possibility of communication with and between street children and what actually is the language of street children.

a. The communicative base of street children

There are basic concepts which we presume to be common when we talk to other people, but in reality, they are not common. I could for example easily think that the word “master” has the same meaning for me and for my friend with whom I am studying the same course in the university. This may not be true. If my friend happens to be a monk, for me, “master” means my beloved bachelor elementary school teacher with short ties and white shorts, while for my friend, “master” could mean the person who accompanied him in his formative journey as a monk!

If no one of us comes out of his world and tries to see what this concept means for the other, we may finish our discourse on “master”, understanding two things totally different, even if both of us have good education. This is even more clear between two persons from totally different worlds; which could be me and a street child! We have lived

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<sup>10</sup> J. Habermas, *The theory of communicative action*, vol. I, *Reason and rationalization of society*, trans. by Th. McCarthy, Polity Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 70 e 131.

totally different experiences; I know who are my parents, he does not; I know my origins, he does not; I know when is my birthday, he does not; I was always helped by the law enforcement agencies, he was always abused; I have where to sleep, he has not; I am sure of my future, he does not know what it is; I have never made use of drugs, but he has; I know what it means to be loved, but he does not know!

There is practically nothing he sees the way I do! If I see a policeman and I feel secure, he feels threatened! We see each other every day, we live in the same city, but we belong to totally different worlds!

Therefore, how can I pretend that when he tells me of his experiences, I am capable of understanding the true meaning? How am I to be sure that the words in my mental dictionary correspond to his? It is true that when I communicate with elementary expressions like “come and eat”, he understands me easily, but how do I know the limits of my understanding of his situation?

The responses to these questions will occupy us in the sector on the dynamics of empathic communication. It is important to understand that a street child lives in his own world, where meanings and values of what we may refer to as “the normal world” lose their sense and because of this difference in belongingness, they are definitively distanced from the normal world. They live, they walk on the world, they play, but *they are not*! It is as if they do not exist! They are neither concerned nor involved!

b. The code of street children

The first scandal I had in my contact with street children is with reference to the language which they use. The clearest example comes from Nigeria or Anglo-Saxon zone of West Africa. Between the local indigenous languages and the imperialist language (English), a mid way language has been formed called “*pidgin English*”. *Pidgin English* is a language

which is born out of the experience of the people. At the beginning of colonization, the indigenes who came in contact with the English people had no scholastic knowledge. In order to communicate with the English people, they learnt some words in English without knowing the grammatical rules. They were making themselves understood with this new language that seems to be a mixture between the indigenous language and English words. The result of this mixture is *pidgin English*.

Today, *pidgin English* is a language very much recognized in West Africa. For instance, in Nigeria alone, it is the language spoken by so many. Come to think of it, even some authors have written their works in this language, and there are magazines published in *pidgin English*. It is true that *pidgin English* has not got much to do with street children, but ironically, there exists a version of *pidgin English* in Nigeria which belongs only to them.

A language which is formed in the same way with *pidgin English*. This version that belongs to the street children is a combination of all the dirty words that could come from both their local languages and the English language combined. It is the so called “gutter language” ... no one teaches them on the correct language to use, it is normal to talk in these terms. The language that is used has no grammatical rule, there is space for poetry, the important thing is to communicate with his mates with a language that all street people understand!

### *1.3. Street Government*

Is there any order in this world of the street? Street children seem to be outlaws, persona non grata, not taken into consideration if not only as beings to be punished when they provoke the

law enforcement agents. They are considered an open wound for the society. A type that infests the city, causing fear, stealing and cheating the “good people” and corrupting the good “children” with their vulgarity and with the trade on drugs. For the major part of the society, street children are not good people and it is better to stay away from them.

Objectively, it seems all true! A street child that grows in the gutter has little chance of becoming “responsible Mr. Somebody” tomorrow. Studies have demonstrated that more than 85% of the street children finish up badly: in prison, with a disgraceful death, or with a terminal disease, etc. The logic is that there is a vicious cycle in their life experiences: a gutter child today, tomorrow a matured criminal; a street girl today, tomorrow a matured prostitute; and so on. And this is verifiable!

The consequence of the social analysis of this situation reflects on the policies of the States. No one worries or bothers himself about street children. They do not exist either for their families or for the government! Therefore, for them, all the structures of the society are antagonistic, a threat to their lives. They do not have any sentiment of belongingness to the socio-political structures in which we live. For this reason, street children naturally and spontaneously institute strong groups or gangs in which they can find solace and belongingness, from which they can seek protection, justice and fair play.

a. The gang<sup>11</sup>.

The gang is the structure of defense which assures survival for the street children. It substitutes the family, offering protection and solidarity, a new status with codes of honour, series of rules to which the young member could conform himself, different and most times in contrast to the rules of a traditional or civil society.

Especially, the gang satisfies the need for an identity, a func-

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<sup>11</sup> S. Agnelli, *cit.*, p. 42.

tion that is most times reinforced by the fact that gangs are exclusive. In some cities, the rules and the mode of organization of the gangs arrive to notably complex levels. The gang could be structured according to a complicated system in which every member of the gang is tied to the other by a sort of spiritual brotherhood reinforced by the multi-forms of shared street experiences.

- b. The gang from the point of view of the street child.  
In his definition of groups, J. Maisonneuve (1973) writes,

Groups are social togetherness of dimensions and of very different structures: from the national communities to the most insignificant “gangs”. The only common character of all these togetherness is given, contemporarily, by the plurality of the individuals and by their more or less strong implicit solidarity. The idea of “force”: the expression “gather themselves” expresses very well the intention of reinforcement of individuals who feel powerless if left isolated; however, this collective power raises ambivalent reactions: reassures and threatens<sup>12</sup>.

From this point of view, the relationship between the individual and the group is summarized in the theme of *needs*. In this interpretative key, the street child enters a gang from the point of view of his personal needs and the possibility of satisfying them through the interaction, and the relation with other persons in the gang.

The need is that of *membership*, that is, of belongingness. The child wants a mental representation that permits his ego to acquire value and to confirm his identity in the unity of other persons who share the same situation with him. Many times, this need of belongingness draws the children into “homogenous solidarity”.

It is enough to look at the children of our neighbourhoods

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<sup>12</sup> G.P. Quaglino et al., *Gruppo di lavoro. Lavoro di gruppo*, Cortina, Milano 1992, p. 16.

who are always together and who believe that they belong to the same gang, they dress the same way, with the same type of hair cut, etc. In this need of belongingness to the streets, there is also the need to defend the gang as if it were a true family.

A single street child constructs his self esteem, his identity, and his dreams on the gang, and in return, the gang gives him security and identity. His relationship with the gang satisfies and fills the emptiness created in him by the rejection he has suffered from the civil society. It is because of this social and psychological dynamics that he owes fidelity to the gang and has the feeling of mistrust, if not hatred, towards the society.

c. The street child from the point of view of the gang.

The gang is a mental representation of the members who identify it as a new subject or person, with original needs, different from those of the individual members, and with different manifestations, not of the same type with those of the single members of the gang: it is the “we” to which they have reference and above all, which they construct and sustain.

We can configure the nature of a gang as a relationship in which the gang is a content and the single child-member is the container. The framework is always that of a structure that is holistic; a unity that literally suppresses the individual. The fundamental need which the gang expresses as a super-individual unity, and which the children satisfy, is the need to exist. This primary need of the gang is satisfied by the children through their belongingness, and through their capacity to contain the operative and symbolic representation of the gang itself, putting themselves in this way, at the service of the gang.

There would not have existed any gang if there were not to be members who believe in it.

- d. Equilibrium between the need of the street child and the need of the gang.

Through a law of symbiosis, the street child depends on his gang and his gang depends on him. Only that the child does not know of his belongingness to a “gang” in the sense in which we understand the concept.

For the child, it is his family, where he feels accepted and loved. Soon in this gang, the street child begins to experience internal conflicts in the dynamic process of the life of the gang, in which naturally follows the negotiation of roles in order to provide the “good” of all. It is in this context that there emerges a squad leader! He who succeeds in maintaining the equilibrium and in negotiating the interests of the gang without forgetting the individual members. The reality of this negotiation is a process which often takes place through violence.

He who becomes a squad leader is not necessarily the most intelligent or a charismatic leader! He is the most violent! The strongest!

- e. The consequences of the gang.

Every child who lives on the streets in a big city is lost and if he does not enter a gang, made up of a hierarchy where all the children have the ambition of becoming in their own turn, capos. For this to come true, they have to carry out acts of bravery which can earn them the respect of the others, even if such acts are criminal acts. In this contest, while the police tries to stop such criminal acts from occurring, the street children use criminal acts to demonstrate their courage/bravery to their companions. The gang substitutes the school which the children should have attended. Here, they learn to prostitute themselves, to drug themselves, to handle arms, etc. The rules of the gangs are absolute! The story of Raul, a street child in Mexico City demonstrates this reality:

I decided to go to Acapulco, I heard that there, life was easier. There, nobody knew me, and I hoped that I would not have entered into trouble. But the nights were quite cold and I was hungry. And so I came back to square zero, I have to steal in order to survive. At first, I worked for the street hawkers at the beach. I was selling to the tourists. Now I spend my time in the market, I search in the waste bin to find something to eat. It's a year now since I started smoking marijuana, it makes me to forget the hunger and the cold. I live a bad life, and all this because my mother sent me to that reformatory. I always think of her. I am her child, and she doesn't even love me. May be I will never see her again. I cannot work. I never finished school, though I would have loved to. That would have meant going away from here, it would have meant leaving the gang, leaving the streets, ... and this is one thing I cannot do. Especially after the incident. We were all a little off our minds, we were joking. I dozed off and someone poured a bottle of alcohol on me and set me on fire. I started to shout and run madly around the streets. Luckily a policeman succeeded in putting off the flames and carried me to the hospital. It was about three months ago and I still have the signs. At least if I had not wounded myself, I could have returned to work, but my legs do not function again as before<sup>13</sup>.

#### *1.4. The classifications*

It is true till now, we have painted in strong colours, the world of the streets, but it is natural that according to the different nations where there are some differences in culture, that the world of the streets are not the same for all nations. There are variations according to place, according to cultural and climatic circumstances, according to traditions and political inclinations. The world map of the phenomenon demonstrates an evident concentration in Latin America, where these children have become an inevitable characteristic of the local cultures. It could be because there is more documentation available to researchers

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<sup>13</sup> S. Agnelli, *cit.*, p. 30.



regarding this zone. The countries that are most hit are neither the poorest, like Paraguay, nor the richest, like Venezuela, but those in middle income class, like Brazil, Columbia and Mexico. In Africa, which has remained for a long time the most rural continent of the world, the phenomenon of street children is a very recent development. But now, more than in any other continent, this phenomenon is in rapid increase in Africa due to the increase in mass movement of the populations and due to rapid and unplanned urbanization. May be the identification of the problem was late because of a different way of seeing the role of children in the African society. Most times, children and women are considered inferior and part of the household ware. All the same, in some zones near the Sahara, where drought, famine and armed violence have had their destabilizing effects on the social structure, the number of street children is in continuous rise. At Khartoum, for example, where in the past this phenomenon was totally unknown, now, there are very many street children. The information we have on Asia is also scarce. The population of India alone is about three hundred million more than that of all the habitants of Latin America and the Caribbean Islands, even if the population is still concentrated in the rural areas. Given the poorer economic base and the rapid urbanization, it seems probable that the number of street children may have a correspondent magnitude and may still continue to grow, even if the data may be confused by the number of entire families who live permanently on the streets. The industrialized countries, on their own part, may not have to rejoice much. In such countries, social services are theoretically available to all. Children who live always on the street is a rare occurrence. But street children, children who run away from their families, from fifteen years up, are not rare. In the streets and city centre of New York, every night, the social service agents count more than 20,000. This is also the case in many other industrialized nations. In order to give a more complete

presentation of the street world, we wish to show a few examples of the phenomenon and how it manifests itself in some countries of the world. We shall limit ourselves to a few countries which we shall regard as representative of the different continents and of the different forms in which this reality manifests itself.

- a. Nigeria. In Nigeria, a West African Nation with about 150 million habitants, one notices two major types of the phenomenon of street children: those who live and work on the streets (street children – children of the street) and those who work full-time or part-time on the streets, returning to their families, friends, guardians or relatives at night (street children – children on the streets). In most Nigerian cities, many children are on the streets as beggars. It is normal to see children working as guides for disabled adults. Apart from these, many children work as itinerant hawkers, professional beggars, shoe shiners, etc. The greater part of these street children in Nigeria are boys while the girls are less in number. In the big cities of Nigeria like Lagos, Benin, Onitsha, Kano, Aba, Warri, etc, hundreds of indigent families (including children) live under the bridges, in abandoned public buildings, in half finished structures, in open public markets and in front of big churches like Cathedrals, etc. Another type of street children in Nigeria is made of some children who involve themselves in vagabondage everyday and every hour in the main cities of Nigeria. These mature from one crime to another until they form strong gangs, weed smoking and druggist clubs or mature renegades causing confusion from one part of the city to another.
- b. Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe (South-East Africa), the problem of street children is not new. Already in the 1920s, children between 10 and 14 years were migrating to the cities in their thousands. Points of attraction were the cities which constituted centres for mining and other industrial activities. The

officials of colonization were already worried of how to get the children off the streets. Many of these children had found salaried work as domestic servants and gardeners, while others were cooks or cleaners. However, in these cities where there were mines, the domestic service included also “sexual” services. In these last years, the phenomenon of street children in Zimbabwe is getting out of proportion. Before their independence from imperialist powers (1980), it was difficult for children to work on the streets as itinerant hawkers, beggars, etc., since there existed a brutally implemented law against such activities. With their independence, such rules were no longer applied with the same force. Recent studies in Zimbabwe show that among the minors who loiter the streets of Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru and Kadoma, the greater part (about 56.9%) work and live on the streets, 31% of the children have homes where to go back at night, etc. The belongingness to the streets grows hand in hand with a dynamics of detachment from the family of origin. The greater part of these children comes from the villages where the incapacity to innovate the agricultural productive system does not permit survival and where the rate of mortality through HIV/AIDS is very high. The structure of the extended family or tribe which is gradually going into a profound crisis especially because of the economic yoke of having more orphans than able parents, makes it impossible for the village system to contain the social problems as it was traditionally done.

- c. Brazil. In Brazil, the sight of homeless children who loiter the streets from morning to night is a common spectacle. These children are more concentrated in major cities like Sao Paulo, Campinas and Brasilia. These children live totally on their own and have to take care of themselves every day, in a hostile, insensitive and indifferent world. Among the Brazilian children who live on the streets, one can iden-

tify many who come from destroyed families, from abject poverty and from a history of sicknesses. However, there are many children totally abandoned, who cannot boast of any known relative. They were abandoned, some because their parents do not want them again or because they themselves are unfortunate children of other street minors who were born on the streets and whose child-parents were forced to abandon in order to fend for themselves. As in many countries in South and Central America, Brazil is a victim of the corrupt state where there is a big abyss between the few rich and the majority of poor people living in abject poverty. The impossibility of living a dignified life in the batchers and huts constitutes an expulsive factor which chases all the inhabitants of the villages to the cities in search of a better life. But unfortunately, these villagers finish up living a more terrible life in the slums of the cities.

- d. The Philippines. In the Philippines, especially in the cities, poverty forced many children into vagabondage, in search of survival. It is horrible to see many children of school age intently searching among bins and dumps from morning to night. Among this refuse, they find “food”, “clothing” and household materials. Places where dogs with the minimum of “self respect” would not accept as homes under normal circumstances.
- e. Italy. In Italy, in the city of Rome, Milan, Naples, Florence, etc., the phenomenon of street children manifests itself in many different ways. It is a bit difficult to describe the categories of this reality in Italy. There seems even to be a certain order in things, and a systematic indifference. The first to come into sight in Italy are the groups of minors who crowd the public squares, public places and centres of tourist attraction, asking for alms. Here we are talking about children of about ten years who look after cars in parking spaces and ask for tips after, children who clean windscreens of cars

at major traffic jams, etc. Many of these children also crowd the metros, with musical instruments, singing, dancing and clowning for an indifferent or totally hostile audience. Many a times, the audience gives them a few coins in order to assuage the consciences of those who could have done more. Italy serves as example of many other Western European countries. Many children are trafficked under false pretexts from Eastern Europe and are “used” by some conscienceless elements of the society in many inhuman forms. Also in Italy, it happens that many minors, especially those from Romania, Albania, Nigeria, etc., are used for the sex market. As we have said before, there exists also the phenomenon of the children of the neighbourhood. Especially in the cities of Italy, there are many of such children, who live practically in the public squares, separated from their families from morning to night and in full communion with the streets, even if they have all the material sustenance from their families of origin. They are children profoundly wounded by the family, betrayed by the society and in crisis with themselves.

- f. Mongolia. Mongolia is a big country situated between Russia and China, almost as big as the whole Western Europe, but with only about 2.4 million habitants and a very hostile climate. The temperature in winter descends even to  $-40^{\circ}$  centigrade and rises in summer to  $+40^{\circ}$  centigrade. The fall of the ex-Soviet Union put an end to the preventive social help that used to come from Russia. The appearance of the first street children was in the early 90s. In Mongolia, the number of street children is estimated to be about 4,000<sup>14</sup>. In this country, a street child is defined as a child who passes his time on the streets, who lives and works on the streets or who has no fixed abode. The major part of them are boys,

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<sup>14</sup> Juvenile Justice Report 2002, *Mongolian adolescents needs assessment survey report* 2000 and World Bank Report 2000.

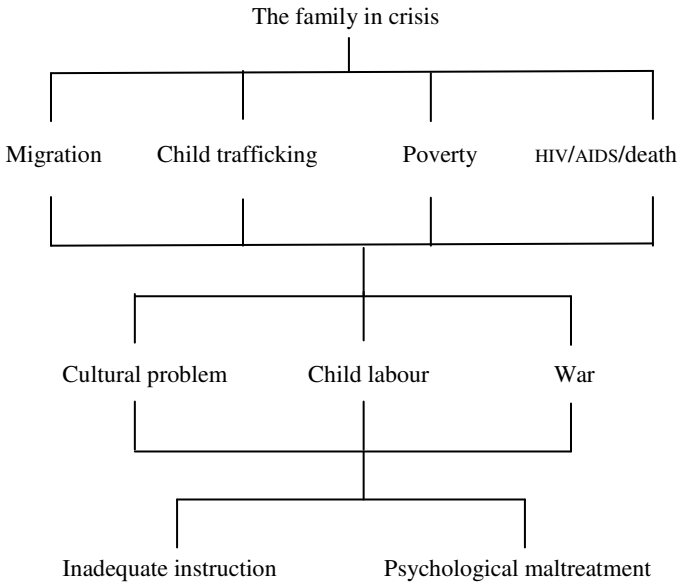
though data reveals a progressive rise in the number of girls.

### *1.5. The causes*

It is true that almost in all of human history, there have always been children abandoned to themselves. It is also true that in nations where there is a just socio-political order for children, the question of street children is contained by an efficient and adequate system of intervention. At the same time, it seems the problem of street children manifests it self in all types of societies, no matter how efficient the government may be.

In line with this, we have studied the causes of the phenomenon of street children, looking at how it is manifested in different cultures and nations. The list of the causes of the problem is very long. Beginning with those most commonly cited among the nations, we have: unbalanced migration from the villages to the cities; poverty and other important factors. After taking a more profound look at the phenomenon, we have also seen how disastrous factors like war and epidemics could be.

The common denominator that comes out in all the causes we examined is the destruction of the natural family. The family is the right place of the child, where he is to be groomed in a natural manner. Every child needs a family with its network of relations according to the natural disposition of the family. When these relations do not exist or when they become sources of oppression, the only option is that the child enters the street world, where his destiny will be completely in his own hands. In our study of the dynamics of this tragic detachment from a family system which brings about a detachment and repulsion from the entire society, we have also studied the fundamental detachment that takes place in the child himself. In a few words, some causes of the phenomenon are:



### 1.5.1. Migration from rural areas to urban areas

For the greater part, street children in urban areas are victims of the urban decadence, of misery and chronic unemployment, of the accommodation crisis, high divorce percentage, moral disorientation and confusion inherent to the unorganized overcrowding of the cities. According to an old study done in the early eighties on the distribution of the world population according to geographical areas, in 1950, the world population of about 2.5 billion had about 15.3% resident in Europe, 26.6% in East Asia, 28.3% in meridian Asia, 0.5% in Oceania, 7.5% in ex USSR, 8.7% in Africa, 6.5% in Latin America and 6.6% in North America. The same study demonstrates that in 1980, about 10.9% was living in Europe, 5.6% in North America,

8.2% in Latin America, 10.6% in Africa, 6.0% in ex USSR, 0.5% in Oceania, 31.7% in meridian Asia while about 26.5% was living in East Asia. Making a forecast for 2025, the same study calculates that about 6.4% will reside in Europe, 4.2% in North America, 10.6% in Latin America, 18.8% in Africa, 4.3% in ex USSR, 0.4% in Oceania, 20.9% in East Asia, while 34.4% will reside in meridian Asia. This study had also as one of its principal objectives, the demonstration of the distribution of world population, exposing the concentration of people in given geographical areas and the reason why it is so. Many factors like emigration from one country to another, the growth in population and emigration from rural to urban areas were taken into consideration. Later, we shall see some of the manifestations of these factors. One thing very interesting here is the interpretation of the distribution in rural and urban areas.

According to the progressive data, 28.9% of world population was resident in urban areas in 1950; in 1980, 41.1% of world population was resident in urban areas and it is forecasted that in 2025, 65.2% will be resident in the urban areas. Looking at the data more closely, in the more developed regions of the world, in 1950, 53.3% was resident in the urban areas, 73.5% in 1985, 79.9% in 2000, and in 2025, the forecast is that about 86.7% will be resident in urban areas; while in the less developed regions of the world, the percentage is 16.9% in 1950, 33.7% in 1985, 43.8% in 2000 and 60.9% in 2025.

More recent studies have confirmed the veracity of the above stated facts and figures. Attributing the problem to globalization, urbanization is seen as the consequence of multinational companies, the response to the call to luxury and a flight from the biting poverty in the villages — flight from a life without hope to a life “full” of hope and new horizons<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> T.C. Ihejirika, *Between globalization and globalism. Dangers of pure humanism*, Barloz, Owerri (Nigeria) 2002, pp. 72-110.



The rejection of this terrible campaign is fast and slow at the same time. For the younger generations, the attractions of a life filled with sufferings disappear before the images of a world of flowers and unimaginable riches spread by the mass-media. A little crumb of ambition is enough to push one who has not known anything but submission, weakness, vulnerability, poverty and impotence, to search for fortune somewhere else.

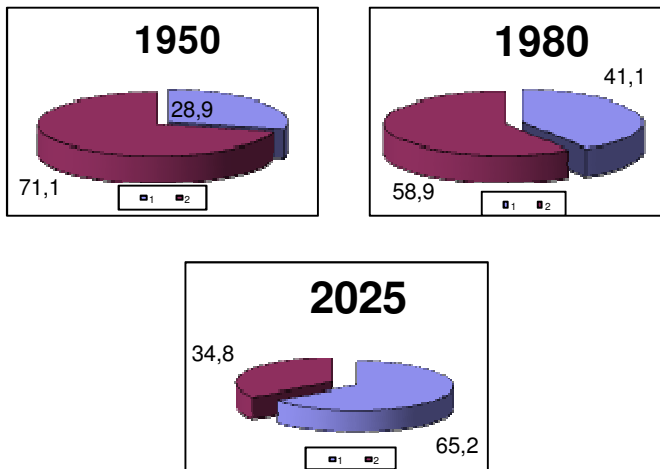
The effect is very dramatic — especially in the developing nations, it can be seen immediately and clearly. All the villages which used to be calm in the 1950s are being transformed in “urban areas”. These so called urban areas were never projected. There is no visible structuring for the residential areas, for public edifices and places of worship, for roads, for public gardens, etc. Many of these cities could be compared to forests while the houses in these cities could be compared to mushrooms which sprout up at will, when and where they please! We can not even say that these houses are abusive, since no law exists prohibiting their construction. Everybody constructs where and how he can, without any impediment. In this way, in many cities, side-by-side with elaborate riches or under the balconies of endless riches, there co-exists the most absolute misery. For the lack of projection, even the peripheries of the cities in the most developed countries become ghettos, where crowds of human beings live practically as livestock.

One could say that if they are village men, they are used to living in such conditions, but, the situation here is not like that of the villages. Apart from the functional traditional sanitary systems in the villages which are lacking in the ghettos, the family ties are lacking, the traditional institution is lacking. The good agricultural practice of every real village is lacking, it is not possible to go to the garden behind the house and harvest vegetables, to run down to the stream and fetch water, etc. Here, everything has to be bought: even water! Moral decadence is also a very important consequence. In the villages, every adult

looks after the children of other adults. I grew up in the village and I know how it is. All the children are first of all children of the village before being children of their parents! Even if one could say that they are children of the village because they are children of their parents who in their own turn belong to the village. For example, in my village, the children are organized in age groups and are strictly controlled and accompanied in their growth. Every phase of life corresponds to a responsibility and there are adults assigned to every group of children. What is more, these traditional practices are tied to moral and religious values. These values form part of the norms of the village ... norms though not written, but held sacrosanct to every generation of the village. Every person is historically and culturally tied to the other. In the ghettos, life is not like this. Though they find themselves in even a worse type of poverty than the one they are used to in their villages, they are suddenly freed from the rules and norms of the villages, they are lawless. In many cases, the neighbours are total strangers, also because they come from different origins, cultures, languages, religions, practices, credence and general habits. When all these people find themselves together in this unorganized manner, and the only rule is that of survival, the result is true chaos! There are so many children born out of irregular relationships, many adolescent and single mothers that it almost seems to be a way of life. What is more, the greater part of adults living in the ghettos leave their holes very early in the morning in order to arrive early at their places of work. If one is to begin his shift at 6.00 am, sometimes, it is necessary for him to leave his house as early as 4.00 am in order to arrive on time. If he finishes at work by 4.00 pm, he risks to arrive home by about 6.00 pm because of the terrible traffic in such unplanned towns. At such time, he is tired, takes his bathe, eats and goes to sleep in order to wake up early the next day. If for example such a man living and working in such conditions has four children or more, and

as seems to happen often, his wife also works like him, the children are totally abandoned to themselves the whole day, every day, every week and every month!

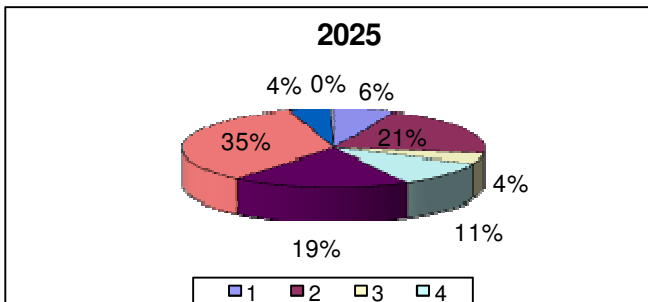
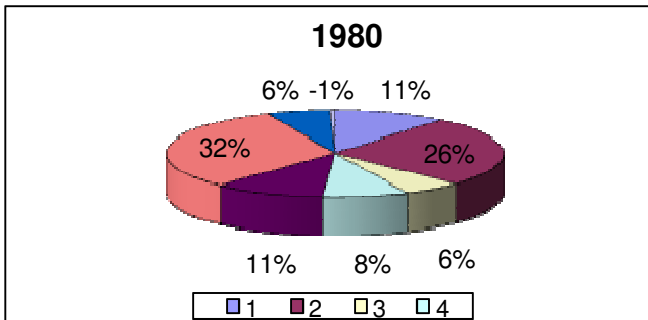
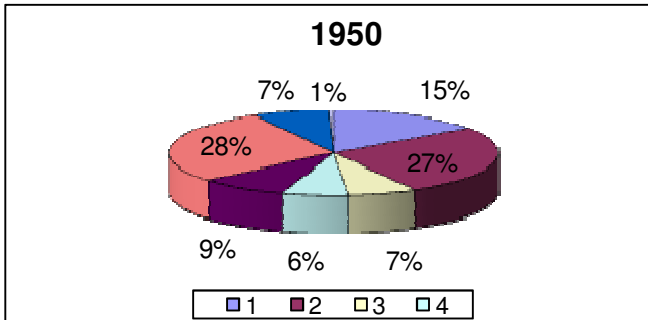
*The percentages of world population resident in the urban areas, represented in the various years.*



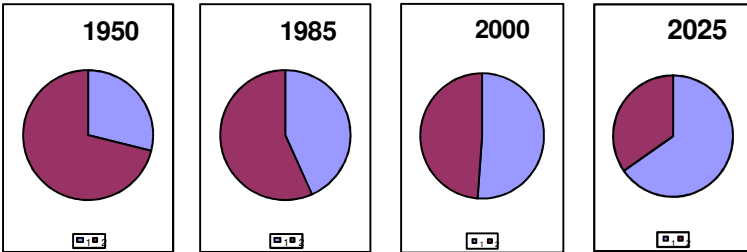
One may ask why is it that they are not able to take care of their children if it is true that they work so hard. For us, the first question should be: what type of work do they do? Many of these adults are simple cleaners, gatemen, gardeners, cooks and drivers in the houses of the rich people of the society. Sometimes they are invited by their employers to live with them, but as is frequently verified, their employers do not want them to pack over with their families. This forces them to make long journeys everyday or to abandon their families in the ghettos.

*Percentage distribution of the world population,  
according to geographical areas:*

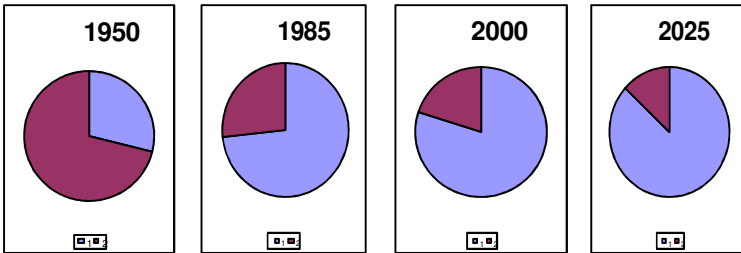
- 1. Europe; 2. Oriental Asia; 3. North America; 4. Latin America;  
5. Africa; 6. Meridian Asia; 7. URSS; 8. Oceania.*



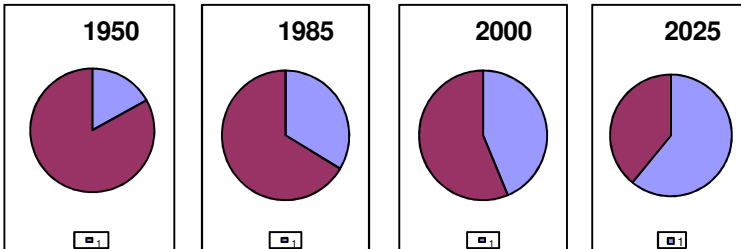
*Percentage of the world population resident in urban areas*



*More developed regions of the world*



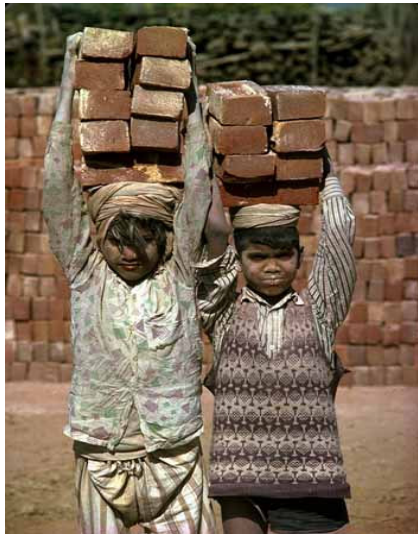
*Less developed regions of the world*



*Poverty*



AP / Greg Baker



[www.alchemistpoonam.wordpress.com](http://www.alchemistpoonam.wordpress.com)

*Child labour*

They are desperate people, they do not have any negotiating power and can not even count on a labour syndicate to protect their rights ... who ever heard of the union of housemaids! The normal thing is that they are over used, and their families are destroyed! In this way, in the satellite ghettos of the major cities of the world, many street children are manufactured everyday in a continuous vicious circle. Children abandoned to themselves, children who must learn to defend themselves alone and construct their own existence without any adult help. Where do these children finish up? It would be an exaggeration to say that they all finish on the streets! But it is quite clear that a greater part of these children do not have any other destination than the streets! Generally, the word "poverty" refers to a state of lack. To be poor means to lack in what is necessary: be it material, spiritual, moral or social.

It would have been very much easier to talk about material poverty, describing the terrible situations in which many human beings live, than saying explicitly and definitively the meaning of poverty. But a recourse to such technique would present a very partial vision of the reality. Poverty as a phenomenon is very difficult to define. It can not be merely defined in terms of income or economic wellbeing, but also as a state of lack of "basic capacities" as different from "basic necessities".

We believe that it is very important to clarify the true content of the word "poverty" and the persons that we may include in the class of the poor. Here, the things to be considered include whether poverty means the inability to procure essential goods like food, cloths, a roof over the head, medical cure; or if poverty means falling till a certain point under the limit of the quality of life in the community where one lives.

In recent times, some American sociologists have reached an agreement on the absolute lowering of the poverty limit line based on the ability to acquire a defined quantity or quality of services and good, while the European countries base their own

measurement on the average percentage of national income.

For us, this polarization is useless since all the definitions of poverty are but relative. The relativity of which we talk about here refers to both time and place. For example, the definition of material poverty based on income of one dollar per day can not be applied to the European nations and to the developing countries without differentiations, nor can this metre be even applied to all the regions of the same nation! A poor man in the Europe of today cannot be compared to a noble of the Medieval Europe. Just as a dollar per day can not be sufficient to warm an European kitchen, a poor European of today would be better fed, medically cured and maintained in all ramifications than a medieval European nobleman.

Having seen the relativism of the use of the word “poverty”, we would like to use this word in a manner adequate for our field of study: poverty as regards the dignity of a child and the integrity of the family, and the effects it could have on the phenomenon of the street children. Here, we refer to the minimum needs for the normal running of the essential activities of the family, in such a manner as to guarantee a dignified life and sane development to every child.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child serves as a “Magna Charta” for understanding the minimum quality of life acceptable for the development of a child. It is a legal test, negotiated for more than ten years and accepted by 192 nations. It serves as an international model to which at least all the countries that have undersigned it should adhere. Article 27 of this Convention specifies that “it is recognised the right of every child to a standard of life adequate for his physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”. This right must be guaranteed and tutored by his parents, guardian and the government of every nation. For this, the same article 27 says that “parents and custodians of children have the primary responsibility of guaranteeing the necessary conditions for the develop-



ment of the child ... and the governments must assist these parents to fulfil this right and they must, when necessary, provide material assistance with programmes of sustenance for the nutrition, clothing and housing of children”.

Having said the above, we can now specify that “poor children are those who live an experience of lack in material, spiritual and emotional resources necessary for survival and development, not having been given the possibility to enjoy their rights, to reach the fullness of their potentiality or to participate in an equal and dignified manner as members of the society”<sup>16</sup>.

Poor children are children of poor families! It is a bit difficult to define a standard for the poverty of a family. For the use of this concept in our work, we limit ourselves to talking about the poverty in a family from the point of view of how it influences the education and life of the child. Millions of families in the world do not have the necessary things for life: food, clothes, healthy accommodation, basic medical care, etc. In many developing countries, many families with about ten components live in batches where they crowd in single rooms which serve as kitchen, dining room, bedroom and toilet. In a situation like this, we can imagine the type of sanitary conditions that could be obtained, and the type of life style that could be lived. Living together in such a family is not a thing of joy, all the components would prefer staying away from home as much as possible and entering the house only to sleep if possible! When and if somebody does not come home, it could be a blessing for the others, they find more space and more peace ... also because quarrels are never lacking in such homes!

As a child, I had the possibility of visiting for a few days, a relative who was living in the city, in a condition exactly as described above! I still have clear images of horrible nights and days spent in liberty on the streets of the city. One night, we

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<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, *The state of the world's children report*, 2005.

came back all hungry because we had not had a decent meal the whole day. The mother of the house had nothing for dinner. She made us to sit around the fire at the centre of the batcher. It was a poor family which knew how to make itself happy ... we told a series of stories, had games of cards, etc., until we did not know when all of us fell asleep around the fire! We were waiting for the food that was being cooked in a big pot on the fire ... only years after, this relative explained to me that on that night, there was nothing in the pot ... it was only water!

The worst thing about a family as poor as this is the fact that often, the parents have to work from early in the morning to late in the night, yet they find it impossible to take care of their families. Not only that they return home tired and only capable of falling into slumber, they hardly pass a full day in the company of their children per year. The children are left in a state of frightful liberty. Often, these children are forced, immediately they reach four years of age, to besiege the streets as beggars or as hawkers in order to augment the family income. The obvious consequence is that they finish definitively on the streets.

One could ask whether poor families and poor children are only in poor countries. The truth is that despite the fact that the poverty of the country could affect the poverty of the family and of children, studies have demonstrated that even in the richest countries of the world, there is a good number of families that live in absolute poverty. In such families, children are at risk of finishing on the streets in the way in which children in poor countries are. What could change the situation of the families is not whether the country is rich or not, but whether the country has a policy geared towards the family and social life, and oriented on the promotion of life.

### 1.5.2. The problem of gender and cultural practices

In different nations and cultures, there are cultural practices

that maintain a substantial difference between the male and female sexes. In recent times, many researchers have made profound studies on the possible implications of sexist practices. Even in the most developed countries of the world, studies have demonstrated the great variation in human attitude and differential comportment towards the sexes as in puberty rites, in the many modes like courtship, marriage, copulation, of training children, etc. Sexist attitude seems to be embedded in all the stages of human growth: birth and the different “social” modes of receiving males and females; puberty, falling in love, courtship and engagement; the prescription or forbidding of premarital sex; the sexual behaviour among partners in copulation; marriage and the variability of “residence” of the couple after marriage; pregnancy, birth, breast-feeding; taking care of children; the comportment of parents and their educational attitudes<sup>17</sup>.

For us, difference is richness. It would have been a good thing if the differential ways of treating the sexes were only to be just at the level of differentiation and role sharing between male and female in a society. But contrary to this, it seems that this differentiation has a concrete effect on societal and family life. First of all, in many societies, the son is preferred to the daughter, the boy to the girl, the man to the woman. The first is considered superior and the second, inferior.

We limit ourselves to an actual example that may seem taken for granted; a female Italian professor describes the use of the Italian words *ragazzo* for boy and *ragazza* for girl; and the use of the plural *ragazzi* which should be the plural for “boys” for a collection of boys and girls even when the girls outnumber the boys. According to her,

*The concrete and symbolic language used in the schools, notwithstanding that the teachers are almost totally females, is a*

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<sup>17</sup> M.A. Gainotti, *Diventare uomo, diventare donna*, Guerini, Milano 2001, p. 25.

*sexist language, imbedded with secular sedimentations in the modes of speech, in common places, in proverbs, etc. What is feminine comes to be absorbed and cancelled by what is masculine: just one male in a class makes it necessary to use the plural "ragazzi" for all the students. The opposite is that a single female in a class of males has absolutely no power to change the grammar. In the schools, language cheats women ... This hierarchy distorts the values of a community, denies the female folk the meaning of her real history and genealogy, produces in the students, right from the elementary school and even before then, a weakening of self esteem, a subtle conformation to a subsidiary post which they are forced to occupy in the society, a push to mortifying their talents instead of cultivating them. The alternative to which they are forced, with certain self violence, is that of recognising themselves in and assimilating male values<sup>18</sup>.*

In an assignment done by the school children in Naples on the difference between man and woman, as published in the book of Marcello D'Orta (1993, pp. 17-18), we see the typical reasoning of a common man:

*The difference between man and woman is that man has always been important while woman has never been important. Actually, just to begin, Eve was created as an after-thought and even from the ribs of Adam and the name that was given to her is even shorter than that given to Adam. Throughout history, the woman has always been the house keeper, except in the prehistoric times, where they were not even doing that because they had no houses: at most, they were rubbing the stones to make fire. The seven Kings of Rome were married, but they were ashamed to say it. If not so, why do we not know the names of the Seven Queens of Rome? During the French Revolution, the first person they cut her head was the queen, because as a*

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<sup>18</sup> E.G. Belotti, 1997, pp. 62-63, in M.A. Gainotti, *cit.*, p. 16.

woman, she had enjoyed too much fortune and there was need to punish her. Men have never considered women: for example they have never made them to become Pope, not even for curiosity. I believe that women, and especially the Arabs who must see from under their veils, throw abusive words at men who have reduced them this way. Now let me talk about men. They call man mammal even when it is the woman that gives birth to children, they should have called man papal. Man has more hairs than woman, though I know a woman more hairy than men, her name is Anna and she is a seamstress at Mater Dei.

The male voice is double, especially when he is annoyed, however the "Village Cousins" have a voice more refined than that of girls. Some actors and singers, for example Renato Zero, Mastelloni and Amanda Lear, it is not clear if they are men or women and no one knows how to address them. But the most substantial difference between man and woman is that the man makes children while the woman suffers them.

In more primitive cultures, this problem of discriminatory polarization between the sexes becomes even more evident. The woman can even be considered as a piece of furniture to be bought and used when and how the man wishes. In the Muslim countries and cultures, many girls are almost reduced to slaves of the male world. They are destined to serve the man in all his exigencies. In some gypsy cultures, the man drinks from morning to night, goes for sports, stays with his friends and is happy; but the woman must maintain the house, go to the streets, if necessary, asking for alms in order to feed her lord and her children. When she refuses to do this, she is filled with blows!

Many women with children have no companions. There is a great number of children which are maintained by single mothers, many a times, they finish on the streets. A numerous family constitutes a determinant factor, which is rarely taken into consideration. In Latin America, for example, many street children have six or seven younger brothers and sisters and a family in

which there is no father figure. The mother sends these children out on the streets to earn a living while she takes care of the new born kids. No one asks where the father or fathers of these children ran to, abandoning their responsibilities!

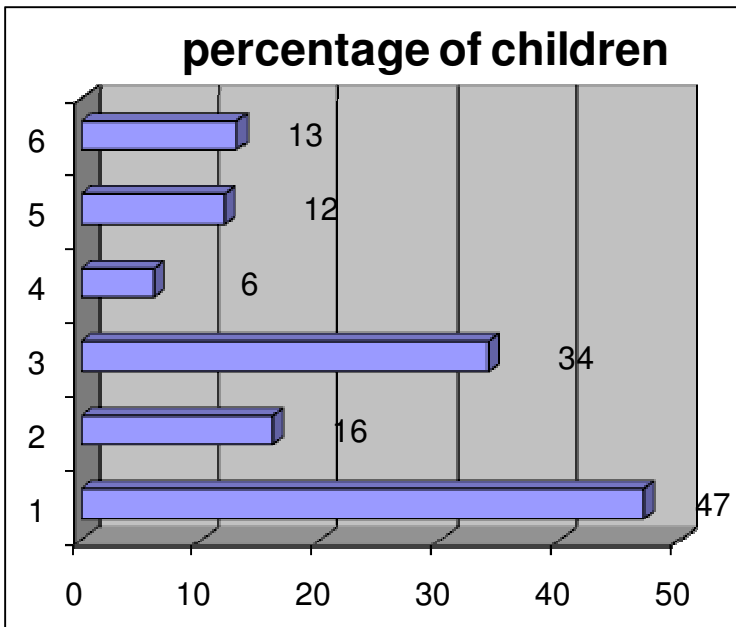
It is also important to note the fact that some religions preach the “virtue” of the beggar. In such religious practices, the child is trained to ask for alms as part of his religious formative journey. This reality still exists in some parts of West Africa, children are entrusted in the hands of itinerant preachers and “holy men” to receive religious education, and after some months, they are abandoned to themselves in a city, where they must live on alms — a religious obligation — which we could consider vagabondage. There is then the problem of mixed marriages and polygamy which in some rural areas could lead to the discarding of the children, considered not of pure blood by relatives of both parents or lost in the dynamics of antagonism inside a family of many wives and too many children!

In spite of the standard established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as contained in the conventions on the rights of children as against child labour, articles 138 and 182, about 246 million children (even below 12 years of age) in the world are engaged in profit oriented labour. Those between 12 and 14 years who should be able to do only light labour are also engaged in heavy labour! Worse still, many children are engaged in forced labour and prostitution: they are trafficked, sold, bought and re-sold like any other ware! Many of these children work in environments that expose them to toxic substances, in mines, in chemical industries and with dangerous machineries.

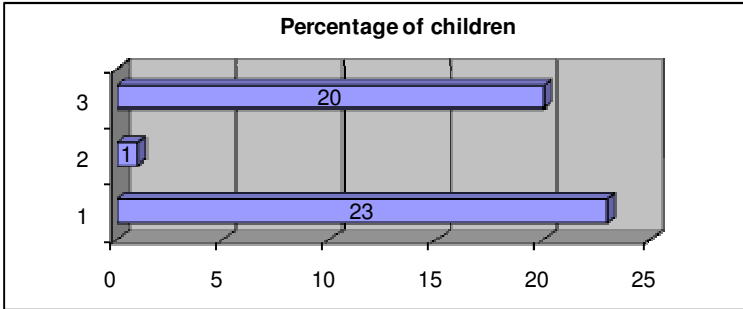
Life could be quite impossible for these children who are forced to live like adults in the labour market. If a child who is not yet matured to carry on such intensive activities works to help his family or guardians, seeing other children like him at play, at normal school work and in comfortable family life, he

begins to be aware of his misery and may be, runs away from his household. Most of such children who depart from an experience of hard labour at a tender age finish up on the streets. Many street children tell stories of how it is much better for them to live on the streets than to return to their homes where they are practically reduced to slavery and where they are continuously violated and maltreated.

*Children out of school: the cost and cause of child labour  
Elementary school drop-outs in percentage*



6. CEE/CIS and the Baltic; 5. Latin America and the Caribbean; 4. East Asia and the Pacific; 3. South Africa; 2. Middle east and north Africa 1. Africa south of Sahara;



3. World; 2. Developed countries; 1. Developing countries

### 1.5.3. HIV/AIDS

Looking at this phenomenon from another point of view, it is clear that child labour creates a vicious circle. The children who work today in order to augment the income of their parents, dropping out of school, are condemned to be illiterate adults when they grow up. They are condemned to be without credible mansion and liability to the labour market. The greater percentage of such children, in future when they will be adults, would not be able to maintain their own families. Their children will have to live all over again, the experience of their fathers. In this way, the vicious circle continues. A street child who tries to succeed honestly has a very serious task awaiting him.

In the countries most hit by the epidemic of the HIV virus and by its consequence (AIDS), the growing number of children without parents is a real and pressing problem. Since the epidemic is mainly transmitted through sexual activity, the most hit age groups are those of young adults at the zenith of their sexual life and of adolescents who seem to be at the height of sexual discovery. From this point of view, HIV/AIDS could be



seen both as an important cause of the phenomenon of street children and as a visible consequence of street life.

In a programme conducted by UNICEF, UNAIDS and WHO, and co temporally transmitted in many international networks and state TVs in June 2002, with the title: YOUNG PEOPLE AND HIV/AIDS 2002, many interesting facts were put to light. In every minute of the day, six youths between 15 and 24 years were infected with HIV (as of 2002), the virus that brings about AIDS. But just a little fraction of these youths realise that they are infected, and this, only after a very long interval of time. Africa south of the Sahara contains only about 10% of world population, but she has about 70% of the world population of those infected with HIV. However, Africa is not alone in this. HIV/AIDS is a world problem. A clear example is the fact demonstrated by recent research that East Europe, especially Russia, is the territory in which there is the fastest diffusion of HIV/AIDS. In the same vein, even in other European countries, the epidemic continues and is alimented by a life of sexual hedonism.

In many countries, especially in Africa, where the system of social assistance is very primitive, orphans are absorbed into the community. The extended family system permits the uncles and cousins to come to the aid of families in difficulty. The consequence is that most times, orphans finish up in the households of their relatives in a situation whereby the relative had no option but to accept them ... they were not planned or wished as part of the household. They have to compete with the legitimate children of these households for the basic life needs. Most of them are reduced to mere slaves and house-helps. They do not go to school with the others, or if they go at all, they are overburdened with heavy and unimaginable domestic chores. At the end, many of these children run away from such slavish households and a great number of them finish up on the streets.

With the HIV/AIDS epidemics, the situation of these orphans

has even worsened. There are too many orphans littered around. The relatives are no more capable of containing the situation: the grand parents are too old to sustain these children and the governments are not ready to give a credible helping hand. One has to consider also the fact that orphans of the victims of AIDS are often stigmatized. In these poor countries, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is most times shrouded by ignorance. In the programme of which we talked about above, Mark Stirling, the UNICEF co-ordinator of the HIV/AIDS office had this to say,

*We have seen a great number of persons who believe that HIV/AIDS is transmitted by mosquitoes. We have also come to know that a greater part of the youths does not know two or three ways of preventing HIV. For example, many youths do not know that HIV could be transmitted through sex, they know little of abstinence and less of fidelity ...*

In this clime of ignorance, many children whose parents are victims of this syndrome are practically disowned by the society and abandoned to their destinies.

An example of what these children do is to be seen in the things said by the so called “tea children” of Rwanda. One of these children says: “You can meet a man who tells you that he wants a woman and then he will give you food and money. Naturally, you do it with him. Sometimes, he does not give you money, he abuses you, he beats you up and he abandons you”.

In this way, many of these street children are not just victims of HIV/AIDS, but they also become its agents. The epidemic has destroyed their families, has expelled them from the society and now, waits for them on the streets to receive them, to infect them and to kill them!

#### 1.5.4. Inadequate education

The school could be included in the series of social elements that limit the possibilities of children. This is the ambivalent po-

sition of the school especially in a multi-cultural world. Instruction, which together with health and social service administered to the greater part of the society, should act as the engine of social progress, contributing to better life conditions. This contribution should be to the benefit of both immigrants and indigenes of any given society. Unfortunately, in many developing countries, public instruction seems to belong to a world far apart from the daily happenings of the streets and therefore constitutes an element of discrimination.

The role and the responsibilities of public instruction in schools are very important though they are often undervalued. In developing countries where the western scholastic system is regarded as a model to be imitated, and where there is the necessity to engage the children living in the cities, single teachers are entrusted with classes of fifty, eighty and even hundred children. The education of children is thereby often reduced to the calculation of the percentage of children in the schools. And this in turn, becomes an element of international prestige. Here also are to be seen the recent effects of globalization: the western models are transported everywhere without adequate study of their compatibility with indigenous cultures. Traditional values come to be abandoned. With these methods and dispositions, the number of those who are pushed aside from this obtuse educational process is very high while very few developing countries can afford a second chance to a child who has failed to fit into the western educational stereotype. The disorientation of being school drop-outs makes it also impossible for them to adjust to the fruition of the cultural competences learnt from their daily lives or from their native cultures. They find themselves on the bridge between two impossible roads.

Not only the form, the contents of this public instruction, is also based on the values of western societies, on the model of the consumption society and on the idea that only office work is respectable work. Such ideas could disorientate and destroy the

children from the lower classes of the society instead of helping them. Children and parents begin to look at certificates as synonyms to sure employment, even in public administrative posts. The school teaches these children to hate unemployment which for the greater number, would be inevitable no matter what they do. The idea that comes to be transmitted is “whoever fails in the school system has no future”.

When the results of many years of fruitless scholastic efforts are evaluated, frustration pushes many children to reject the whole scholastic system and find shelter on the streets, among others who have already broken away from the obtuse system. In Africa, where public instruction is an element of grand prestige, somebody who is failed may prefer washing cars in the city to face the shame that awaits him on his return to the village. Apprenticeship with master workmen is rare. In order to be assumed as an apprentice, one has to pay. The competition is very high, the margins of profit are very low while the workmen misuse the children for their selfish gains ... street children represent a font of free labour of which one could do as he pleases, they are not capable of contracting just agreements and labour conditions for themselves.

#### 1.5.5. The effects of wars

The phenomenon of war demands a bifocal attention: child soldiers, war orphans or the disappearance of children, the conditions during the war and the post war conditions. An estimate of about 300,000 minors below the age of eighteen actually serve or have served government armed forces or rebel groups between 1990 and 2000. In Liberia, for example, where the civil war lasted seven years, about 15,000 children, some of which were less than ten years of age, served as regular soldiers. Many of these children were considered strong warlords and forced to commit different atrocities even against their families of origin

and against their relatives, in order to demonstrate their fidelity to their leaders. Thousands of girls, also some below ten years of age, were forced to become sexual machines for the satisfaction of the soldiers.



[www.connectafrica.wordpress.com](http://www.connectafrica.wordpress.com)

This is really a complex situation. If we bear in mind the fact that in many countries in the world, war has become a way of life, we come to realise that for example, in Colombia where the civil war has lasted several years, some youths of 25 years have

never experienced what it means to live in a country in peace. In these countries, who can guarantee the guardianship of children under responsible adults? It is clear that many of these children finish up on the streets. At the end of every war, many children become leftovers of the society. They are lost. Many of them do not have any family link anymore or a house where they could return to. Others who had been child soldiers become societal misfits. They have been too used to lawlessness and freedom to return to the classrooms and to the itinerary of a child being formed for a meaningful adult life. They can not submit themselves again to the authority of their parents and guardians, they can not fit into the labour market, they have not learnt any trade and they are not educated. The consequence is that they gather in groups to form street gangs.

#### 1.5.6. Witchcraft and abuse of children in Nigeria

*Two children accused of witchcraft*



[www.guardian.uk](http://www.guardian.uk)

*Everyday, when a child behaves badly, they call him a witch or wizard. This is normally from ten years and below, I have never seen anybody throwing an adult male on the streets. They give the dog a bad name so that they may hang it.*

Chief Victor Ikot, Nigeria.

In Africa, the phenomenon of witchcraft remains a subject of hot debates and preoccupations. In 1995, in Nigeria, we heard the terrible news of how a prophetess of a spiritualist sect burnt the fingers of two little children in order to force them to confess their witchcraft activities and their purported obstruction of the economic progress of their family.

Many Nigerians believe that the soul or spirit of a man can separate itself and act independently of the body. In order to accomplish this separation, particular rites and rituals are to be performed so that the person would have a special power to enter and leave his body when and how he wishes. These rituals and rites are to be done through pseudo-religious or spiritual sects. Among these sects, one of the most common is said to be witchcraft and wizardry. They are said to be so common that the country is said to have been divided into witch covens with precise territories and organizations. In the different covens, there are different persons with different responsibilities. Especially at night, the belief is that they go about in the forms of birds, cats, snakes and insects, rocking all sorts of harms on the society. They are seen as an incarnation of evil, the cause of road accidents, misfortunes, illnesses and deaths. To worsen it all, they must begin with their own families in this apostleship of destruction. They have to offer their own relatives as sacrifices at the coven rituals in order to become more powerful and in order to advance in their evil career. For this reason, whoever is identified as a witch or wizard is expelled from the village in order to save the rest of the people.

Children are the first victims of this practice and belief. Many street children in Nigeria are children rejected by their very families, feared by all and forced to live in the open market or under the bridges. Many of them are mutilated and violated in very strong terms in the process of trying to “cast away” the unclean spirit which has “possessed” them and in order to “break” their spiritual pact or link with their coven.

Looking at Nigeria today with her economic, social and technological developments; looking at how much Christianity is spread in Nigeria, one asks himself why and how such inhumane and anachronistic beliefs still exist. The response is immediate: Nigeria has started off towards western development without adequate instruments for re-visiting, reflecting and penetrating her cultures. Christianity is in crisis of incarnating itself in the Nigerian cultures.

Technology itself becomes an instrument of the diffusion of beliefs that are clearly against the integral development of man. The Nigerian cinematographic market is the third largest in the world after Hollywood and India. More than half of these numerous films produced every year portray and reinforce beliefs in wizardry. Especially the Pentecostal churches, evangelists and Pentecostal movements worsen the already bad situation. Many of them feed fat with the instrumentation of fear. They pass unending hours in “ministrations” for casting out demons, hunting and terminating wizards. Children “identified” as witches and wizards are abused, abandoned and even killed while the pastors make money from the fear infused in the parents and entire Nigerian community. If the devil were not to exist, am sure that they would invent him! Because the devil and the fear of the devil are good market!

The saddest thing about this situation is that there are no laws which could protect these children, while a social system for coming to their aid is practically non-existent. What would become of them? Many of them finish up on the public squares,



under the bridges, etc. They become street children ... rejected by their families.

#### 1.5.7. Children of the brothels

Have you ever thought of what happens to the children born to prostitutes or the so called “sex workers”? The first thing to be considered is the type of prostitute that is involved. If she is a prostitute that lives and works in a brothel, living with others like herself, or a prostitute that lives in her own house, etc. In whatever situation it may be, what becomes of her children?

One with the western experience would say that naturally, the welfare or social service will take over immediately. But already in the developed countries, there are many cases that are not reported to the social service, in which the children have to grow up in these environments. Even at that, if the woman involved in such a business does it in her own house, how do you come to know? Worse still in developing countries where welfare service is practically non-existent.

One thing sure is that right from birth, the child is an economic disaster. Often, these children are results of unwanted pregnancies, but even when they come to be accepted and loved, they remain an obstacle to their mother’s business. Practically, they are expelled from the house so as not to constitute a stumbling block between mamma and her clients. In this way, right from a very tender age, the child begins to leave house for the streets and may not come back home if not in the small hours of the night when even the most avid clients have to go back home! Worse for him if mamma takes up an all-night-client! It is natural for a child who grows up in this environment to become a citizen of the street. Only a miracle can save him from the streets — the mother of all the abandoned.

### 1.5.8. The psychological factor

The decision to live on the streets is not always determined by problematic family situations. Often, of ten children, only two finish up on the streets. There is need to also examine some personal-individual factors which could influence the choices of the different subjects. Trying to individuate the recurrent factors that bring about the choice of the streets, some psychologists have analysed individual motivations and theorized that at times, these children may not so much be victims as they are protagonists of abandonment. In answering the question: “Why this child and not another?”, they suggest the existence of a certain hereditary predisposition, independent of the family conditions, that push some to actively choose the streets and to prematurely put to test their personal independence. After tasting the grounds with ever increasing absence from their homes, the children know with sufficient precision where they will finish up. According to this theory, they are pushed by complex motivations to search for a greater autonomy and in a certain sense, to search for an active integration into the social environment.

At this point, we can reflect on the concept of “resilience”, a concept that has received much attention in recent times in the psychology of human development. Resilience measures our capacity to face and sustain painful events, and rise up after in a more lively manner; the possibility of overcoming contrary situations, using the personal and social resources at our disposal. Many children born into abject poverty become thieves they try to steal in order to have their basic needs, but others convert their lack into a creative opportunity. They become tourist guides instead of thieves. When they do not succeed scholastically, they still excel in other sectors where they can demonstrate their competencies in inclinations which the school had not been able to promote. When they are in families of single mothers, they are capable of re-elaborating their state of life

and becoming resources to their mothers instead of problems. Many famous people were abandoned children who had to convert their terrible situation into opportunities.

Those who sustain this theory underline the importance of the lack of a psychological pathology and instead, the presence of constructive reactions among these children rejected by the society. Our difficulty is in having concrete demonstrations of this hypothesis and in creating clear distinctions between the psychological element and the social elements that push children into street life. I think this consideration can only be complete with profile studies of concrete individuals.

A greater number of psychologists state the need to study the period of adolescence more closely in order to be in a better position to help street children and children at risk of street vagabondage. To this end, we can indicate two possible psychological dynamics that have already been made evident by some psychologists. According to the psycho-analytic school, during the adolescence, all the treads of the life of the adolescent are scattered; the unresolved problems of infancy ask once again to be taken into consideration and there is a continuous stress generated by the need to stabilize one's proper identity in and outside the family. The second dynamic is that of the presence of the unconscious world, an internal world weaved with the treads of unending fantasies.

*I will try to give you a picture of the internal world of the individual,  
of his internal development.*

*I will start by describing the adult world  
in which the adolescent tries to enter,  
then the world of children which he is trying  
to leave and finally the world of the adolescent.*

*From the point of view of the adolescent,  
the world of the adult seems above all to be a political structure  
with a class system: the adults live as if they had the power  
and as if they control the world. To the adolescents, this does*

*not seem to be because of their superior knowledge or capacity,  
but because they control an “aristocratic organization”  
whose principal scope is to preserve power from every intromission.*

*The adolescent therefore has the sensation that  
the adults may be all “cheats”, “hypocrites” and that  
they possess something which they have never had the right to have.*

*This is the origin of the idea that children find themselves  
in a position of “slaves” or “servants”,  
and the illusion that the parents know everything  
and are capable of doing everything.*

*The adolescent sees himself as part of the community of adolescents,  
a community that sees itself as between these classes:*

*adults “aristocrats” who have power,  
and the “slaves” who believe in them as if they were gods,  
and live in the illusion that the adults know everything;  
the adolescent therefore puts himself  
in a position of denigration when meeting  
both with the adults and the children,  
and the organization of the world which they represent<sup>19</sup>.*

Even more illustrative of this dynamics is a test from the Letter to the Father (1919) of Franz Kafka:

*According to me, the world is divided in three parts,  
and in the first, I, the slave, was living under the yoke of laws  
conceived only for me and to which, without knowing the reasons,  
I was not able to conform myself totally,  
then there was second world, infinitely far from mine,  
in which you were living, occupied with issuing orders  
and getting annoyed if your orders were not followed,  
and finally a third world, where the rest of humanity  
was living in happiness and freedom from orders and obedience.*

It is true that these are only theories used in describing what

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<sup>19</sup> D. Meltzer, *Teoria psicoanalitica dell'adolescenza*, in M.A. Gainotti, V. Biasi, *Essere insegnanti in classi di adolescenti*, Guerini, Milano 2004, p. 14.

happens in adolescence, and that they can not be applied to every case, at the same time, we believe that the inappropriate management of the period of adolescence could be a determining factor in the phenomenon of street children. To exclude this hypothesis could lead to the difficulty of explaining the reason why many children live in difficult family conditions while only a small part finishes on the streets.

#### 1.5.9. The family

The family is the microcosm of the society. This means that the family is not only a reflex of the society, but also that the society is a reflex of the situations lived in the single families. When there is crisis in the families, there is also crisis in the society. The more family crises there are, the more there increases the rate of delinquency, violence and crime in the society. In the same vein, the problem of street children is an index of the family situations in any particular society.

All street children should have belonged to their own families and should have been under the protection of their families, parents or guardians. If they were all to return to their families of origin, there would not have been children abandoned on the streets. To be a street child therefore means to be left outside the family system, as long as the person is not to be a guest in a social welfare structure.

There are many things that could shake-up to a family. The first is poverty, then, death of one or both parents, inter-family violence, poor living conditions, location of the family, number of children in the family, and also the legitimacy of the family in its particular society. In many families, unemployment or under-employment provokes depression, loss of self-respect, alcoholism and a vicious circle of insurmountable tensions. In some cases, the parents are not married and the children are considered illegitimate. In the societies in which a legal union has

more value than a private contract, illegitimacy could transform itself into a grave and indelible stain. In many cases, there is constant violence for no just cause. Sometimes for the parents, violence is only a way of offloading their frustrations. Under excessive physical, psychological and emotional pressures, family relationships gradually decay and after passing a certain limit, the family goes to pieces because the family is nothing but a network of relationships. Miserable living conditions do not only create tensions, but also attack fundamental human relationships at their very foundations.

*The sociologist Paulo Freire was trying to convince a man who was living with his family in a single room at Recife, not to be beating his children, or at least not to be beating them very often. The reply was:*  
*“We are nine. When I come back from work, I meet all the children crying, out of hunger, cold, or because they are ill.*  
*I have to wake up at four in the morning, I must try and sleep and there is no other way to do than to give them some beatings<sup>20</sup>.*

In a case like this, the streets become something marvellous that calls the children to freedom, joy and peace. In countries with dictatorial regimes, the repression which the families of detained politicians suffer generates situations of unforeseen crisis which at times may never be overcome. Also handicapped children, rejected by their families and reduced to street beggars, constitute a large portion of street children. Domestic workers who are forced to live within the house of their employers, especially in developing countries, are also at times forced to abandon their children to themselves from morning to night.

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<sup>20</sup> S. Agnelli, *cit.*, p. 53.

### 1.5.10. The family and the crisis of undefined and unstable employment

In our society, a precise definition of the family seems to be almost lost. At least from the way it was being thought in the past, there is a great confusion because of social, moral and political problems. Every element seems to have the family as a prime target of strong but unmerited attacks. We are gradually getting used to a new language for the definition of family relationships, new and meaningless definitions that seem to be gradually substituting the natural and authentic forms; new forms of free unions recognised in many legislations for simple reason of a new democratism shrouded in confusion.

The very heart of the family — the couple — is even under attack,

it is an institution that gets more and more difficult to categorize, making its nature almost heterogeneous. Defining when two people form or do not form a couple may depend on multiple factors: getting married, sharing the same habitation, and even through other forms of interpersonal exchange, among which surely, the reciprocal decision to form a couple. It results to be even more difficult to mark out the distinction between the life of a couple and life of a non couple. It seems that every person situates himself in one of the many possible modalities of relationship and to a certain grade of integration between one's very life and that of the other partner. ... marriage only does not define the couple any more<sup>21</sup>.

Apart from this sociological and conceptual confusion created by the different post-modern currents of life, the undefined and unstable employment and professional status in which many couples live constitutes a very important factor in the analysis of the present crisis of the family especially as regards the phenomenon of street children.

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<sup>21</sup> L. Salmieri, *Coppie flessibili*, Mulino, Bologna 2006, p. 9.

In developed countries, the time limit of adolescence continues to be more and more elastic even up to forty years of age. Many young adults do not wish to go into marriage because of the lack of financial stability in which they find themselves.

Beside the difficulty of organising daily life in a manner that responds to the flexibility of work, the existential strategies ... with an unstable employment must undergo continuous change. It is very grave to take decisions when one has only short term work contracts and the said decision implies long term projecting. Insecurity breaks the decisions and delays the appointments with one's personal projects and with his projects with others. Leaving the house of one's parents becomes a problem<sup>22</sup>.

In the more difficult situations, one works for more than eight hours but has a salary that does not correspond to the time and effort put in and in many cases, he has a temporary contract which he is not sure would be renewed.

It is a strange sensation. The months pass by. You feel always more belongingness. You are like one of them. You have your own desk, your telephone. You are like the others. Even then you feel suspended. Tied to who knows which tread of destiny. It goes on like this for some time. I have even tried to convince the company to employ me. May be with a contract of two years. What can one do, they have decided that all the new people would be only mere collaborators. Everybody is attached to a project. The fact is that they have so many projects. They work always and continuously like mad people. Then I say, employ us. The truth is that with the so called "collaborators" they save a lot of expenses. Then you are more malleable, because you are afraid that may be they may not renew you contract. Then when they say that we have no timetable, it means that we work always. If we must finish a project, we work; the others go home by 6.00 pm<sup>23</sup>.

If this model creates so much problems in Europe, it creates

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<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 82.



even worse problems in the developing countries. In many families, unemployment and under-employment are common terms. Few adults are regularly employed. Those who have a stable work never have enough money to carry them to the end of the month, they are forced to work always the more in the hope of living a more dignified life. Terrified by the consequence of this sort of life, many youths do not put the training of a family as part of their immediate projects ... it remains a vague dream. The cohabitation of a man and a woman becomes an accidental occurrence, occasional, not projected and sporadic. In this way, many children are born into non defined situations, they lack defined and stable reference points, which could be a "couple" that cohabits without the minimum intention of legitimizing their union, or a virtual couple, which for reasons of the type of work they do, or other complex reasons, meet each other only for a few hours a day. Such are some of the situations in which many children are likely to finish up on the streets, abandoned to themselves for whole days.

Already in 1985, a study done by the United Nations on dis-adapted youths and juvenal delinquency had this to say:

Drawing a conclusion from the data we have collected, we can state that juvenal delinquency is not an inevitable result of poverty and of a rapid process of urbanization. The fundamental variable that intervenes is the solidity of the adult/youth relationship, especially inside the family<sup>24</sup>.

### *1.6. Synthesis of the first chapter*

The phenomenon of street children is very vast. For this, right from the premise, we wished to give a vision of the reality instead of giving scientific definitions, we did this through a lit-

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<sup>24</sup> UNSDRI, Doc. 22, Roma 1985.

tle story which presents some dynamics of living and being of the street. The definitions that follow our demonstrations are more or less conclusions drawn from the stories we recounted!

In this first chapter we entered in the world of the street children, trying to analyse their modes of being, the causes and the inherent activities of street life. Our considerations are aimed at giving a general overview of the phenomenon. Our research has demonstrated that the world of the street children is a world totally different from the actual world, created by processes of exclusion, by conflicts, by poverty and by the injustices of the society. The citizens of this strange world are victims of an indifferent and wicked social system. A systematic exclusion from the society and from public services. It is obvious that street children could be found everywhere, on the public squares, at the bus stops, at the train stations, on the side-walks, in the markets, etc. Though we see them continuously in these different situations, they do not belong to our world. We see them, but they are invisible! We meet them as if in a parallel life, they live in our time and our space, but we do not “actually” meet and we do not enter into relationship. We use the same language but with totally different meanings! The only possible way of helping these children, victims of our society, is to find an adequate response to the phenomenon. In the chapters that follow, we shall try to give a response, departing from our scientific vision on orientation of street children and a demonstration of where it has already been realised and how.

## **Chapter 2. Orientation: *between myths and reality***

### *2.1. A question of rights*

The streets are the only escape route for the millions of children who are growing up in situations of poverty, abandonment, lack of educational interventions, hunger, discrimination. For them, life is a continuous fight for survival. Wherever they live, they are at risk of losing their infancy, excluded from essential services, be they sanitary, social, cultural or educational as could be seen in the lack of deserved basic education. They lack protection from the family system and more often than not, they are used like objects and abused sexually, physically and psychologically. Many adults ignore the fact that these children are entitled to rights which should have guaranteed them a secure infancy and a future filled with hope.

Since 1924 when the League of Nations accepted the Geneva Declaration on the rights of the child, the international community has stipulated several pacts for ensuring for the child, in different countries, essential right to survival, to health, basic education, protection, social participation, etc.

The pact that was most comprehensive and extensively accepted is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, accepted by the General Assembly of the UNO in 1989 and ratified by 193 countries. The convention presents the obligations of the national governments towards all children and minors. The governments are obliged to give a periodic account of their policies and social actions, especially as regards children, to an international agency, the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In this session of our research, we wish to see some of the implications of these pacts and how they are interpreted by the different nations who have undersigned them, by the agencies which see to their implementation and by the organs of the gov-

ernment who are directly in-charge. We shall see also the reflexes of these pacts in the organization and realization of the projects of orientation for abandoned children and/or children at risk of abandonment.

## *2.2. A social or charitable intervention*

When we talk about the phenomenon of street children, the man on the street, the common man, reacts in different ways according to his personal orientation, his cultural background and common prejudices. The attention which the mass media give to single acts of deviant minors, painting them in vivid colours, feeding the wish of the people for what is spectacular with horrible news of impossible situations, and making them to increase their hate does not help matters. In the common parlance, street children are a big problem, people are reluctant to give them a help. There seems to be no hope for them “by the way, they are good for nothing and helping them is a waste of time”, it is useless wasting energy to rehabilitate them because their destiny has been signed by their history. The only common attitude then is to keep them as far off as possible so that they may not give problems to the rest of the society. However, a more specialized and attentive look at the phenomenon of street children reveals that no blanket judgement of street children could be ever justified. Taken one by one, irrespective of the wounds provoked by their dramatic histories, every street child is a custodian of great capacities and talents that could even be useful for the society. Our opinion is that if we change our mode of looking at street children, from looking at them as problem vendors to looking at them as people in difficulty, societal resources in need waiting to be tapped, the whole body of common prejudices against street children would melt down. Instead of constituting a societal problem, they would become a

societal project. For the purpose of our study, we shall now pay attention to the scientific nature of the interventions and methodologies that have so far been used in the orientation of street children. This study will help us to look at the value of the interventions done by different schools of political science and social service. We shall also look at the laws that are used in the different nations to help a street child integrate himself into the larger society and to claim his right to a dignified life.

At the basis of our thesis is this statement “every individual is a custodian of richness; that is, original competencies capable of making particular and unrepeatable contributions to the society”. Every person is an important element of the whole called humanity. The whole of humanity belongs to man individually and collectively. Every man belongs to humanity in a total manner, both in his individuality and in his participation in the collective unity. No life is useless. Every life is a source of richness for humanity. It is for this reason that every life is unique. The importance of the individual in the collective whole can never be denigrated. Especially in the contemporary society where technology tends to eliminate the value of man, and collective life risks being lived only in a virtual manner, we can not ignore the fact that individual decisions in the world by single persons or groups any where and every where in the world could directly affect us. From this point of view, everything changes. The intervention in favour of street children can no longer be considered as a work of charity or as a mere work of solidarity with less privileged people. It is much more than these, the children at risk are custodians of talents and entitled to be recognised as having their non-negotiable rights and obligations. They are not to be treated as “special” cases but as part of a general programme of social intervention for every citizen throughout his life cycle. This new way of looking at an individual in need is wholesome and global.

The civil journey towards a social policies with a global vi-

sion of the human person has never been easy. In Italy, this step needed many years, even many centuries to mature. Today, we refer to the changes brought by law 328/2000,

which we can define to be of historical weight, as it substitutes the so called Crispian law of 1890. This new law which is based on the contemporary system of social policies, carried out a revolution by decentralising social services ... adding a universal character to interventions, in that they have to be for all, though the priority has to be reserved to the poor, to those in total or partial incapacity to provide their personal needs because of physical or psychic problems:

- tutelage is not only for people at risk, but in the light of a wider sustenance relative to all life cycle
- the evaluation of the third sector — onlus, etc. — (art.5) a sector whose essential role for the realization of social policies comes to be recognized. In this sense, they are asked to acquire a professional quality based on the possession of certain structural requisites, for example, the continuous training of the partners; continuous evaluation of projects in the light of objectives, etc.
- the realization of an integrated system of interventions through the method of programming and the projection of a system of verification of results in terms of quality and efficacy; a new concept of ethics of performance becomes the foundation, the essence, of the integrated system of disposing services with a double aperture — internal/external; the service card comes to be described as a necessary instrument for the accreditation of the needed information to the clients and font of statistical resources favourable to on-the-project evaluation<sup>1</sup>.

This Italian law gives an indication for many specialists in psychology of orientation and in the projection of social interventions. Some of them have carried out some interesting in-depth theoretical studies which help to arrive at a new interpretation of the situation of the disadvantaged (as in the case of street children), and they have proposed new visions of being disadvantaged. Beginning with an epistemological approach,

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<sup>1</sup> A. Norcia, *Professioni sociali. Manuale di general management*, Carocci, Roma 2006, p. 14.

Gatti<sup>2</sup> has contributed a very interesting dimension. His arguments are based on the analogical comparison between psychology, philosophy and the other natural sciences. He tried to demonstrate the importance of a global intervention centred on the human person as a unity in space and time. Other intellectuals like Romina De Cicco et al<sup>3</sup>, propose a reflection that departs from a phenomenological anthropological vision of the reality of the disadvantaged. The carrier of disadvantages or handicap does not exist any longer! They are dignified people, equal to every other person, custodians of rights and talents, in need of help in order to fructify what is already part of their being. We shall come back to this argument and this concept when we shall be talking about an adequate orientation for street children.

### *2.3. At the international level*

From the World Summit of Children of 1990, one of the most significant events regarding the rights of children is the popular ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In line with this convention, the UNICEF commission on the rights of the child, has published an agenda for the rights of the child for the ten years between 2000 and 2010. The first document of this agenda carries a few recommendations that interpret the obligations of national governments that have undersigned the convention.

In this document, all types of discriminations were listed, be they racial, of colour, sex, language, religion, political ideas, social class, physical handicap, etc. All are invited to study the

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<sup>2</sup> F. Gatti, *Psicologia dell'orientamento per educatori professionali*, Armando, Roma 2006, pp. 35-58.

<sup>3</sup> R. De Cicco, D. Ria, M. Sivilia, *Sguardo educativo e innovazione*, Kappa, Roma 2006, pp. 7-14.

phenomenon of discrimination more closely; to analyse it better in order to proffer better possible interventions for changing the status quo.

With regard to fundamental human rights, some priorities were indicated: all governments must establish and promote birth registrations and documentation in such a manner that it may be useful to all states, all must have identification documents, all governments must dedicate themselves to assuring that girls have full access to basic education, that the handicapped should have adequate processes of integration in order to acquire enough education as not to be at disadvantage when compared to the normal processes of integration, to assure the child's right to his own language, to his own religious practices and to his own culture of origin, that the children may have equal access to food, education, health and other services without any discrimination.

With regard to justice, they also tried to establish some common parameters for children law, with regard to the processes, convictions, to avoid unjust detention of minors in common cells with adults and common criminals, to protect children from physical and psychological violence at the hands of civil authorities, to avoid their being starved in detention, their being left without food, without beds, without medical care, without healthy hygienic conditions and without education. All the countries of the world who undersigned the Convention have the obligation of:

1. establishing and maintaining systems for child justice according to international standards, with the finality of orientating convicted children to a new and adequately fruitful life for a better future;
2. educating the officials of the judicial system, the police and the prison warders in children prisons and reformatories on the rights of children. Taking care to ensure that this education be multi-disciplinary, and that every officer is conscious



- of the functions of the other offices of the overall judicial system;
3. developing and using alternatives to detention and ensuring that the agents of the welfare and social services are involved in this process when and where possible. In this way, children will only be detained as the last option and for as short time as possible. Children may never be detained with adults;
  4. assuring that rehabilitation is the primary objective of every reclusion of a minor;
  5. abolishing the use of capital punishment (death sentence) for the offences committed before 18 years of age, and assuring that no child is subjected to a sentence of passing his whole life in prison;
  6. assuring that children under criminal investigation and court prosecution are adequately represented by qualified lawyers.

Recognizing the fact that the eradication of poverty is a central knot that could assure the rights of children, governments are obliged to:

1. make the eradication of poverty the priority of every regime;
2. develop and coordinating strategies for the reduction of state debts;
3. assure international codes for the regulation of the international market and for the effective taxation of the multinationals in order to generate resources and reduce poverty rate;
4. ensure access to credit and loans for poor people;
5. ensure programmes that could give the opportunity to children to have an access to better technology;
6. re-examine the accounts and budgets in order to create equilibrium between military and social expenses.

Among the rights presented, a particular attention was put on

education. It is a privileged instrument for the projection and construction of one's future and in order to be integrated in the society for the construction of the society. In the developing countries, 130 million children in school age do not have access to basic education. Many other millions receive inadequate education. The governments are obliged to ensure:

1. a free and compulsory basic education for every child;
2. that girls have equal access to qualitative education in a secure environment and without any discrimination;
3. that girls have full access to education and that they be motivated to carry their education carrier to meaningful degrees;
4. taking care of education right from the earliest years of life since education is a process that lasts throughout a life time;
5. using specialized measures that ensure access to education to categories of children who are excluded by normal educational systems: children detained by child judicial systems and care institutions, orphans, children who are victims of child labour, child soldiers, child refugees, street children, etc.;
6. paying attention to scholastic texts to ensure that they be truly adapted to the integral education of the children. The governments should ensure that education respects the rights of the human person and that the scholastic discipline be administered in such a manner that it respects the dignity of the child as a human person and that every form of physical punishment be eliminated;
7. encouraging the teachers to be inspired by social responsibility in their duties to the youths, informing and forming the human conscience to the rights of the human person, to the duties of man in social life and to the right to education;
8. underlining the benefits of education among the populace and providing incentives for education;
9. that the cost of education does not prevent anybody from attending school.

With regard to health problems and the right of the child to a healthy life and to basic health care, the governments are obliged to assure as much as possible:

1. the survival and healthy development of children before birth, at birth and after birth;
2. that every child without discrimination, should have access to free medical care, and may it be of the highest possible standard;
3. developing programmes for the education of the families in good health practices;
4. that every child with HIV positive or AIDS has full and equal access to health care and support services;
5. realizing the vulnerability of children to chemical substances in the environment and committing herself to the defence of the environment;
6. promoting laws and work plans that assure access to potable water, healthy toilette facilities and clean air;
7. that minors have access to an autonomous representation in cases of involuntary hospitalization for reasons of mental health.

Many street children in the developing countries are handicapped. It is important to know what the obligations of the governments are regarding handicapped children:

1. it should be ensured that handicapped children are treated with equal dignity, respect and protection as other members of the society;
2. children with disabilities must be included in national plans and budgets for child development;
3. rehabilitation services should be at the disposal of children with physical disabilities;
4. realizing that the segregation and institutionalization of children with physical disabilities are unacceptable practices be-

- cause they deny them their fundamental rights to participate fully and integrate themselves in the world;
5. evaluating all children as equal before the law, in public decisions, etc.;
  6. ensuring that services, schools, health care and recreational structures are structured in a manner that they may be accessible to all children, irrespective of their physical or mental conditions.

With regard to the family, just as we have underlined in the paragraphs in which we talked about the causes of the phenomenon of street children, the agenda for the rights of the child recognises that the disintegration of the family is a problem at the root of the discourse of the rights of the child. For this reason, all adherent governments are obliged to give adequate support to the families in order to provide a secure and stable environment for the education of the child.

Faced with the problem of the armed conflicts in different nations of the world and the consequence that every year, millions of children are physically wounded, rendered disable, sexually violated, mentally destroyed or even killed; the agenda obliges all adherent governments to:

1. ensure that no child below eighteen years be recruited even if it be voluntarily;
2. adequately prosecute persons responsible for war crimes against children and attacks against educational institutes or people responsible for the recruitment or use of children in armed hostilities;
3. take adequate and concrete measures to reduce the possibility of access to arms;
4. stabilize an international system of documentation for whatever violation of children's rights especially in armed conflict situations;
5. protect inside every nation, refugees, child war victims, child

- victims of sexual violence, victims of child labour or child military recruitment; ensuring that their rights to education, health and security are fulfilled;
6. ensure that children do not become victims of international sanctions;
  7. assure an obligatory training of military personnel involved in the peace missions of the UNO in materials of the rights of children;
  8. ensure that the right of the child to education should never be compromised — therefore every government should ensure that the resources for the education be considered as the fourth pillar of humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts (together with food, accommodation, medical care);
  9. encourage the community involvement in disarming and the creation of rehabilitation projects for child soldiers;
  10. involve youths and adolescents in professional and civil training programmes, with particular attention to the girls.

Other areas in which the Convention stabilizes attitudes and modes of operation for the adherent nations with regard to minors include: intra-family violence, street violence, violence in correctional institutes, violence in child labour, violence in schools, etc. The agenda obligates the adherent governments to:

1. ensure that every child that is detained, institutionalized, accepted in a residential structure or simply inserted in a scholastic structure, be protected from every wicked treatment, torture, inhuman and humiliating punishments, including physical punishments, sexual violation or abuse of whatever form;
2. vigorously and immediately investigate all the reports of torture and abuse of any form against children; prosecute the persons responsible for such acts, and publicly reporting every investigation in that regard;
3. ensure that the child and his family may have an easy access

- to the mechanisms for denouncing and initiating investigations in every case of violence or abuse;
4. ensure protection for street children from any form of physical or sexual abuse in the hands of the police and from arbitrary detentions. Making funds available for the medical care and help to children at risk of survival;
  5. conduct educational campaigns for the change of traditional attitudes and practices that are opposed to integral development of children, and ensuring their abolition;
  6. ensure the protection of children from every form of abuse, violence, abandonment, maltreatment, misuse, both physical, mental, sexual or otherwise; in the hands of their parents, guardians or whoever is made in charge of their education.

Against child labour, the agenda demands that the adherent governments may:

1. universally ratify and implement the Convention of the ILO 182 on the forms of profiteering of child labour and as much as possible, also the recommendation no. 190 of this Convention;
2. make provisions for the qualitative and vocational education for children at risk of economic profiteering, giving them an economic support for school attendance when and if necessary;
3. rule so that all the agents and employers responsible for the misuse and abuse of child labour be vigorously investigated and prosecuted;
4. give civic education to all youths at risk of abuse and misuse as domestic workers and give adequate attention to the so called "hidden works" where especially girls are at risk;
5. ensure that every child saved from abusive employment may not be discriminated against or blamed, that he may receive adequate education and other appropriate forms of assistance and immediately reunited to his family.

With regard to minors who are in the market of sexual profiteering and misuse, prostitution, pornography, etc., the agenda obliges all adherent governments to the tutelage of such children with the following norms:

1. making effective the agenda of Stockholm for the action of 1996 World Congress against the commercial profiteering of sex, and verifying the results obtained with the global conference of 2002;
2. immediately and vigorously prosecuting those who sexually abuse minors and those who profit from such business;
3. ensuring that the sexually profited, abused and misused minor may not be marginalized and blamed, but receives psychological help, medical care, education and professional training, and that the minor may be reunited to his or her family as soon as possible;
4. promoting public campaigns for a change in the mentality of the adults who consider children as desirable sexual objects;
5. introducing measures for the abolition of child prostitution;
6. implementing the conclusive recommendations of the 1999 Vienna Commitment Against Child Pornography on the Internet;
7. introducing measures for the abolition, in the concerned countries, of forced marriage of under-aged children and child marriage.

With regard to child trafficking, the agenda obliges the nations to:

1. approve laws that make the traffic in minors a crime;
2. revise the laws on immigration with the aim of avoiding that irregular minors are subject to prosecution and persecution, but of defending them;
3. ensure that immigrate and irregular children are not deported, but tutored and protected from dangers;

4. provide services that protect minors, victims of child-trafficking, especially if they testify against their traffickers.

#### *2.4. Between theory and practice*

##### a. Egypt.

As we have seen, many countries have accepted and under-signed the New York Convention on the rights of the Child. Unfortunately, this does not correspond to reality.

About 96% of world children live in the countries that have recognised their rights but do not adequately defend them. One of such countries is Egypt, where children are not only neglected in their rights, but where even the government agents who should protect the rights of these children often originate the different abuses of children. For example,

In the police centres, they are often maltreated and denied of their freedom through detention with chains and cords. The prisons are badly kept and filthy, also the detention rooms seem to be batchers for animals. The police uses different forms of torture, among these, the use of electric shock. There are accounts of how a child of seven leaves the police station with visible signs of beatings and physical assaults. When the police was asked why such treatment was meted to mere infants, there was a callous reply: “these children deserve to be treated in a worse manner! They run away and they are liars!”<sup>4</sup>.

The Egyptian police has the objective of arresting the children considered “vulnerable to delinquency” or “vulnerable to danger”. These children have not committed any crime, the only reason for which they finish up in the hands of the police is the mere fact that they beg on the streets, they are homeless or they are handicapped, wastes of the society,

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<sup>4</sup> Cairo Juvenile Court, “Social Welfare Report”, Cairo (Egypt), July 3, 2002.



forced to take care of themselves. Children who should receive help, but instead of tutelage, they are all the more rejected and emarginated by the very agents who should have the duty of protecting them.

In a study done by the Human Rights Watch in Cairo, Egypt, between June 25 and July 30, 2002, private interviews were conducted with some street children of Cairo, children in police custody and representatives of the Egyptian non-governmental organizations interested in street children. The results of these interviews are very interesting and demonstrate how much many countries who undersigned the New York Convention of 1989 fail to protect the rights of children. When the Human Rights Watch interviewed Amal A. in July 2002, she was 16 years old and was living on the streets for about four months, sleeping in the public garden. In her very words,

I left my house because my father needed money and wanted us to work as slaves in our house. I once worked in Aswan and the man used to molest me. I reported the issue to my father but he wanted me to continue working there ... I was eleven years old then! When I refused to work, my father used to flog me. Now he flogs me always because he always wants me to give him money. Recently, I was engaged with a boy but my engagement broke up because there was no money. My boy friend is a good man, a boy of twenty-one years who sells fruits ... he is a victim of circumstances like me<sup>5</sup>.

When Amal was asked why she did not ask for help from the police or from the welfare service, she retorted:

the government has put me on the bus and carried me to a police station in Sahel. The officer doing his turn beat me up and then wrote his opinion in the investigative report. Then, he sent me to the underground floor where I was locked in a little cell.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with A. Amal, "Human Rights Watch", Cairo (Egypt), July 17, 2002.

That time, he locked me up for two days, other times, he used to lock me up for four or more days!

Just like almost every other street child interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the police had detained Amal without food or bed in putrid cells with adults who were beating them up and molesting them. The police did not protect Amal from the abuse of adult detainees. Even more as was in the case of Amal,

the guards at the station were always cursing us and using bad languages against our mothers, then they used to beat us up! ... my mother is dead, therefore I can not bear it if anyone abuses or curses her ... If the guards curse me, I curse them also. Some times, the guard says to the officer to beat me up and he simply beats me up. He did this two times — it was always the same officer. He curses me, he forces me to stand up and he beats me with a stick. When I fall to the floor, he makes me to stand up again and he beats me all over my body — from head to toes”.

Every time Amal was arrested, the Egyptian authorities never offered her any protection or cure, nor did they investigate her family members on the allegations of child abuse. On the contrary, always picking her up from the streets, they considered her good for nothing, they simply detained her until they were tired of her or convinced that she had not committed any crime.

The police sends the documents to Cairo to see if there are cases against us, unless they receive the reply from Cairo, they lock us up in cells ... but if they do not find any proofs against us, they free us. They do not send us home, they simply free us. Normally this happens at night, at about mid-night, they open the door and throw us out!

The case of Amal is very normal in Egypt. The Egyptian laws do not make effective distinctions between children

who have committed crimes and children in need of protection. The 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Egyptian Child Law 12 of 1996 entitled “The Criminal Treatment of Children”, gives the police the permission to arrest any child below 18 years for a wide range of activities<sup>6</sup>. These activities that merit arrest include habitual absence from school, mental illness, reduction in mental capacity, homelessness, begging, prostitution, gambling, consumption or sell of drugs, etc.

b. Mongolia.

Another country which undersigned the Convention on the rights of the child of 1989 is Mongolia. In Mongolia there is an effective change in the defence of the rights of the child. They have started a process of reformation of the national legislation since 1996 when Mongolia presented to other countries the report on the state of children in respect to Convention on the rights of the child. The law for the protection of the child was immediately approved in May 1996 and new changes took place in the parliament in May 2003. Even more, at the regional levels about 50 laws have been changed to conform them to the dictates of the Convention.

The Mongolian government adopted a National Plan of Action (NPA) for the development and the protection of children in December 2002, a plan that should guide the nation for ten years. This programme has specified the objectives and the priorities for the tutelage, protection and development of children, the free and full access to a good quality education and to an eventual professional integration, the finality is to guarantee a high quality of life. The coordination of this programme is put in the hands of the councils for children organized at every level of the government.

Street life is tied to the problem of daily survival: malnutrition, homelessness, violence and health hazards. The street

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<sup>6</sup> Egyptian Child Law, articles 94-134.

children of Mongolia can easily be met by the police and by the street educators who come from the diverse INGO/NGO.

About six ministries of the government share the responsibility of taking care of street children: the ministry of health, the ministry of education, the ministry of social services, the ministry of works, the ministry of Justice and the ministry of internal affairs. To these, we must also add the other ministries and government agencies, interested in child development, among these, the National Council for Children.

The children identified as abandoned or at risk of delinquency are normally interviewed by inspectors and educators regarding their history. Such information include an evaluation of the family situation, the reasons for which they live on the streets, their means of sustenance, etc. A file is opened for every minor: the minor is photographed, his or her digital tomb-prints are taken in order to have a clear vision of his or her situation and his or her easier identification. The abandoned children or children at risk are given to the care of supervisors of the social service or to educators properly and specifically prepared for the duration of one year. The reasons for this registration are for an easier control and for the prevention of the risk of children running away from their families. The notification of the registration of the child is sent to the local government and to the school of the child if he is still of school age. The inspectors must meet the child and his family at least once every month.

The inspectors of the street children are also committed in various activities for the prevention of child prostitution. They visit hotels, bars and public gardens during the night. Child prostitution is fought with administrative sanctions that consist in fines, but at the same time the children receive protection from the competent government organs.

A lot of initiatives have been started by the Mongolian government in order to offer assistance to the families of chil-

dren in crisis and at risk. In the mid nineties, different social welfare centres sprang up in Mongolia with special attention to family development and with particular interest in the assisting, accompanying and preventing sordid situations of families at risk with material and social sustenance.

With regards to the integration of street children in the civil society, the International Development Association (IDA), World Bank and the Mongolian government have under-signed an accord with the sum of USD 443,000 from the Japanese Fund for Social Development in June 2001. The objective is to assist the Mongolian government in giving a new life prospective to street children. The project was started a long time ago.

c. Rwanda<sup>7</sup>.

In the area of cultural or traditional practices which often negatively affect the lives of minors, in the following paragraph, we analyse how this is true in the case of Rwanda.

With a population of about 8.3 million people on about 26,338 kilometres square of land, Rwanda is one of the most densely populated nations of Africa. It is an internal zone of Africa, far from the sea with a small amount of natural resources. The genocide of 1994 left behind it a still visible sign of poverty. Especially the women who have not had any cultural training are discriminated against. The education of girls continues to be considered less important than that of boys. Very young girls are married off and take up domestic family responsibilities. With the help of the organization for the education of African girls, UNICEF is giving her support to the Rwandan government in reorganizing the educational system. The following strategies of action have already been put to act since 2003:

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<sup>7</sup> [www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index.html](http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index.html), *Girl's Education in Rwanda*, Oct. 2003.

1. three female teachers per school have been formed to give adequate accompaniment and support to the girls;
2. three thousand teachers are formed to acquire specialized competences for the use of participative methods with children;
3. a programme of procedural decentralization at the administrative level has since been initiated to favour scholastic activities;
4. communities and villages at risk of discrimination and sexual inequality have been identified and services of control and educational orientation have been started.

The objective is the education of about 500,000 girls and the preparation of about 8,000 teachers in the provinces. In this project, there is a well planned programme geared at integrating the great cultural themes of sexual difference and complementarily in the education of youths.

d. Children involved in child labour.

About 246 million children still work. About 70% of these children work in dangerous conditions — in mines, in contact with chemical substances, pesticides or in attendance to heavy machines. The number is even enlarged if we consider the difficult situations in which we can obtain sure and definitive data. Millions of children who work everywhere, but of whom we do not know anything, are employed in domestic slavery, as labourers in the factories or as labour hands in crop fields.

We have already considered the fact that child labour is a phenomenon that concerns street children. We have also rendered evident a few sample nations and how they use relevant laws and social actions to fight the phenomenon of street children. We have seen also how some nations have failed woefully in this enterprise, or even, how they have not tried at all to combat it irrespective of their public declara-

tion and adherence to the Convention of the rights of the child.

In Asia and Oceania, about 127.3 million children between 5 and 14 years of age work (19% of the child population of this region), in Africa south of the Sahara, about 48 million children work almost full time (29% of the children in this region, almost one out of every three children), in Latin America and the Caribbean, about 17.4 million children work (16% of children in this region), while about 15% of the children in North Africa and mid-east work. In the developed nations, about 2.5 million children are involved in child labour<sup>8</sup>. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have a high number of child labourers. Extreme poverty and cultural factors have forced millions of children of this region to work in different households and in factories, especially in cloth and carpet industries, the greater part of these child labourers have never attended any formal education.

UNICEF, ILO and the association of manufacturers and exporters of cloths of Bangladesh (BGMEA) have stipulated an agreement in 1995 for putting an end to child labour in the cloth factories. Children freed from such work were to be sustained with funds coming from BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO. In 1998, 10,500 children were helped with this programme, and about 80% of these children were registered in professional schools where they have received the adequate training in order to be introduced in the labour market and integrated in the society. This programme has been a success because it was sustained by the government of Bangladesh. Today, this government has gone into partnership with other countries of South Asia, with the objective of eliminating child labour before 2010. Realizing the importance of educational training, the government of Bangladesh has elaborated

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<sup>8</sup> [www.unicef.com](http://www.unicef.com).

a system of education for all the children who were normally excluded.

In Brazil, many organizations are dedicated to giving a new life to street children and children who are at risk of abandonment. Since 1996, UNICEF has cooperated with other associates in Brazil and with the support of German and Swiss organizations sympathetic with projects directed at re-integrating street children in schools, promoting families, constructing participated communities and impacting civil instruction to adolescents and families.

These projects have been directed to the localities at greater risks for the healthy growth of children and adolescents. A national forum was also inaugurated for the prevention and the abolition of child labour — a group of forty members, including government agencies, employers, syndicates and members of the civil society. At the level of the single states, such forum is also created in order to reach out to as much people as possible. The national forum has identified particular zones for her own specific intervention in the help of adolescents and children working on the streets of Belo Horizonte, those who line in the periphery of the city of Salvador and those who work in the shoe factories in the city of Franca, in the state of Sao Paulo, and in the mines for the production of carbon at Mato Grosso do Sul, etc. Apart from this, 65 rural local governments (municipals) have been identified as in great and urgent need of interventions in the region of Pernambuco while 34 others have been identified in the region of Bahia. In Nepal, more that half of the 5 million children between 6 and 15 years old do not attend school, they are involved in occasional labour and through an agent contractor — the greater part are girls and they never go to school. With the support of some foreign governments, a programme of civil rights' education has been initiated. This programme is primarily directed to parents



and pregnant women and it is called Parenting Education (PE). UNICEF has also sponsored a programme that offers nine months' professional training to youths between 10-14 years. Between 1997 and 2004, about 1,239,000 children have benefited from this programme.

e. Other statistics.

In order to have a clear idea of the world situation of children despite the laws and international pacts, it is interesting to give a short reading of the UNICEF 2006 report on the condition of the infancy in the world. According to this report, every year, more than half of all the children born in the developing countries (except China whose data were not given), up to more than 50 million, the right to citizenship is not recognised since they are not registered in any birth registry. There is no gain saying that children without official identity do not feature in any national budget and therefore are not guaranteed basic education, quality sanitary care and other basic services that affect their growth and have consequences on their future. For example, children who are not registered are not admitted in the schools in which birth certificate is required for registration. Simply put, non registered children are not counted and so do not count. Many of these children are on the streets and it is very difficult to help them since they do not even exist for the state. Without counting the millions of orphans, street children, children in detention, in corrective structures and lost children who grow without the loving care and protection of a family. In these circumstances, children are not treated as children.

It is estimated that 143 million children in the developing world — one child out of every thirteen — has lost at least a parent. For very poor children, even the loss of just one parent, especially the mother, could bring about long term repercussions on their health and education. Tens of millions of such children world over pass the greater part of their

time on the streets, exposed to all forms of abuse and profiteering at the hands of unscrupulous adults. More than one million children are in detention and a greater part of them are awaiting trial. Many of them are victims of abandonment, violence, etc., they have on their shoulders, told and untold histories of traumatic experiences. We must not forget that children at risk also include those children forced prematurely to assume adult roles. Such children apart from losing important phases in the correct evolution for child development, not being able to carry such great loads, often take refuge in the streets where they run away to escape from tasks too big for their tender age. Hundreds of thousands of children are involved in armed conflicts as fighters, carriers, cooks, etc., for the armed groups, or some are even forced into the sexual market. In many cases, they were even kidnapped or blackmailed into such enterprises. Despite the law and the international pacts that forbid child marriages, even in many countries who undersigned the pacts, more than 80 million girls in developing countries are married off before the age of 18 and many even as early as their 12<sup>th</sup> year.

### *2.5. The question of methodology*

As we have seen, the gap between the texts of laws on minors and their concrete actualization is very big. It is however interesting to consider how these nations try to reach at an intervention that corresponds to the international standards.

Let us reflect on the methodologies used in the different nations, which are the structures of intervention that have been put in action, which are the systems of implementation of services, and who are the subjects that come to play (educators, psychologists, etc.), called to respond to the urgency of street chil-

dren. The question is: which work team is necessary and what type of help could be given to these children? What type of help is required for an effective orientation of street children? This is the fulcrum of this book.

In order to better understand the methodologies, we wish to first of all, establish what we mean by the word “orientation”. With such basic knowledge, we could depart as if in a journey which will reveal to us different forms of orientation already existent, in order to evaluate, criticise and integrate them in our search for an adequate method of intervention.

## *2.6. The concept of orientation*

*What do I do with what they have done of me?*  
Jean Paul Sartre

The word “orientation” in general represents the position of the body in space and its relationship with the environment<sup>9</sup>. From this point of view, there are some key words which could be considered: position, body, space, relationship and environment. According to me, only a complete analysis of these words, first of all, taken separately and then considered together, could help us to understand the term “orientation”. Without rendering the argument laborious, let us examine two of the key words which seem more important to us: position and environment, considering the fact that these words necessarily also imply the other words. Position is the form or the mode of being in relation with time, space, class, role, quantity, quality, sequence, possibility or capacity, more or less measurable. In this way, we can talk of position from different points of view.

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<sup>9</sup> F. Gatti, *cit.*, p. 10.

For example to a male university teacher, father of three children, with two brothers, uncles of four nephews, with a middle class salary, of socialist political leanings, lay active member in the Catholic church and in a train from Rome heading towards Naples, one could attribute many positions:

Sex: male, non female.

Occupation: teacher.

Position in family: brother, father, husband, uncle.

Economic class: middle (high).

Political position: left wing.

Religious position: lay practicing catholic.

Physical position: seated in a train towards Naples.

Inside these positions, one could also identify other positions; the ordinary of the seat of psychology, elder brother, natural father and adoptive father, second husband, etc.!

A position can be static or dynamic, there are positions we can gain and positions we can not change. When one is born, he is born in a defined time, with a defined sex, in a definite order in his family and even if medical technology is refined always the more, to the point of changing one's sex exteriorly, one can never totally lose his original disposition endowed on him by nature. However, dynamically, one could be student today and professor tomorrow, fascist today and socialist tomorrow, Catholic today and Muslim tomorrow, etc.

The environment is the contest of being. All what the being finds in its process of existence. Its space, age, currents of thoughts, political ideas, history, all! Actually, to talk of environment means to talk of an all embracing system, a whole one lot of factors, vital and non vital, organic and non organic, human and non human, natural and cultural, formal and non formal, material and spiritual, etc. Therefore, one could talk about the cultural environment, scholastic environment, professional environment, social environment, physical environment, emo-

tional environment, political environment, etc. In this book, our attention is on the society as an environment — with several parts and structures which serve as dictates and offer some forms of control. These dictates and structures of control determine what we mean when we say that one has such and such position in relation to the society. Thus, the question “What is our relationship with the society?” needs to be raised and answered.

Every individual is integrated in the society through his belongingness to various existent groups inside the society: family groups, peer groups, work groups, political parties, etc. The single individual inside the various contests, the position of the individual in these series of relations is sometimes very fluid according to age, economic growth, technological development, daily experiences, etc. Often, the individual is not capable of emerging, of being himself in the face of strong external factors. The individual needs to update himself continuously in his relationship with himself and with the environment in which he finds himself, his mental vision, even his historical baggage of all his personal experiences, his wounds, his failures and successes, must be constantly re-read and utilized in the light of new experiences. He has to elaborate, keep adjusting/improving on his relationships and his roles step by step with the passing of time. The society changes every day, with new languages, new visions, etc. Every historical happening leaves a sign on the society. The contest of yesterday is not the contest of today. Only from the point of view of temporal sequence, it could happen that I live in a disoriented manner today if I do not bear in mind the happening and historical, conceptual, political, economical and social changes of the last eight years. I could be physically collocated here and now while am mentally absent, or better put, left behind in time. I could become an adult but remain in every effect, a bimbo that has not yet elaborated his growth; in this way, I will be disorientated because my reality

does not tally with the reality in which I live.

The society is an organic body, governed by laws and organised in a manner that all the parts function for the good of the whole. Without going into the analysis of the theories of the organization of the society, it is already clear that every system must respond to the needs of its members and to their active integration. The members themselves must work so that the society may function for the good of every member and of all the members together. For this reason, it is necessary to train each member — educational or professional, civil, social, cultural, emotional, physical training, etc., — from the moment of birth till death. “Orientation is a process and must interest the various phases of the life of the human person — from scholastic training to professional training, to integration in the labour market — in the different moments of transition”<sup>10</sup>. Here, the different moments of transition refer to the different stages of growth or of the assumption of roles. In this way, we can identify the need of daily updating of roles and competencies according to the interaction between our static and dynamic positions, and the historical and social happenstances. The fulfilment of this need is orientation.

We cannot say that a well oriented person is a person simply collocated or positioned in his environment. All of us are collocated in our environments, but not all of us are fully collocated according to our roles and in equal pace with the changes that take place in our society and in our individual histories.

With these clarifications, it is clear that a typical street child, who takes care of himself, without the protection of a responsible adult, without an assurance of basic needs, and without the hope of a stable future of reasonable integration in the society is totally disoriented. He has no healthy family reference, he has a distorted infancy, traumatic experiences, and a vision of the so-

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<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 11.

ciety coloured by the desperation of one who has always had the worst out of the society. He is totally wounded, so much so that he sees reality from a mistaken and distorted angle (you see indications of orientation as a representation of the position also of “the mind”). Even physically, he finds himself in places where he should not have found himself at his age.

His case has a real need of a global orientation, the type which Prof. Gatti describes as “the global approach towards the person”. Such an approach to orientation must be a dynamic process, meta-disciplinary, with a multi-factorial analysis, from social, cultural, psychological, personal and historical points of view. In such an intervention, a single individual can not suffice, nor can mere goodwill, arbitrary improvisation or isolated interventions. There is need for a team of professionals well-prepared in their specializations and disposed to team work.

Nowadays, the only valid orientation intervention geared towards self-orientation is training in the capacity of a continuous and fluid adaptation, and in a process of self-recognition and self-organization of the subject. Here, we clearly refer to orientation to positive empowerment, that is the capacity to make oneself and others capable, it is based on the belief in the inner capacities of the persons we wish to help, the will to help them in drawing out of themselves that which they have inside them and to use their riches for self-realization.

Continuous learning in the whole arc of life is a central concept for empowerment and it is sustained by a theory of learning according to which adults learn when: the contents of learning proposed to them are relevant, that is, beyond transferring knowledge, one acquires concrete capacities synonymous with power; the climate and the atmosphere of the formative process are supportive and not evaluative; they feel challenged in their personal growth and in learning more than in organization; they know the context of new learning, that is, they possess a map of the world (where are we, where are we going, how can we reach new territories); all their senses are stimulated; they are active (they discuss, they influence, they participate); they search for a

constructive feed-back, be it reflexive or evaluative; they learn with their rhythm and are respected in their difference<sup>11</sup>.

## 2.7. *Assistentialism*

The concept of assistentialism as a method of social intervention has a very significant historic precedence. Already in the XVIII century, it was used in a very profuse manner in social policies. In the context of the industrialization of Europe and the imminent danger of anarchy from the part of workers who were living in situations of extreme poverty in the industrialized nations, two currents of social service were developed by these countries in order to keep the workers under control. The German “insurance” model was based on a legislation geared towards covering up the risks of limited categories of workers — those in the major industries — and the expression of an intervention “from above”, determined by basic preoccupation of how to prevent social unrest and how to institute social control. The other model is the British “assistentialist” model, used by Britain and the North European countries. A model connected to democratic and parliamentary development, characterized by a legislation geared at responding to the needs of the needy sectors of the populace — non exclusively for workers — nor to the tutelage of workers and their organizations<sup>12</sup>.

Today, State assistentialism is disappearing gradually. It was criticized very heavily by many sociologists and economists. It was also fought down by socialism and communism which had put much emphasis on “added value” of human labour in order to demonstrate that social policies were not right if they were a

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<sup>11</sup> M. Smeriglio, *L'impresa sociale: l'anima e le forme, cooperazione, empowerment, territorio*, Magma, Roma 2001, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> G. Procacci, *Welfare. Controllo sociale, assistenza e sicurezza 1880-1919*, in P. Corner, *Assistenzialismo italiano*, Rapporto di ricerca MURST, Siena 2001.



mere work of mercy. A social policy has value only as a human right. Helped also by the two world wars, *the eyes of man have been opened and this has accelerated a process of development of a more comprehensive system of valorisation of the human person*. It is a valorisation that brought us to the redaction of a world wide declaration of human rights.

The concept of “human rights” comes to be seen in a wider way than that of “citizenship”: we are first of all human beings and then members of a “city” or of a civil society. At the same time, to say “person” means to say relations, community, city, etc. Individuality and relationality are valid and recognised basic dimensions of the human person.

From this point of view of social policies as policies made for the human person, social intervention is no longer valid if not as a tutelage of the right of man to integral existence and development. “The right to development is an undeniable human right in virtue of which every human person and every people has right to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and the freedom could be fully realised”<sup>13</sup>.

Assistentialism is seen as a reality based on the paternalistic conception of poverty or of suffering, as a direct and de-responsibilizing intervention on the society, where the assistentialist nation provokes the loss of human energy and an exaggerated increase of public apparatus, dominated more by bureaucratic logic than a genuine preoccupation for the human person, with high increase in expenditure, completely ignoring the hard fact for which needs, preferences, aspirations, are different from person to person. Such nations attribute to themselves the right to identify some needs considered “essential” and they assume the function of providing, sometimes in a monopolistic manner, the relative services to the whole people in the same manner for

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<sup>13</sup> *Declaration on the right to development*, Resolution 41/128, December 4, 1986.

everybody considered in need!

Sergio Ricossa observed that “a) it is already difficult to know what is my good (need); b) it very difficult to know the good (need) of others; c) it is almost impossible to realize it, even if it is to be known”<sup>14</sup> that:

- the beneficiaries of welfare are supposed to be the poor or weak, whose suffering, indigent conditions and lack of security is wished to be alleviated. Actually, the results demonstrate that this is an illusion from the point of view of “redistributive efficiency”, and beside the undeniable desirability of these objectives, there are numerous demonstrations of injustice that make one to doubt the very fact that the authentic beneficiaries of the social State may really be the needy and the less privileged;
- the true solidarity is a pact: it requires that there be someone who offers and someone who wishes and accepts. Secondly, those who defend State assistentialism, backing themselves up with such moral categories as altruism and solidarity, forget that morality must necessarily go hand by hand with freedom. An act is moral if it is free; a gesture of solidarity qualifies as such if it is free, voluntary and not forced.

But this is not the end of social assistentialism. Actually, the historic manifestation of assistentialism which we have seen above is the consequence of a more profound assistentialism — individual assistentialism, as the attitude of a single individual of the society when pressed by situations of want, need and cases of the less privileged. This is a paternalistic attitude which pushes us to give a helping hand as if we were to be doing works of mercy or to feel better with ourselves.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.googlesearch.com](http://www.googlesearch.com), G. Bianco, *Assistenzialismo di Stato: Robin Hood o Robber Hood?*, June 17 2005.

Many interventions addressed at the problem of street children are done only from this point of view. Social workers organise lunch, distribute sandwiches, cloths and even contraceptives to street children, they give them blankets to cover themselves in cold nights and they return to their houses satisfied that they have done well.

One day, in a hot argument with a friend of mine who often dedicates himself to distributing sandwiches to the homeless at the central train station of Rome Termini, he said am totally ignorant of the issue at stake: “you do not know what type of miracle a sandwich could work when you are hungry”. In as much as I do not deny the value of the charity done by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and giving drink to the thirsty, it is clear that this system of intervention is too scarce, superficial and egocentric to qualify for a social intervention that can be appropriated at the State level. Actually, it reduces the person in difficulty to an instrument to arrive at an inner satisfaction of having a clean conscience in the face of terrible social problems in need of radical solutions.

Talking about needs and the needy, according to Maslow, human needs are organised in scales of importance determined by the necessity of survival, a necessity that, once satisfied, ceases its place to needs of superior levels. The structure of needs is founded on the physiological necessities (house, food, etc.) which, generally, are the most acute and their lasting effects do not permit the emergence of other needs. Once these physiological needs are satisfied, new needs related to security, stability and order emerge (example: the search for gainful employment). Once their certainties are assured, the needs of belongingness, becomes evident.

Once stability and the sense of belongingness are satisfied, the need to be esteemed emerges, etc.! The theory of Maslow has been strongly criticised by different psychologists especially for the rigidity of the hierarchical order of the so called

human needs. We know that the human needs are daily needs, they are needs of everyday, needs that present themselves anew as the occasion arises, to be re-elaborated, updated and satisfied! No one can say that a certain need has been completely satisfied, so much so that one could climb to the next level! To the superior level!

We can not say that a person who has reached the level of self-realization can no longer suffer hunger or cold. In this way, the theory of Maslow has been demonstrated lacking in this element of fluidity, contingency and coherence between the different needs. However, the psychologists who analyse human needs today continue to use this theory, though in a criticised version.

If we were to follow the stages of human needs as they are presented by Abraham Maslow, we see that the physiological needs are only at the first level of the many complex needs of the human person. Though we do not accept the theory of Maslow as dogma, we think that it is sufficient to demonstrate the superficiality of a help-programme based only on the identification and satisfaction of such needs.

The approach of assistentialism could be valid only in the context of emergency, where there is no need for long-span projects. One could assist and must always assist others when and wherever problems and difficulties arise. This is a valid service which every social political order must guarantee to the people who happen to find themselves in emergencies and sudden need.

But in such interventions as in the case of street children, that is in the orientation of street children, the whole system of assistentialism could only be reduced as one of the interventions in the first stage of a process of orientation.

## *2.8. Tolerance and the multicultural integration approach*

In the context of contemporary debates on social integration of marginal classes of our society, one could very well insert the discourse of street children. In an official publication of the WHO, on the proposal of the training of street educators and other assistants of street children, the very first statement confirms the status of the street children as a significant class of our society:

the street children constitute a marginal group in the society. They do not have what the society considers appropriate relations with the institutions of the infancy life the family, the educational system and the health care system. Continuous exposure to very dangerous environments and life style renders them vulnerable to the use of toxic substances and constitutes a threat to their mental, physical and spiritual health<sup>15</sup>.

This situation of indigence renders them a class! The street child is not a problem, but the result of a social situation, therefore as a social class, street children merit to be considered equal to any other social class, helped, defended and respectfully integrated in the actual society.

As we know, they are stigmatized and it is true that

the normal and the stigmatized are not persons, but perspectives. They are produced in social situations during mixed contacts, in virtue of norms of which no one is conscious and which can exercise their weight on the possibility of a meeting. The attributes of the whole life of a particular individual can form one stereotype; may be he plays the role of the stigmatized in almost all the social situations, making it natural that people talk of him as a stigmatized person whose life situation collocates itself as the opposite of what is regarded as normal. However, his particular stigmatizing attributes do not determine the nature of the two roles, the normal and the stigmatized, but only the frequency with which he assumes one of them. Since roles of inte-

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<sup>15</sup> [www.googlesearch.com](http://www.googlesearch.com), World Health Organization, *Working with street children*, 2000.

gration come to play and not of concrete individuals, it should not surprise any one that in many cases, he who is stigmatized from a particular point of view, renders evident to all the normal prejudices that are maintained towards a person that is stigmatized from the other point of view<sup>16</sup>.

From the historical point of view, we have the tendency of repeating events that have already occurred in human history. Right from the beginning of history, different forms of racial, cultural, linguistic, religious and so on and so forth types of discrimination have been verified. The examples of this phenomenon are almost endless. In our era, the theme of cohabitation between people from different cultures and orientations and the possibility of producing operative plans of integration has been accentuated by the great theme of immigration. Many countries have developed social policies for fighting prejudices, discrimination and conflicts; the objective is always that of creating a better society where there is greater participated integration for all the members of the society. We wish to also present the possibility of using the researches already realised by sociologists in this field of intercultural dialogue to help street children. We truly believe that if the phenomenon of street children is seen from the point of view of the exclusion of a social class, and if by so doing it is integrated into the discourse on cultural integration, may be, it could be better faced and more effectively fought. The validity of this discourse is guaranteed by the argumentations which we have developed above, according to which street children live in a world apart, a world totally theirs, with different value systems from that of the civil society, with categories of social and emotional understanding totally different from ours and with experiences which only those who live in such situations can ever fully understand.

“Multi-cultural” therefore is a bi-focal method of orienta-

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<sup>16</sup> E. Goffmann, *Stigma. L'identità negata*, Giuffrè, Milano 1983 pp. 149-50.

tion, towards the dominant (the larger part of the society) and towards the minor class (street children). The society needs to be helped with pieces of information and with an educational and correct policy regarding the problem of street children. There is a prejudicial situation in our society where every street child is considered not only to be a criminal, but above all, as an object of pity. As we have demonstrated, these children are only victims of situations beyond their control. Only a very little percentage could be rightly considered “guilty” and to have “freely chosen” to be street children, in the light of our discourse on the psychological factor; but this remains totally arguable.

As a method of orientation towards street children and towards the society, one could demonstrate the validity of a programme of education to valorised diversity or the valorisation of difference, presented by “Family Cares”, an American association inspired by Coretta Scott King (daughter of Martin Luther King jr.) and by her friend Rosa Parks. In two very interesting activities, presented in the form of jokes and to little groups of children, the first joke was presented with the following materials:

- 3-4 different kinds of apples;
- photos cut out from magazines with different species of dogs and cats;
- photos cut out from magazines of children from different races.

Activity:

- looking at the apples attentively and identifying the similarity and the difference among them. Cutting the apples and tasting them, then telling the difference and similarity in taste;
- looking at the photos of the dogs and discussing on their differences and similarities;
- looking at the photos of the children and discussing on

- their differences and similarities;
- reading a short story that recounts the life or event in the life of a family of a culture different from theirs and discussing on the similarities and the differences between this family and theirs.

The second joke is not much different from the first. Summarily, the technique tries to clear the richness deriving from difference, diversity. In our schools, instead of making general judgements or ignoring the situation of exclusion in which street children live, programmes of this nature, addressed at having a better understanding of the phenomenon, could construct a useful methodology for helping street children.

Another thing that we must understand is that from the point of view of street children, there is need to digest the position of diversity which they live. This approach could be proposed to them in order to make them understand the vision of the greater society and the vision of other children, so as to help them understand from the right point of view, which are the true values of the society. The discourse here is reciprocal and has to do with empathy. The society comes to be helped to understand the phenomenon better, and street children are helped to valorise the society better. I think that specialists in didactics could develop effective programmes in this line of action. It could be a very stimulating research, looking for educational activities that fit this type of training to tolerance with the multi-cultural approach.

### *2.9. Persecution*

In a situation seen as dangerous, man normally reacts violently. It would really need a very reflexive man gifted with a great capacity of self-control to search under apparent danger



and to discover the richness hidden therein. This fact is verified in human history where many times, man has reacted violently to “imaginary dangers” that derive only from unjustified and unjustifiable prejudices. The most eloquent testimony is the Holocaust suffered by Jews, by the gypsies and physically handicapped during the Second World War and the genocide that was verified in Rwanda in the 90s. Sometimes, it is believed that perceived danger could be avoided by eliminating all those who belong to a class that is identified to be dangerous. In the ex-Soviet Union, the authorities were perfectly conscious of the existence of the young “hooligans” (ulgini) and yet they did not hesitate to wipe them out as “social parasites” sending them to prison camps where they must learn the “dignity” of labour. In China, the phenomenon of street children has very limited dimensions. A severe policy for the family planning (a child for every couple) and the “street committees” tightly tied to the official organs of the police assure “prevention”<sup>17</sup>. Today, despite the fact that many world agencies are sensitive to the problem and are working to combat it, some people still believe that the solution to the phenomenon of street children is the elimination of all street children, that is “liberating” the streets and the cities of these “pests” and “little delinquents”.

If we look at this phenomenon from the juridical point of view, we find out that despite the fact that many national laws recognise all the human rights for street children, following the international norms and undersigning all international pacts on the rights of children, there are many national social polities that are clearly persecuting street children. Even in cases where such polities are not in vogue, one discovers that between the police and public officers street children continue to be persecuted. “The role of the police in this complex is one of the fundamental aspects and could transform itself in a positive factor

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<sup>17</sup> S. Agnelli, *cit.*, p. 77.

if only there were to be a positive political will". Political will can not be quantified and it constitutes only one of the parameters that could be applied in this context. In many countries, the police has too much freedom of action and practically no concrete obligation to respect the rights of these children. The concept of respect of human rights is often relegated to the background especially when there is need to spare tourists from the shameful and disturbing spectacle of these little beggars. Street children are often objects of suppression and extortion even from the part of policemen who could seize their day's earning with the simple excuse that "it is certainly not clean money". We have seen cases of children who came out of the police stations with signs of cigarette burns, of sixteen-year-olds without identity documents arrested and registered as eighteen-year-olds so that they could finish up in prisons with adults who may give them a "good lesson". In the zones in which the number of street children is higher, the corruption of the police is a bitter reality that makes it even more difficult to control drug peddling, prostitution and gambling, especially in drug producing countries. The question mark this type of corruption puts on the public officers could consequently be extended as an attack on the legitimacy and moral authority of the official institutions. The fact that street children are conscious of this state of affairs risks to destroy the efforts of those who work to help them<sup>18</sup>.

At the institutional level of the centres and family houses for street children, a serious problem that may arise is the persecution of the people. Often, neighbours are opposed to such projects and do all in their powers to destroy them even before they are started. The greater part are afraid that a rehabilitative community for street children could bring negative influences on their neighbourhood. Some write petitions against the project to ensure that it is not sited in their neighbourhood. If after all

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<sup>18</sup> S. Agnelli, *cit.*, p. 74.

their agitations, the project comes to be sited in their vicinity, they transform themselves into friends of the public who must publicly denounce and report every incongruous act by the street children or any mistake of the management. They report to the police: “they cause a lot of confusion”, “they are all thieves”, etc. Every little thing is given much emphasis to aliment hatred and prejudice against the street children and the whole project of rehabilitation.

Worse still if the children are outside the rehabilitation centres. If they are still on the streets, they are fixed into an identity code as principal enemies of the society. They are accused and found guilty as charged of everyone of the crimes that are verified in the community, they are hated, rejected, violated, mis-used, profiteered and even killed; all with the conception that since they belong to nobody, nobody would ever ask after them.

One wonders if this mode of reacting to the phenomenon of street children could ever resolve the problem. From what we have seen, violence can not help to convince street children to leave the streets. Most of them are on the streets because they have no alternative. Most times, the streets are not chosen freely: the greater number of street children can simply do nothing about it. In such cases, violence can not resolve anything. Instead, violence strengthens the ties between the desperate street children and the streets. Violence against the street children strengthens the power of the street gangs. It is verified that the more violent the law officers are on street children, the more ferocious the street gangs become.

### *2.10. Synthesis: towards the discovery of a method*

It is heart-warming to know that there are international and national laws that guarantee a dignified life for all, even for street children: children who are part of a sector of our society

that comes to be always ignored by welfare services even in our contemporary society. The problems exposed in this chapter are not impossible problems, they throw open a challenge for a new polity which sees beyond material assistentialism to a personalised approach. It is only such a personalised approach that could boast of reaching at the individual in his concrete personal situation with a long term proposal of integral development and orientation.

It poses a challenge and this challenge must be accepted by whoever elaborates and/or participates in a project of orientation for street children. The first thing to be done is therefore individuating a method that may function in realising this objective.

## **Chapter 3. The dynamics of empathy and a personalized global intervention**

### *3.1. Foreword*

This chapter is the most essential part of this book. It is here that we wish to present our thoughts and pedagogical proposals for the orientation of street children. As we have had the opportunity of indicating in the last chapter, we wish to present the model of orientation which requires a global intervention; an intervention on the totality of the human person, beginning from his concrete and particular situation.

The novelty of this chapter is the reading of this model as a systematic plan that has direct reference to a communicative method of empathy as the engine which links and moves the whole system. From another point of view, the “practical” novelty is the attempt to draw up a valid programme of global intervention for educators involved with the orientation of street children, following our model of global intervention animated by empathy.

The key words are: communication, empathy, dynamism and system. In the optic of this reading, a global intervention is seen as an intervention with the following characters: multi-disciplinary, historical, concrete, personal, value-oriented, motivated by rights, dynamic, relational, errant, personalized, empowering, long span, an assisted self-orientation. Such an intervention needs new methods of administration, new educational styles, role definition of the specialist(s) involved, with the challenge of operating as teams, multi-factor analysis, and above all, a new vision of the system of social and welfare services organised in the “form” of business firms.

### 3.2. *Global intervention*

The concept “globe” is of common usage in recent times. It is especially used in international political lexicon and economics in talking about “globalization”. It is also used in geographical science and other branches of science in describing the planet earth. “A globe is a spherical object. For the fact that the world is seen as a globe, everything that has a world-wide influence comes to be defined as “global”. So we hear expressions like “global warming”, “global policies”, “global village”, etc.”<sup>1</sup>. In the disciplines on man, there are two ways of seeing the adjective “global” in reference to man: “global” as something total and “global” as a diversified unity. Both refer to the Greek vision of man as “micro-cosmos” – a little world. This conception of man comes from the diversity of the aspects of man. Man is body, mind, spirit and soul: yet man is at the same time a corporate unity. Man is in the process of change and growth though he remains the same in his essence. He changes, but yet he always recognises himself for that which he is.

Every man is a carrier of many faces which manifest different aspects of his or her personality. Faces that are formed according to individual history, needs and experiences, according to the society in which one lives, according to his epoch, role and responsibility in the larger society.

Playing an interesting game with the concept of “human faces”, Rilke recounts of his delusion with some men who have learnt to cheat the world by changing their personalities (as represented by their faces):

I did not know, for example, before now, how many faces we are. The human multitude is infinite. But the faces are even more numerous. Because every human being has many faces. There are human creatures who carry only one face around for years. Naturally, it gets

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<sup>1</sup> T.C. Ihejirika, *cit.*, p. 2.

dirty. It gets ugly, wrinkles are formed, falls into ridges and is deformed, as gloves in a journey. And there are the “simple” human beings, discreet simpletons. They do not change their faces, they do not even care to clean it, they think that it is just ok that way. And who could convince them to the contrary? But since they have also other faces, the question comes spontaneous: what do they do with their other faces?” and yet, “others instead change faces with a disturbing speed, and soon they wear out all their faces. It seems to them, from the beginning, that they will always have a new face to change with. But they have already changed forty; and the fortieth is the last. And sudden delusion has tragic effects” and finally: “gradually, the contrary becomes the case — facelessness — and they move around in this form, faceless”<sup>2</sup>.

One could talk of “global vision” from this point of view. A vision that must not be necessarily seen as “world-wide” in the sense of the physical world, but as comprehensive vision of the diversity of the aspects of the same reality. Explaining the unique quality of the globality required in order to arrive at a global intervention, Gatti in his book “Psychology of orientation for professional educators” departs with the famous contrast of dualism in the history of philosophy. Right from the origin of philosophy, the Greeks were fascinated by such questions as: “of what material is the world made?”, “are things one or many?”, “do things change or remain unchanging?”, etc. At these questions, Heraclitus, Zeno, Tales, etc., tried to reply in their own way. The research for the answer to these questions would bring about extreme affirmations like: “All is one and not many!”, “Everything is permanent, change is an illusion!”, “All is change, there is no permanence!”, etc. These affirmations divided the philosophical world for a long time. Some philosophers tried once in a while to create a link between the different philosophical schools but failed woefully. In the patristic and medieval epochs, the debate was so fiery that there was

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<sup>2</sup> R.M. Rilke, *I quaderni di Malte Laurids Brigge*, Tea, Milano 1998, pp. 5-6.

even a clear-cut division in man: between body and soul, between body and mind, between what is sensible and what is rational, between perception and intuition, etc. Also between philosophy and science, clear-cut demarcation lines were drawn. What is philosophical, once considered same with science, comes to be opposed to what is scientific, what is metaphysical to what is physical, and so on and so forth!

When professor Gatti talks of the global approach, he therefore refers to a possible collaboration between the speculative philosophical sciences and the experimental physical sciences. In his own words,

there emerges a new need of using philosophy with its functions of critical theory of the sciences and of methods. The collaboration between science and philosophy give an ample contribution, in the respective fields, to the consciousness of the limits and dangers in being closed-in only in one of the various forms of scientific or philosophical knowledge<sup>3</sup>.

This vision of the global approach which brings about a global intervention on man seems to us to be nearest to a more comprehensive vision of man. To this reflection, we wish to add an opinion which we have already expressed in another book:

Man is a rational animal. This gives man horizontal and vertical dimensions. As an animal, man is among other animals and beings, a member of the entire cosmic system. Vertically speaking, man tends to transcend himself towards “the other”. Man “escapes” the confines of animality in order to preoccupy himself with “meta-animal” actions. Any line of thought that negates this transcendental aperture to man is therefore tragically reductive<sup>4</sup>.

Without entering into a metaphysical analysis of man, it is already clear in the daily actions of man that man is beyond ma-

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<sup>3</sup> F. Gatti, *cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> T.C. Ihejirika, *cit.*, pp. 132-33.



terial existence. With an adequate phenomenological study, one sees immediately the qualitative difference between man and other animals: Man has a language and so do animals have languages, man climbs, so do monkeys — but in these actions, there exists a difference of levels, a qualitative difference. Even when man makes the same sensitive experience common to all animals, man's experience is very different from that of animals. This is because in the words, actions and sensations of man, man is imbued with reason and man is abundantly symbolic. His actions go beyond their immediate values, they go beyond their face values, effectively indicating and representing very profound significations which mere eyes can not see, nor could a mere combination of senses produce. One would need not only the senses, but a total knowledge of a particular man in order to understand all what a single action of his means! Even after such an arduous operation, all what we must have understood would only be an interpretation conditioned by our own personal experiences and subject to change in real time.

In the field of pedagogy and human training, the collaboration of all the sciences in order to arrive at more efficacious and comprehensive interventions becomes an imperative which must not be undermined. There is nothing else to do.

In order to clarify immediately my point of view, I take for an example a hyperkinetic child: if I know that a certain child has a cerebral wound due to prenatal or postnatal causes (let us say in both cases, for an abnormality) or from/through an anamnesis I come to know that he lived the experience of an encephalitis, it is obvious that my strategic and didactic comportment will assume different regulations from the case of a child that I define as hyperkinetic because he is always curious, in search of new explanations, of new objects, of new answers. In the second case, the activities would be differentiated in order to stimulate him the more and create even new and more stimulating environments with which he could challenge himself. In the first case, the observation and the research should instead identify the period, length of time, intensity, place where he received medical care, etc., to verify which type of body movement coincides with his physical

schemes, which are his linguistic difficulties and how much they influence his expressive clarity, how much his clinical profile influences the level of his affective expression – emotion, his cognitive and social experiences, etc. It could also be of great help to my analysis if I could know which part of the brain has been affected by the wound, if the electrical and chemical activities need or have already been regulated with different pharmacological therapies (for example with a psycho-stimulant in order to reduce the hyperactivity and in what quantity and periodicity), etc.; if the wound brought about a malfunction or a structural damage; if there are consequences at the metabolic level, etc. At the scientific level, the case could also be interesting to me for different reasons: for example, in order to insert an additional element or a contribution to the hypothesis of interpretation for such disturbances in children, in my mental representation of the problem of hyperkinetic children (that child has a father who was also hyperkinetic as a child, therefore this could confirm the conviction that could reveal a hereditary character in the hyperkinetic compartment); in order to verify if the case being examined also presents a chromosomal abnormality (the research does not confirm but puts in evidence the particularity of the cerotype XYY, or may be the presence of an extra Y chromosome) or if actual researches are conducted which exclude all these; to confirm the relationship of 6 is to 1 between boys and girls with hyperkinetic disturbance<sup>5</sup>.

We hope we shall have no need of getting to the extreme of analysis as complicated as this! We wanted only to demonstrate how different realities could be met in a single problem of didactic strategy, and how it would be very superficial not to closely verify single cases before intervening. The global reading of individual cases, otherwise called the global approach is therefore an approach of orientation that appeals to the totality of man. This approach of intervention constitutes the method that we wish to propose in this book. It is an intervention with the characteristics of inclusiveness. Inherent is that it is multidisciplinary, historical, personal, value-oriented, team work-directed, human right-centred, multi factor analytic, dynamic,

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<sup>5</sup> V.A. Piccione, *Pedagogia delle neuroscienze*, Seam, Roma 2004, pp. 63-4.

errant, communicative, personalized, business firm modelled and finalized at empowerment. We shall now see how this type of intervention could be constituted for an effective help to street children.

### *3.3. Multi-disciplinary intervention*

The consequence of the global approach is the multi-disciplinary commitment. Especially in this epoch where some think that

science is fast dividing itself in many particular sciences, so much so that it requires a progressively parcelled specialization. There are many who call our attention to the limits implied by this development: the specialization of the sciences distances the scientist from a global vision of problems and, actually, limits the progress of science<sup>6</sup>.

Some others still agree with us, that specialization is neither a loss in scientific orientation nor a limitation of scientific progress, but a source of richness for possible growth in knowledge. One can not grow in knowledge if one always remains on the generic level. Both history and human nature require the so called parcelled specialization. The mode of being of man is that of being “situated”. Man is situated in time, in space, etc. The same discourse we developed in the last chapter on the concept of “position” is also valid here. To be situated is to be within limits. Though one may be able to do many things at the same time, one can not be everywhere at the same time, or do everything at the same time. No matter how intelligent a man may be, no one can be a specialist in all arguments or have profound and updated knowledge of all arguments. Even if a man were to have all the capacities, he would not have the time to do

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<sup>6</sup> F. Gatti, *cit.*, p. 36.

all of them, and even if there were to be the time, it is not everything that can be done contemporarily. When he would be developing an argument, all the other arguments would have to wait for their own turns!

For this reason, we are human beings, essentially relational beings, what is a limit in a subject finds its completion in “the other”; knowledge, science, or whatever other human dimension, does not subsist neither in one man alone, nor in a branch of study alone! All branches of studies must relate with each other in order to effectively respond to the entire man. From this point of view, when one talks of the orientation of street children, many disciplinary competencies come into play in order to have a complete vision of the analysis and of the possible response to the problem. For this, an effective intervention as they are mostly adolescents, must take into consideration studies done on psychology of orientation beginning with psychological and didactic competences.

In the past, education and training were a traditional question carried on according to the capacity of the individual, it was not to begin until the child completes his sixth year and the almost exclusive preoccupation was the acquisition of knowledge. Gradually there came the realization that the very first years have an enormous importance for the rest of life and that the traditional methods, applied by breast-feeders and ignorant mothers, was certainly not the best<sup>7</sup>.

Though, today, no one can establish with certainty to have the thoughts and methods for a sure education of children every where and at every time, psychological studies have however developed very interesting studies on the whole arc of human growth. There are profound studies on prenatal development, somatic development, development of the legs and hands, development of infantile perception, development of intelligence

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<sup>7</sup> B. Russell, *Il mio pensiero*, Newton Compton, Roma 1961, p. 624.

and memory, development of emotions, characteristics and functions of human emotions, development of comprehension of the emotions of others, control of emotions, affectivity, social development, development of communicative and linguistic capacities, and even the development of moral consciousness<sup>8</sup>.

To ignore so much exposition and so many results obtained today with street children by different specialists who work everyday on this reality, would amount to facing the problematic in an approximate manner. An example that demonstrates that all we have been able to say till now is in the studies on adolescence. Adolescence has been studied in the recent past years from new points of view, demonstrating the different aspects of the changes in this most important stage of growth. Adolescence is no more considered as a period that regards a determined age, but as an activity.

From a biological point of view, adolescence is a universal phenomenon, though the exact age in which puberty begins is not the same for all individuals. Regarding the end of adolescence it seems conceptually rich to agree with researchers in psychology of different orientations such as Corey (1946), Ausubel (1953), evolution psychologists like Havighurst (1952) or even psychologists of the human personality like Blos (1962) and Erikson (1968) that adolescence comes to an end when the individual has resolved a series of “developmental assignments”, whose time of resolution depends on the particular social, cultural and economic situations that constitute the life, environment and the resources of every individual. The list of the assignments to be faced differ according to the authors, but it is valid upholding that, in the general complex of ideas, these assignments have to do with the reorganization of one’s inner image of his body consequent to puberty, with the emotional and affective detachment from the parental figures, with the training of a social identity connected also to the type of belongingness, with the entrance in the labour market and the acquisition of economic independence<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> R. Vinello, *Psicologia dello sviluppo*, Junior, Bergamo 1998.

<sup>9</sup> M.A. Gainotti, V. Biasi, *cit.*, p. 11.

For the fact that street children are more or less adolescents, not to have clear ideas on adolescence could be an unpardonable weak point for a street educator. Again, since many street children are addicted to stupeficient substances, there is need for precise knowledge for whoever wishes to accompany them in their reorientation. It is impossible to make an effective project for street children if the question of drug addiction and the related subjects are ignored. Any useful long-span help addressed at such people can not just be informative and/or persuasive; an intervention to the favour of an addicted child, for example, must last from the period of dis-intoxication to the period of rehabilitation. It demands a knowledge of the effects and/or the symptoms, of the types of drugs consumed, and which are the right interventions to be used: pharmaceuticals, psychological and social support, etc.

Whoever has no knowledge of these things can also prepare very wonderful programmes of intervention, but they remain only ideals that are practically not realizable. In the same manner, it is not possible to do a comprehensive work for street children without an adequate attention to the changes in the regulations and laws on minors in the country or region of operation. Though one may not necessarily be an expert of laws, the legal implications of the actions on field work can never be overlooked.

Every project of orientation must be designed in conformity with the regional regulations for structures of social intervention. Without exploring all the competences required for making and realizing a global help project, it is clear that for the realization of such a programme, there is absolute need for a systemic and relational link between many different disciplines: medicine, psychology, laws, didactics, sociology, economics, history, philosophy, etc.

### 3.4. Multi factorial analysis

It is not possible to make the same project for all street children in all countries and all times. Such a project would be obtuse, may be, rationally effective but not applicable in reality. There is need therefore to consider the many factors that could come to play in a particular case before concretely realizing a project of intervention: the national context, the most urgent problems of the street children in question, etc. For this reason, whoever works with the neighbourhood children of Rome would have to prepare a totally different project from one who works with the street children of Pasto in Colombia. This fact is already clear for one who has to prepare an assistentialist intervention, the more reason why it must be part and parcel of the global model of intervention with personalization of projects as one of its major pillars. The factors to be analysed in order to realize a personal intervention are factors that are rooted in the causes of the phenomenon as already exposed in the first chapter of this book. Already in Europe, the models of social welfare could be read in this optic of multi-factorial contextual analysis. In a recent study<sup>10</sup> on these models, five representative models of the different currents of European social policies according to the particular problems of the countries:

- a. the Scandinavian model of public service (Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden);
- b. the Anglo-Saxon model of the “means test” (UK);
- c. the Hollandaise-German subsidiary model (Germany, Holland);
- d. the traditional care model (Southern Europe — Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal — and Ireland);
- e. the Franco-Belgian model of family policies (France and Belgium);

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<sup>10</sup> W. Lorenz, *Il servizio sociale e la nuova Europa*, EICG, Genova 1995.

- f. the ex-communist model (Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, etc.).
- a. The Scandinavian model of public service: presence of ample offers of social service, financed through high level of taxation. The principal objective is to alleviate the family of care responsibilities. The central governments have a fundamental role in financing and programming the services. The municipals have a basic-level role in the dispensation of social services and third sector associations are often involved. The offer of domiciliary assistance in these four Scandinavian countries is effectively the highest in all the countries of Europe. In Finland and Denmark, the greater part of the care given to children below three years is given by private personnel who work from home to home under the supervision of the municipal. They offer private services at reduced payments. The system of services is universalistic; it is not tied to insurance taxes paid in antecedence or to a condition of economic poverty. If the beneficiary is deprived of means, services are gratis, when the service is because it was requested, the monetary contribution is free according to income. In Finland, people belonging to the highest income grade can pay the whole cost of the services they receive. There is significant growth in participation in paying for services in recent times. There are services to which the citizens enjoy subjective rights. The principle of equality of rights and obligations of all citizens gave rise to a decisive policy towards the integration of the disabled in educational, social and sanitary services used by the whole population.
- b. The Anglo-Saxon model of “means test”: according to this principle, social services are given according to the demonstration of more or less means of self-sustenance by the person who asks for assistance. This implies a work of “as-



assessment” on his or her socio-economic conditions. Since the last 20 years, there have been great changes that could be attributed to the strong neo-liberalist current. The system of service-giving is getting significantly differentiated by day, introducing in strong terms, the development of the market of services in the private sector. This seems to develop a certain competition and variety of services offered (a liberal model of welfare State which inspires the social polity of USA, Canada, Australia). The offering of services is limited and addressed principally to problematic cases. Beyond Ireland, Great Britain is the only country of the European Union where socio-educational services for children below the age of three are generally given to children of working parents, and exclusively to those who are living in a situation characterised by social problems. Actually, the State follows a policy explicitly designed to maintain a low volume of services. The paid private services have a strong and visible role. The families are called to directly assume the responsibility of the services of which they are in need and are encouraged to avail themselves of the services of the third sector and of the private non-profit organizations. The attention of the social operators remains almost exclusively focused on poor families, limiting the initiatives to inclusive and universal actions for them.

- c. The Hollandaise-German subsidiary model. Historically, in these two countries, both the lay and religious non-profit organizations are invested with a very important role in giving social services. They are directly and obligatorily financed by the State and through providential and public health insurances. The services for elderly people are primarily financed by such insurances, thereby creating a strong tie between social services and health assistance. Sometimes, the insurances, by creating a close tie between social services and health assistance, find it difficult to

cover the finances of all the interventions. In such cases, the municipality which enjoys much autonomy could intervene. The confines of public intervention were established on the bases of the doctrine of subsidiary operation: which means that they are limited to when the capacities and resources that permit the individual, the family, the primary organizations, and the local community to assist her members are totally exhausted. The public offices are obliged not to activate the dispensation of services where such are guaranteed by non-profit organizations, though the rights of the citizens to enjoy healthy services remain guaranteed. There is a great investment in social policies in favour of youths. This type of intervention has increased so much since after the second world war, in order to close up the educational gap, cultural isolation and to effect the social regeneration of the after war generations.

- d. The traditional model of care. The interested countries initially structured their social policy according to principles closely tied to the Catholic and Greek-Orthodox Churches and their outlet organizations. Here, the emphasis is on the family as a central nucleus of society, as a subject responsible for taking care of her members and as an autonomous micro-system, whose boundaries are inviolable. The Church has for long been the principal care giver to old people and to the disabled, especially with her capillary system represented by the parishes, caritas and other movements and ecclesial associations, which constitute the grass root outlets of the churches. They maintain some common characteristics with the Anglo-Saxon countries, especially the verification of the economic possibilities of the beneficiaries before giving them help. Though they come from organizational situations where services were offered exclusively to the poorest part of the population and organized according to categories. In the past ten years

they have gradually passed to a universalistic-selective model, re-dimensionalized by the limitations of resources. In this phase of services, the government and public sector are assuming an increasingly more important role, especially in the sector of infancy and services to old people. This is seen in a particular manner in Spain and Italy, a little less in Portugal. In Spain, Portugal and Greece since after the fall of the fascist military regimes, a process of decentralization has initiated at the local level of public responsibilities in the social services sector. Greece is still based on a centralized welfare system. The central government evaluates the needs of the citizenry, defines the social programmes and fixes a budget, while the responsibility for the actuation of social policies belongs to the regional authorities. The case of Italy was presented above in our discussion of the law 328/2000.

- e. The Franco-Belgian model of policies for the family: traditionally, there is a very high intervention of the State in social questions and this is normally taken for granted even by the populace. The process of decentralization which started in the 80s has brought to a redistribution of responsibilities among the national, regional, departmental and municipal levels. Policies for families are well developed while a relevant part of public funds are destined to socio-educational services. There is here, the most complete and deep rooted system of nursery schools and baby care in Europe. There is even a system of care of children in their homes effectuated by people external to the families and subjected to the attentive supervision of public officers. The residential and socio-sanitary structures for old people give paid assistance except in cases of citizens who lack the adequate means. The costs of the home services or residential support can be sustained by health insurances. France was the first country to introduce the minimum

revenue scheme of integration (revenue minimum d'insertion, RMI), in 1988, in order to fight the growing problem of poverty and the exclusion originating from unemployment. The dispensation of monetary contributions is combined with the offer of a whole lot of services geared at social reintegration.

- f. Ex-communist countries: the central planning of communist development had the duty of guaranteeing: job security, minimum income, essential social rights, etc. The salaries were not connected to the productivity. The rate of unemployment was very low there was scarce career or job mobility and occupational concentration in some productive sectors. As a consequence of the process of transition at the fall of communism, these weaknesses became evident. Full or complete occupation was no longer possible, while production collapsed because of the change in demand of goods and services. The capitalist model which is rapidly imposed in the post communist societies has put into crises, the individual paradigm of action and the entire access of State organization. In this context, characterized by a difficult economic equilibrium, unemployment and free market competition have evidenced such phenomenon as exclusion, alcoholism, drug addiction, delinquency, and the institutionalization of minors.

The dynamics and strategies of European policies are at the basis of the systems of dispensation of social services in the various European countries. This dynamics determines a possible project in favour of street children. We are conscious of the fact that the orientation of street children is only a part of the numerous services rendered by Welfare Service. Such an intervention should therefore walk hand in hand with the systems put in action by the given society and try to respond to the situations therein. This does not in any way exclude the legitimacy

of criticizing the national systems in which one operates or making useful innovations that could help such systems grow and respond better to the ever changing social situations.

### *3.5. Human right motivated*

It is no longer meaningful to treat social intervention as a charitable action. Before, one could and one can still make reference to Christian principles on universal solidarity of all men, on alms giving, on love and on mercy. These principles were valid and still remain. As rightly observed by the Second Vatican Council,

God has destined the earth and all it contains to all men and to all people so that all creation may be shared in a fair measure by all humanity under the guide of justice tempered by charity. However the structures of properties of the people may be, according to the circumstances and coherently with the legal structure, we must not lose sight of the universal destination of the good of the earth<sup>11</sup>.

These principles are no longer mere virtues. They have been transformed into laws. Street children are invested with rights that must be respected. These rights do not depend on our disposition to charity. They are rights guaranteed by international and national laws. Therefore, whoever takes care of projects for these children must carry out his work from this point of view. It is not important whether he is a voluntary or paid worker. What he renders to the children is their right not a mere act of charity. The legal point of view based on rights guarantees the security of every one involved. The law establishes the limits within which an operator or a structure may operate, the law guarantees the norms of social action, the law accurately studies

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<sup>11</sup> “Gaudium et Spes”, 69.

and regulates the aspects and possible consequences of social intervention. It is true that many times, what is legal is not necessarily just. Often a social operator has to fight between legal norms and the dictates of his conscience. In such situations, it would be better to appeal to the competent authorities. In any case, whatever initiative to be taken on the field of work must take the legal norms and regulations into consideration. If there have to be changes, these must be in the direction indicated by the law. Only in this way can we make sure and healthy projects. We know that the educational sector is in continuous evolution and always demands new responses that could normally be born out of field experience without normative antecedents. We know also that the rigidity of some legal schemes limit educational projects orientated towards a personalized approach to training. Often the risk of operating within the confines of the law may include looking more at the norms than at particular situations, guarding more the structures than persons, being more interested in filling forms than in resolving issues, etc. All the same, we must not forget that laws are there to protect us, to guarantee the validity of our actions; laws are open-ended, they could be always amended if by our discoveries and new initiatives, we are able to give useful contributions.

### *3.6. Systemic intervention*

The global intervention requires not just a system, but the system.

The plurality of actors involved in the system of dispensation of social services, linked to the different levels with different competences and resources, demands a project capable of identifying the critical elements of developing an integrated system of interventions. This approach was introduced (in Italy) by the use of innovative laws: the reform of Title v of our Constitution effectuated with the constitutional law of 18 October 2001, n. 3; the law of 8 November 2000, n.

328, through the realization of the integrated system of interventions and social services; law of 28 August 1997, n. 285, regarding the dispositions for the promotion of rights and of opportunities for infancy and adolescence<sup>12</sup>.

A systemic intervention is an intervention organized in different parts linked by a common objective. These different parts respond to the needs of the intervention to be protected in the course of its function and to carry its work to a good end. The parts are also sub-systems.

The systemic approach represents one of the possible methods of reading and constitutes a useful instrument both for analysis and for planning of activities, permitting the organization itself to be considered as a system made of parts, every part or variable is made of a group of subsystems which in turn are made of other subsystems<sup>13</sup>.

A system can be closed or open. This depends on the type of relationship it has with its other external structures. A closed system is a system that does not depend on environmental and social changes and does not respond to the needs of the times, while an open system is animated by exchange with the environment. A global intervention is an open systematic intervention. When we wish to intervene in favour of street children, we must face a lot of systems: world, country, region, economics, law, culture, technology, globalization, etc.

It is no longer possible to make social projects without adequate consideration of all the interested partners and structures. Beyond the basic structure that constitute our project of intervention, in order to ensure its globality, it must also be a living process capable of continuous action, reaction and interaction with all the levels of the system. For this reason, an organization that takes care of the dispensation of social services must

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<sup>12</sup> A. Norcia, *cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. 15.

have the characters of every open system: interdependence, coherence, contingency and finalization:

- a. interdependence is relative to the capacity of the various components of the system to influence each other reciprocally, in this sense, every variable is determined by the other in a series of complex relationships;
- b. coherence of the elements is at three levels linked to each other: the first is between the internal environment and the external environment, meaning that if there is a change in the external environment, for the system to remain relevant and continue to carry out its functions necessary to achieve its objectives, it has to be flexible and change its inner structures to make itself coherent with its external change; the second level regards the coherence of all the components of the system among themselves while the third level is the coherence that must be verified between every single component of the system and the external environment;
- c. contingency is a characteristic which implies that the conditions of the context determine new configurations of the internal variables and even the variables themselves;
- d. finalization is the character that gives the system its reason of existence. It is the objective that is to be realized. The variables must respond to a common objective.

In global intervention, the role of the coordinator of services is collocated here as the invisible hand that guides the whole system to arrive at the wished end. When it is a project of orientation as in our case, the objective is non other than self-orientation capable of empowering the street child to construct a life project, both at the personal, professional and societal levels without delegating his decisions to others.

The indicators of the systems for quality that could be derived from ISO 9000-9001/2000 are:

- a. the centrality of the person and orientation towards the beneficiary;



- b.the leadership that should involve all the operators in aiming at common fixed objectives;
- c.the approach by processes in the management of activities and resources;
- d.the systemic approach to correlated processes;
- e.the continuous perfectibility of output;
- f.the taking of decisions based on facts from concrete experience<sup>14</sup>.

### *3,7, Personal-historical intervention*

A global intervention is an intervention projected on the concrete situation and history of a person. Every man carries with himself a particular and unrepeatable history, every personal history is unique and special. This is seen in our experiences of life. It is true that we can draw a general plan of an intervention of orientation, yet, it remains only a hypothesis if it is not incarnated in the history of a particular person. To understand this, we need to have a good notion of man and his historicity. In many psycho-pedagogical studies, a phenomenological study of man has been proposed. Phenomenology is the branch of philosophy that studies the “appearance of being” as signs full of significations to be analysed and interpreted together, in order to arrive at the true nature of being. In the last century, this study was championed by Edmund Husserl who had proposed phenomenology as a valid methodology for arriving at the essences of things. Phenomenology is the study of things beginning with “how they come to light”:

Since phenomenology is a study of things themselves, of the thousand possibilities of causality and reasons that determine a body and a psych, it is not dogmatic, nor is it a model of the reflection of man as object of psychology, biology, sociology, phenomenology is a philosophy, above all, a study of essences<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> F. Gatti, *cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> V.A. Piccione, *cit.*, p. 73.

When applied to man, philosophical anthropology studies the manifestations of man in his actions. In the case of every man, philosophical anthropology gives a reading of the totality of the actions of every man as a concrete person who is historical, individual and unrepeatable. It studies every one of his single actions, words, and events, etc., in his history, as symbols that recall all other events in his life and that indicate the future. Phenomenology takes the attention away from man-body, object of pity to man-subject, protagonist and actor, place of manifestation of endless significations, intriguing mystery; a totally new world to be discovered!

What is hidden in every soul that is wounded and bruised by pain, is difficult and complex to decipher: both everyday life, in psychology or in psychiatrics: all human sciences, which have before them blurred horizons and till date incomprehensible ... listening to the silence of a soul heavy with sadness, or his cry, beyond every word, is undoubtedly a challenge, a risk, a fatigue. But it is this that gives meaning not only to the psychiatrist but to whoever tries to compare himself with others<sup>16</sup>.

The existential phenomenology which we propose in this study does not require a profound knowledge of philosophical studies. We simply propose that the nature of the previous history experiences of the children which we wish to help must be accurately studied and put down with precision. It is not just a matter of trying to describe the different events and particularities of their life stories or much less is it a matter of categorizing single experiences according to some pre-established schemes but seeing the history of the person through the person to know what values he attributes to them and what ties they

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<sup>16</sup> R. De Cicco et al, *cit.*, p. 8.

create in him<sup>17</sup>.

In considering the global orientation of street children and the task of studying their personal histories, we must study his environment from two major points of view: material environment and cultural/symbolic environment. The material environment refers to all that of our surrounding that can be measured in physical terms; that obey the laws of nature, and are same in the whole world and for all men. The differences are with regards to climate and geography: some live on mounts while others live in the desert, etc.

The cultural environment has to do with systems and codes of communication, codes and rules of comportment, norms, values, morals, social patterns, etc. Here are variable and flexible factors that depend not only on where one is but also on when one is there, why one is there and who one is.

From a personal point of view, no environment is lived by two people in the same manner. Based on this, it is not possible that two people could be same as to be treated in a completely same manner at all times. Not even the fact of living in the same place and at the same time can make us be same. Even in the case of identical twins, born on the same day and brought up together by the same parents, they are not alike and even less same. It is enough that there be just a single event in their infancy experienced from different points of view, for you to have totally different individuals with totally different orientations and worldviews. The historical and personal intervention is very attentive to this historical particularity of every person and tries to give each person a phenomenological reading that helps in making a personalized project for him.

The validity of personalized projects is already old story! It is very widely accepted and acclaimed. In Italy in 2001, the de-

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<sup>17</sup> E. Borgna, *Come se finisce il mondo. Il senso dell'esperienza schizofrenica*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2002, pp.29-36.

cree of the Prime Minister to the ministries titled “Act of address and coordination in matters and socio-sanitary service” specifies that “socio-sanitary assistance be to people who show health needs, who request for ... acts of social protection, also of long period, based on personalized projects” This approach is not that new in Italy. Such a principle of personalization was developed especially in the environment of the disabled. Law n. 68/1999, art. 2 provides the predisposition of a personalized project aimed at integration in the labour market in continuity with the indications that emerge during their school years.

It is not enough to evaluate the person in order to establish his grade so that he could be collocated in the labour market or in the school system. It is important that the whole team of operators and collaborators following the case should try and identify the type of work that suits his capacities, potentialities, aspirations and history in order to create a totally new project of life for him to realise the total sense of his existence.

### *3.8. Bilateral orientation: errant and relational intervention*

The consequence of a personalized project is bilaterality. Whoever makes a project must orientate himself continually according to the feedback that comes from the person he is helping. It is not possible to have a complete project before beginning a global intervention. In general terms, there could be a complete project for a structure of intervention in the sense that it defines the general line of action. But in individual cases, complete and pre-packaged project can not work. Actually, the project is developed with the new indications that are obtained through continuous interpretation of the actions of the beneficiary. Whoever does the project should not have a complete, decisive and resolute idea of his intervention, nor must he be unprepared, instead, he must study every case in its minimum de-

tails, and allow himself to be guided by the results of the formative meeting. In this bilaterality, there are two very important elements: errant and relational.

The errant element is a constituent characteristic of man. It evidences instability, growth, movement, wander, and continuous change, all part of the condition and actions of man. Man is presented as he who travels through experiences and who matures by travelling. Man's life in the society today can be correctly called nomad in this sense

intended as flowing, it has roots very deep in philosophical thought. Already Heraclitus was imagining a world reality as eternal flux in which all things flow when he was underlining that "it is not possible to enter the same river two times, nor touch a mortal substance two times in the same state; with the speed of movement, all is undone and recomposed again, all comes and goes" (fr. 91). This description represents well the contemporary social order whose equation is the product of the association between movement and uncertainty, between speed of circulation of immaterial flux of information and interiorization in life of categories of unpredictability. This is the ground on which the nomadic essences (men) move<sup>18</sup>.

Man in his journey through experience comes to be contaminated by experience and he in turn as a protagonist of thoughts and action contaminates experiences! It is a continuous mutual contamination. Man himself becomes "a vague morphological essence" that is neither inexact, undetermined, imprecise nor exact, determined and/or precise. It is a question of seeing man as an "emerging reality", in the form of an "event" which explodes every day and suddenly in different forms and manifestations. This is because the lack of unity in the contemporary man can no longer be regarded as an identity crisis. The type of logic implied in this vague fluid form is con-

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<sup>18</sup> M. Maffesoli, *Del nomadismo, Per una sociologia dell'erranza*, Angeli, Milano 2000, p. 10.

tinuous discernment and accompaniment in a long span manner.

The type of knowledge useful is learning in action, a knowledge that can not be pre-constructed, caged in classic formats, in rigid forms, but which must be fluid, open, and above all capable of acquiring information, results from the external, capacity of interiorization of categories and concepts. In order to be able to operate correctly therefore, it is necessary that this type of learning passes through methodologies of research, of experimentation, of communication, of learning in action<sup>19</sup>.

The figure of the educator seen as a person who teaches, is useless with regard to an intervention in favour of street children. The notion of help does not resolve once and for all, all the problems of the person being helped, it is a futile attempt! The only path that can be toed is that of becoming a companion in his life journey. The project of help for street children must be an “accompaniment” and not an assistance. The street educator is symbolically to be compared to a person who picks up his bag, laces his sandals, puts himself beside the person in need of help and walks along with him. What is necessary to be done will be revealed in the course of the trip.

It is from this point of view that we talk of bilateral intervention as a relational intervention. Our reference point in this discourse on relations departs from Carl Rogers’ theory on non-directive therapy, “client-centred”. Rogers has developed through psychotherapeutic practices, a profound methodology that permits us to help people to change their lives, following the indications that come from the client to arrive at character evolution.

“Client centred therapy” continues to be based on respect for the human person and on faith in his potentialities; it however underlines the fact that the value of a help relationship depends on the quality of the interpersonal meeting between the therapist

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<sup>19</sup> R. De Cicco et al, *cit.*, p. 119.

and his client<sup>20</sup>. From this point of view, the fundamental behaviours of the therapist or of a helper, in our case the street educator, are:

1. “genuineness” or “congruence”: the educator is, in this relation, a real person, authentic and transparent;
2. unconditioned positive consideration: the educator accepts, respects and values the child in an unconditioned manner and is interested in him;
3. empathy: the educator understands the sentiments of the child, sees and lives the world of the child as the child himself perceives it without forgetting that he is the educator<sup>21</sup>.

It is not possible to do this type of intervention without verification, understood as a strategy of action. Verification here means permanent evaluation of the whole system of orientation. The structure of intervention must always verify itself in its relation with the context of the country where it operates, it must continually compare itself with the quality of output and the result that is obtainable, with the ethical-political systems it makes reference to, in the quality of the relationship between the operators themselves, between the operators and the directors, between the whole team and the children, etc.

The operators must cooperate and make reference to a system of verification which constantly permits the monitoring of the work done. Interventions in the social sector are aimed at results that follow immediately after the interventions or after a bigger system of series of interventions realized.

Evaluation of the work done is the only mode of having feedback, in order to understand if the work is valid, if it produces changes or not.

Let us imagine for example, a team which realizes interven-

<sup>20</sup> C.R. Rogers, *Three characteristics of a helping relationship*, “Personnel and Guidance Journal”, 37, 1958, 6-16.

<sup>21</sup> C.R. Rogers, *La terapia centrata sul cliente*, Martinelli, Firenze 1989, p. 14.

tions on the street for the prevention of the spread of HIV and unwanted pregnancies among street children. If the team maintains a continuous contact with the street children and establishes a lasting relationship, sharing with them the happenstances of life, it can understand more easily, if the project is succeeding in reducing risky behaviours on the part of the children. Beyond the interest the children show in the activities proposed to them, how can the team understand if the work being done is useful in relation to the objectives established at the beginning of their assignment?

It is necessary to have a continuous evaluation adapted to the intervention. It has to be an evaluation with expectations and measurable variables. The concept that captures this continuous verification is the qualitative and errant relationship. The educator must commit himself totally to the cause.

### *3.9. Team work*

The team is a work group with shared objectives but different roles. What distinguishes a group from any other aggregation of people is the fact that there must be an interaction between the different components of the group. If we say that the individuals A, B, C, D, E, ... form a group, this means more or less the validity of the following sequences: within a given period of time, "A" interacts more with B, C, D, E, ... than it does with: M, N, L, O, P ... which we can consider more as strangers or as members of another groups. Also "B" interacts more often with A, C, D, E, ... than with strangers. It is therefore possible, counting the interactions, to construct a map that distinguishes a group quantitatively from others.

In order to be a work group, or team, there is need for more elements than in a normal group. It demands as in every organic group, plurality, contact, reciprocal perception, consciousness



of having something in common and subjectivity in cohesion. What is more, a team requires additional formative inter.

At the level of definition, the more consistent difference resides in the fact that while an ordinary group is a mere plurality of interactions, a work team is ... a plurality of integration. To put it better, a plurality that tends progressively to the integration of its psychological ties, to the harmonization of equality and differences that manifest themselves in a collective, through its dynamics it can be identified as a work team<sup>22</sup>.

Interdependence as necessity of tie and opportunity of exchange is the hooking point between the virtualization of the relationship between equality and difference, the equilibrium between the education of an autonomous social subject capable of restitution of energy and results to the environment where it is formed and capable of attributing meaning to itself. In this way, the significance of the work done by group instead of an individual is enclosed in the expectation to obtain a substantial result, richer and different from that which anyone could ever produce alone.

In his discourse on team work for rehabilitation in the orientation of the disabled, Prof. Gatti gives some points that could be useful in clarifying our ideas on work team:

The rehabilitative work team is constituted of sanitary professionals who operate in the services of rehabilitation coordinated by the medical personnel responsible for the structure. He/she has the task of:

- elaborating the individual rehabilitative project,
- defining, in general terms, the short, medium and long term objectives;
- projecting actions and determining the necessary conditions for reaching set goals;
- periodically verifying the validity of programmed interventions and evaluating the obtained results.

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<sup>22</sup> G.P. Quaglino et al, *cit.*, p. 27.

The rehabilitative team is the expression of the different professional ties, each of which assumes an important role in the organization of the integrated socio-sanitary process, favouring the connection between the programmes of sanitary interventions and social intervention, so that, oriented towards developing and rendering available the resources and the environmental potentialities, they may amplify and reinforce the rehabilitative intervention<sup>23</sup>.

The street work team is determined by the beneficiaries of the help offered, by the programmed finality and by the society in which the work is done. In constituting the work team for services to street children, it is necessary to highlight that they are almost all adolescents. Their need for health care, need for basic education, need for the intervention of the social service, need for a professional or vocational training and above all, the need for a family — these and more should be paramount in determining the general objectives of the intervention and the choice of the people to make up the personnel.

The work team formed for a global intervention in favour of street children would absolutely need a medical doctor, a psychologist of the evolution, a group of committed teachers, a group of educators and at least a professional educator and coordinator of services.

There is absolute need to guarantee the professional competence of the professionals and the capacity of human relationship among the team members and every operator independently of the formative context and culture.

Pieces of information must be transmitted in a simple and clear manner, adequate to the situation, such that it may be easily comprehensible, this is the specific task of the professional educator and coordinator of services. The objective is to facilitate communication and relation with logical and strategic ca-

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<sup>23</sup> F. Gatti, *Integrazione della persona diversamente abile*, Armando, Roma 2006, p. 52.

pacities (the capacity of programming and planning, delegation and control, analysis and solution to problems, information management, problem management), relational capacities (the capacity to communicate, negotiate, collaborate, conduct groups, manage meetings); managerial capacities (the capacity of organization, decision making, leadership, motivation and development of the collaborators, sustaining tasks till the end); organizational qualities (realization, initiative, determination, concreteness, systematicity); social qualities (trust-worthiness, transparency, positivity, openness and integration with the others); subjective qualities (flexibility, tolerance of anxiety, creativity, learning and self-consciousness)<sup>24</sup>.

### *3.10. Business firm type of intervention*

Beginning with the needs of the work team, immediately is the need for the consciousness that a global intervention functions practically like a business firm. The concept of a business firm puts to light the dynamics of a work group and the workings of an effective organization of a project. It is clear that the concept of offering social services in the manner of a business firm is gradually taking root. In Italy, law of 13 June 2005, n. 118, with great authority and firmness, defines a private social welfare structure as “a private non-profit oriented organism which exercises a stable and principal economic activity of production and of exchange of goods and services of direct social utility finalized at the interest of the general public”. These private juridical subjects become part of that panorama of firms that can offer services to the public administration. They come to be described with the concept “firms”, a term that in the commercial sector implies the sell of products, in the industrial

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<sup>24</sup> G.P. Quaglino et al, *cit.*, p. 111.

sector implies the production of material good and in the other sectors like jurisprudence, the exchange of services for retribution. The offer of social services and non-profit oriented activities are already in the mercantile logical lexicon. Some of the differences between the industrial sector and the social services sector are indicated in the table below<sup>25</sup>.

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Social services</b>
The product is generally concrete	The service is immaterial
There is transfer of property when one effects trade	Normally the property can not be transferred
The product can be shown before buying and selling	Normally the product can not be shown in an efficacious manner (it does not exist <i>a priori</i> )
The product can be stored by sellers and buyers and be used when needed	The product can not be stored
Consumption is preceded by production	Normally production and consumption coincide
Production, marketing and consumption may take place in different places	Production, consumption and marketing often take place in the same place and at the same time.
The product can be transported	The product can not be transported (but the “producer” can sometimes move around)
Only the marketer produces	Both the buyer and the marketer take active and direct part in the production
It is not always possible to have direct contact between the firm and the client	It is almost always necessary to have a direct contact between the firm and the client
The product can be exported	Normally the service can not be exported, but the output system or strategies can be diffused

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<sup>25</sup> A. Norcia, *cit.*, p. 136.

The proposal to see the offer of social services in the form of a business firm does not reduce the quality of services or substitute the non-profit orientation with materialism. Non-profit orientated service avails itself of just a part of the style of the business firms, a part useful for her survival. Here, we refer to the use of the business-firm organizational system, with its logic of control, evaluation of human resources, management and projection aimed at efficiency.

In this way,

in a system of output of social services, be it a private firm or a public structure, we can talk of a “checks and balances” in the same terms as business firms, which could be described as “the capacity to use the resources of the firm towards a strategically defined objective and of identifying the modalities, in terms of the process and activity, with which to operate the checks and balances. However, in this, our system is also subject to external control since it interacts closely with the external environment.

Through this social control, the members of our civil society indirectly delegate some well defined objectives which are concretized in a series of obligations and of organizational behaviours of the managers and of the technical crew<sup>26</sup>.

The global intervention is a social service. Every project that is aimed at global intervention in favour of street children should be prepared in the same manner with which a business firm undertakes a true and serious enterprise.

From this point of view, the planning must be carefully done, the system of evaluation must be inaugurated with the very first steps of the work and the management/administration must be done with the *forma mentis* of one who is managing a business.

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<sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 50.

### *3.11. An intervention of empowerment*

An old African tale tells of a beggar who never asked of fish but line and hook in order to fish, never asked of vegetables, but a piece of land to be cultivated. When they asked him why, he used to answer: “today, you give me to eat, tomorrow when I will be hungry again, I will come back to ask you again for food. But if you help me to produce something to eat, I will not ask you again for what to eat!”. This little tale demonstrates in very simple terms what the global intervention tries to do for street children. We do not give them food to eat today and die of hunger tomorrow. In this way, we shall only be alimending their dependency. It would not be of any use.

This notion of orientation as empowerment is the logical consequence of all the discourses we have done till now. A fundamental characteristic of global orientation is that of creating lasting and significant relationships based on the conception that every human being is unique with individual needs which correspond to particular histories and personal wishes. For this, it is not possible to homologise individuals. Actually, every individual possesses personal human potentials of development, potentials proper to him as ontological dispositions of his being. The projection of orientation, as in making personalized projects, can never be uniform for everybody. In order to be really effective, it must create and offer possibilities of choice, it must propose formative processes in different modes, rhythms and with different contents. The educator should take-up a categorical and methodological imperative of paying maximum attention to every single child and his particular story, wishes and project, if he really wants to effect a global intervention.

Let us apply Carl Rogers’ thought and his “client-centred-therapy” to this educational system, so that it can be considered as a “democratic education” model, as he himself states:

generally, the client-centred-therapy is coherent with that type of objectives that could be approximately defined as democratic ...

The objective of a democratic education is that of helping the students to become individuals that:

- are capable of acting from their own initiatives and are responsible of their actions;
- are capable of self-orientation and intelligent decision making;
- are capable of in-learning critique and evaluation of the contributions of others;
- acquired useful knowledge for problem-solving;
- are capable of adapting themselves flexibly and intelligently to new problematic situations;
- internalized a flexible approach to problems, which they usually use in a creative and free manner, in all the experiences that are related to the problems;
- are capable of collaborating effectively with others in all activities;
- do not act to receive the approval of others but for internal motivations<sup>27</sup>.

The intervention of empowerment is subject to the work team. The decision and action must be shared, spontaneous, systemic and capillary. Here there is need to out-grow the fordist model of organization of firms from the hierarchical and vertical point of view; there is need to move on from a pyramidal model to a model of shared and participated organization of projects and social structures.

It is only when every member of a work team has the power of decision-making in his own environment, when and as the need arises, then and only then can we say we have a global intervention.

### *3.12. Communication; active listening*

Communication is the connecting red line of global interven-

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<sup>27</sup> C.R. Rogers, *La terapia centrata sul cliente*, cit., pp. 220-21.

tion as in every human relationship. Communication is necessary and governs actions in all the levels and moments of intervention.

The process of orientation must promote generic strategies of diagnosis, activate rules of analysis of life histories and classify new events in order to understand the relationships among them, processes of interpretation of signs and methods of mental stimulation for organizing and restructuring experience. All this implies an immense trafficking of information. Because of this, communication is at the centre of the life of man and of the process of his orientation. We wish to therefore make explicit some aspects of verbal, formal, non formal, informal and non-verbal forms of communication present in the dynamics of global orientation for street children.

Verbal communication is done with words while nonverbal communication is done through signs and signals. Signs of communication can be of various natures; actually, it is possible to transmit a message using sound signals, visual signals, gestures, touches, etc.

However, in every sign, we can recognise two components: a physical component which is perceived by the senses, or significant, and an immaterial component, which refers to the content of the sign and corresponds to what one wishes to communicate, the signified.

Non-verbal communication is therefore a means of communicating significations that words can not always express, often, verbal and non-verbal languages are used contemporaneously, words are accompanied by gestures.

As limpidly explained by Romina De Cicco,

words are not the only things that exist, there is also the language of silence and of gestures: the living body with its shadow, with its desperations and its enthusiasms; when we meet a person that is suffering we can not fail to notice this immediately, before every word, both the face, the look in the eyes, the manner of salutation and hand-



shake, the body language<sup>28</sup>.

As we have been able to present in our analysis of street world, there are many elements that come to play when one talks of communication: sender, receiver, canal, message, referent and code. In this way, every message that is expressed by the sender is sent in a determined code. In order to decode the message, the receiver must know the code of the sender and must have healthy sense organs. The disturbances of communication are all those things that render it difficult or that impede the de-codification of a message from the part of the receiver.

To the physiognomy of communication we have explained here, one may add a reflection on another very important aspect of communication: the quality of communication.

It happens that sometimes the verbally emitted message may not correspond to the message emitted non-verbally:

this determines an invalidated communication, substantially incapable of offering significant contributions to the speakers. It constitutes one of the sides of a complex phenomenon that defines a problematic communication: all the phenomena in which a communicative relationship is ineffective and inappropriate are today regarded as miscommunication. Actually, the present interpretations insist that we must also verify the level and grade of satisfaction which everyone or all the speakers perceive in their communicative exchange. This theory is interesting for us because it shows that beyond the efficiency and clarity with which messages could be proposed, we recognise and attribute a fundamental value to educational relationship and the quality of its implications:

- for the professional, cultural and social growth of teachers and students;
- for the possible cultural enrichment following all moments of miscommunication;
- for the individual attitudes towards knowledge, maintained by all the protagonists who participate directly or who withdraw voluntarily from the exchange or who decide from a certain moment not

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<sup>28</sup> R. De Cicco et al., *cit.*, p. 23.

- to be interested any more;
- for the individual prejudices that could be determined in all the phases, in relation to persons, contents and roles;
- for the quality of all the existent relationships in the educational context: the speakers can be benefited by the dynamics existing among contents, individuals and places<sup>29</sup>.

In an educational relationship, one overcomes the level of habitual or passive communication to arrive at an active and profound communication. Listening is the primary instrument of an educator who wishes to be of help to a person. When realised in the fullest psychological and physical possibilities, it inserts us in a dialogical dimension, especially if we bear in mind that in the modern world, oral communication is one of the most widespread forms of transmitting information. For this, it is more than ever important to refine our listening capacities: to be capable of perceiving the variety of pieces of information that will come to us from the children.

Listening is not only a simple activation of the hearing faculties, it is trying to draw some sense out of what one hears. Listening in training and orientation sciences must be inserted in the contest of active “waiting”, “expecting” the messages that are thrown out by the person we are trying to help. Waiting here is active because we try to explore the aspects of the person, involving him in the activity and stimulating him to creativity.

The capacity that we demonstrate in closing up the distance between us educators and the children in difficulty; it is all there, knowing how to listen and understand the expressed and unexpressed needs of a person in difficulty and discovering personalised inters of training, using those instruments that form part of the basic training of an educator: creativity, motivation, empathy, capacity of listening, project-making-capacity and capacity to personalise and individualize rehabilitation projects<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> V.A. Piccione, *cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> R. De Cicco et al., *cit.*, p. 20.

This means that formative listening is another important key to global orientation. It is the adequate methodology for arriving at the personal phenomenological anthropology which we have demonstrated above.

The educator listens to the person in a total manner as the person who comes with a bag of information useful for the project.

The phenomenological anthropological experience of the body avoids his reduction to an object, to something, to a mere preceptor of sensation, in order to think of him as a custodian of languages, of communication and of silences even when one of his extensions, the voice, happens to be absent for some pathological or organic reasons, intentional or involuntary, incomprehensible or un-hearable, and makes space for emptiness, for gestures that continue to bear witness to an interior life, the wish to enter into dialogue, to reduce the distance between the confines and the boundaries<sup>31</sup>.

This methodology helps us to overcome the difficulty of understanding difficulties even before the person in difficulty verbally manifests them. It helps us to overcome the prejudices that impede us from reading in-between the lines to see the real problem of the person we have before us.

Using active listening as an instrument of participated communication, we avoid rendering our interventions anonymous, mechanical and passive.

Another important point is that listening is a mode of living the training experience as a vocation to mutual donation.

Listening is not a need which we feel but a gift which we make to the other. The need of being listened to and the availability to listen is the first step in constructing an efficacious relationship that makes reference to active listening.

Active listening could be used in a relationship to permit the other

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<sup>31</sup> V.A. Piccione, *cit.*, p. 88.

to communicate his difficulty and therefore to help in the activation of the adequate resources for overcoming it, it contributes to establishing a constructive style of influence in relationships, which includes a variety of behaviours for communicating our wishes to the other, to understand him and accept him as a person.

In health departments for example, this technique reveals itself particularly useful when the operator has to help self-isolating patients, who do not participate in the therapy and who demonstrate low collaboration.

The objective of the operator is to create a climate of trust in order to institute an efficacious help relationship that permits him to help the patient to overcome this difficulty.

The technique of active listening supports the realization of such objectives through the activation of a series of passages in stages, in a communicative interaction. Such passages can be summarized thus:

- passive listening: this is the initial phase of interaction which consists in listening to the other in silence and permitting him to express his problems without being interrupted and making him to perceive the fact that you are listening to him;
- messages of reception: they consist of verbal messages (“am listening”, “am trying to understand” ...), and non verbal messages (gestures with the head, look, smiles ...) which indicate the comportment of a person who listens;
- warm invitations: we mean verbal messages which encourage the subject to go to the depths of what he is saying (“tell me”, “please explain better” ...) without evaluating or passing judgements on what is being said;
- active listening: during this phase, the person that intends to listen “reflects” on the contents of the message of the other, recounting it with different words. This permits him to verify if the message has been well understood. It is important to clarify that active listening does not give back only the verbal and explicit content of the message but reflects above all the sentiments expressed by the communicant and perceived by the listener, that is the emotional content of communication<sup>32</sup>.

In this book, we wish to present communication in its person-oriented character.

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<sup>32</sup> R. De Cicco et al., *cit.*, p. 22.

<b>The possible impediments to communication according to Gordon</b>	
Gordon describes 12 behaviours that must be avoided in order not to risk the breakdown of communication and the destruction of relationships.	
1.	Ordering, demanding: most times in obligating someone to do something, we do not consider his sentiments. Receiving orders could provoke anger and hostility; above all the risk in ordering is proposing behaviours that are inadequate for the subject.
2.	Threatening: normally when one feels threatened, he defends himself with counter-attack. He could be submissive or afraid to lose a particular benefit. Fear reduces trust in the relationship and motivation to face and overcome problems.
3.	Moralizing: the invitation to follow some determined obligations, imposing a moral, can produce loss in self-esteem and increase the guilty consciousness.
4.	Giving ready-made solutions: giving solutions to problems instead of stimulating someone to search for his own solution could suggest to the other that we do not trust in his capacities. This risks to bring him to dependency or mistrust and does not allow him to develop autonomy.
5.	Persuading with logical arguments: if we do not take a person's sentiments into consideration in evaluating his actions and telling him what to do, we risk offending or humiliating him.
6.	Judging, criticising, disapproving: too much criticisms, negative judgments and disapprovals can damage the self-image of the other.
7.	Giving unmerited approvals: unmerited approvals, just like criticisms, can wound the person who receives them if he feels it is false and does not correspond to his self-image.
8.	Interpreting, diagnosing, analysing: it is good to avoid interpreting the behaviours and the messages of the person before him, in order not to put him on a defensive position or make him feel misunderstood.
9.	Consoling, minimising: minimising a problem in order to console the other can make him feel misunderstood.
10.	Dodging the problem and changing argument: if the problem is dodged, the person may feel that the other does not consider him and his sentiments as important.
11.	Interrogating: if, in a relation, the subject perceives to be interrogated, he may feel the other's intrusiveness and then try to close up in himself and not to participate in the communication.

Therefore, we ask ourselves: when people are talking, what do they talk about? Certainly, people tell their own stories and the stories of others in the light of their own life experiences. For this reason, whoever communicates creates a point of view, his own world, made of his own ideas.

In this way, people say their own point of view of things, tales that do not totally ever resemble that of others, there are never two perfectly similar tales.

Two people may be living the same experience but may never tell them in the same way, at the same time and from the same point of view! The tale is changed from person to person, highlighting personal fears, hopes, interests and prejudices of the story teller!

Every person has a unique and unrepeatable story to tell, a world coloured with his own dreams, his delusions, frustrations, etc. In order to communicate with a person, there is need to enter in his world.

### *3.13. Dynamics of empathy*

The communication to which we make reference in global intervention is empathic communication, a communication that is capable of using active and empathic listening as a methodology of the training journey with the child who is being formed. Empathy comes from the Greek word “*empathia*” – “passion” and is composed of “*en*” – in and “*pathos*” – affection. It refers to the ability of a person to recognise, perceive and directly feel the emotion and the state of being of the other.

Just as the mental states, the wishes of others are affiliated to their emotion. In an empathic relationship, one can effectively understand the other. Empathy is often characterized as the capacity to put oneself in the shoes of the other, experiencing his point of view and feeling his emotions with him.

Let us see some of the definitions of empathy taken from the works of some intellectuals from different orientations in order to identify the constitutive elements of empathy:

- Heinz Kohut: empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself in the interior life of another person.
- Nancy Eisenberg: an affective response that flows from the understanding and comprehension of the emotional state and condition of the other, that resembles what the other feels or can feel.
- Roy Schafer: empathy is the interior experience of sharing and comprehension of the actual psychological state of another person.
- David M. Berger: the capacity of emotionally knowing the experience which the other lives, beginning with the other person's structure of reference, the capacity to taste the sentiments of the other or to put oneself in the shoes of the other.
- Wynn Schwartz: we recognise the other as empathic when we feel that they have accurately acted or in some way, formally or informally recognised our values, motivations, knowledge and our talents or competences, and especially as they seem to recognize the significance of our actions in a manner in which we can bear that they be recognized.
- Carl Rogers: to perceive the interior structure of reference of the other with precision and with its emotional components. To perceive their true significances as if one were to be the other, but without losing the condition of "as if". In this way it means feeling the pains or the pleasure of the other as he feels it himself and perceiving their causes as he perceives them, but without losing the recognition that it is only as if one were to be wounded or one were to be pleased and so on and so forth.
- Jean Decety: a sense of similarity in sentiment experienced by self and by the other, without confusing the two people.

From these definitions, we can deduce the fact that empathy is the focalization on the interior world of the interlocutor, the capacity of intuiting what is pushing him, how he feels in a situation and what he really feels beyond that which he expresses with words.

We can also see empathy as the capacity to read between lines, to understand the emotional flash lights, to understand the signals and non-verbal indicators of a state of being and to intuit which values certain events have for our interlocutor, without being guided by our personal schemes of attribution of significances and yet retaining our personal identity and vision of things.

### *3.14. Empathy and some related phenomena*

One has to be careful not to confuse empathy with sympathy, telepathy, emotional contamination or intellectual comprehension. Intellectual comprehension of facts looks for the real state of things and reconstructs the exact dynamics of the events and realities without emotional involvement.

Empathic comprehension is more subtle and complex than intellectual comprehension. It requires a very refined and rare sensibility. It is not sympathy because sympathy is mere sentiment of compassion for the other, the wish to see him happier. Emotional contamination is simply the involuntary or unconscious imitation of the emotions of others, especially as can be seen in adolescent gangs.

Telepathy on the other hand, is a paranormal phenomenon where the emotions and/or mental states of others could be read directly, without contact with the person involved. Empathy is not a defence mechanism which we put into act in order to avoid sentiments of anguish, guilt or loss, taking a shortcut



through fusion and confusion between us and others.

Empathy serves above all to feel and understand these internal conditions. Empathy helps to understand situations that present themselves at different levels of consciousness.

A person who identifies himself with the other as a mechanism of defence is not conscious of this identification while in empathy one is fully conscious. While identification is at the level of the unconscious, empathy is at the preconscious or conscious level.

In order to understand empathy very well, there is the need to differentiate it from empathism. Empatism is the “goodism” of the social or sanitary operator who disposes himself to embrace and combat even unpleasant sentiments, who flowers hatred and hostility, or instead of humbly confessing not to have understood the feeling of the other, falls into the illusion of a proper contact with himself while he actually is losing both ends or may be even falling into the syndrome of burn-out.

### *3.15. A few discussions on empathy*

Empathy has been studied in recent years from many different points of view: psychological, didactic, neuro-biological, etc.

In the field of psychology, we would like to remember the studies of Carl Rogers who has made empathy the central point of reference in his reflection on client-centred-therapy, a methodology in the treatment of schizophrenia that has come to be appreciated by many academics.

The process of modification of personality in the course of the therapy has been described above all, if not exclusively, from the point of view of the client.

This focalization of the “phenomenic” world of the client differs completely from a description based on external criteria, such as, ad-

aptation to the external environment or the evolution of a series of symptoms.

It is necessary to underline also that “client-centred-therapy” has never occupied itself with so much of the problems of psychopathology, she has above all concentrated its interest on what happens during the therapy session, on how the client lives the process of the therapy.

The modification and the growth of the personality in the course of the therapy are explained with constant reference to a “basic force” already present in the client, defined as “actualizing tendency”, considered as the essential force that is at the origin of the growth and the development of every person.

It is a regulating force which permits the person to select, in a hierarchically ordered manner, the vital experiences. The objective of the therapy is that of creating favourable conditions that permit this force to operate, such that the person may grow towards his self-realization<sup>33</sup>.

Some intellectuals believe that not all men have the capacity of empathy or of perceiving the emotions of the other. They appeal to the situation where people suffer from autism or from the syndrome of Asperger, sicknesses often characterized with the lack of empathy.

Researchers are trying to give response to the questions arising. Some other intellectuals have dedicated themselves to discovering possible answers in the neuronal processes that go side by side with empathy. These studies have demonstrated that observing the emotional state of another person, some neurons are activated making us feel the same sentiments which the other has.

Studies on empathic neurons have been accelerated by the discovery of the “mirror neurons” studying how monkeys involuntarily imitate the mental states of people.

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<sup>33</sup> C.R. Rogers, *La terapia centrata sul cliente*, cit., p. 10.

### 3.16. *Components of empathy*

Three main factors are present in empathy: empathy, the empathised and the empathic. The first is the objective empathic comportment, the second is the person towards whom this comportment is manifested while the last is the person who as protagonist, empathises.

From the very concept of empathy, we can underline the following ingredients: relationship of equality and respect, trust, relationality, transparency, active listening, unprejudiced communication and unconditioned acceptance.

Transparency is the coherence between the sentiments manifested and the sentiments truly felt. If the interlocutor perceives transparency, he opens up with trust, otherwise he closes up in self-defence.

Transparency does not mean an impulsive revelation of all sentiments, but implies not stimulating a sentiment when in reality you are feeling another way altogether; the result is always that the interlocutor may feel the dissonance.

Empathetic comprehension consists in putting oneself in the condition of the interlocutor in order to understand his point of view, without assuming it as one's own, but maintaining self-control: if a nurse throws herself so much into the condition of the sick person so as to be overcome by the pains of the sick person, she would worsen the emotional condition of the sick person instead of offering him or her some consolation and sustenance.

Unconditional acceptance consists in the abstention from evaluations, approvals or disapprovals and from corrections.

Empathic comprehension implies the suspension of moral judgements on sentiments to which the interlocutor makes references: listening without measuring the conformity to norms, nor the right mode of comportment, nor illustrating the situation objectively in order to induce the other to understand that he did

not face it with due maturity.

### *3.17. Empathy as a methodology of orientation*

Parting again with Carl Rogers, we wish to appeal to the validity of empathic communication as the key to a global project of orientation in order to establish the methodological value of empathy in orientation. Actually, all the elements of global intervention which we have examined would be useless if we had not examined empathy as the basic assumption. *Empathy is the structural aspect of the help relationship.* The relationship between the educator and the person to be helped, in this case street children, is demanding and may be different from that of a medical doctor or psychologist. His approach must not be cold and detached because that will not allow him to institute a help alliance based on trust, on reciprocal respect and on common formative journey. There is need to be capable of approaching the suffering of others with caution, understanding it with grand respect and attention, considering it without rendering it banal. How is it possible to mirror oneself in the faces and looks, in the silences and in the vibrations of the mind of another, in his self show and in his lost in confusion, in his sufferings and in his wounds which are born out of the context of needs and of disorientation, of sadness and of fear?

In order to meet the person and help him to change his life, many psychologists of scholastic and professional orientation, many social pedagogues and specialists in social integration have made reference to this methodology of help based on empathy and on empowerment in order to develop programmes of intervention that resemble our global intervention. The departure point is the statement that empathy is a capacity that can be acquired through careful experimentation and exercitation.

Help giving is an ancient praxis (an art). One can say without exaggeration (it has been said by Kropotkin, a social philosopher of the early nineteen hundreds, who saw the first mutual help-giving as a sociological “fact”) that solidarity has been a true engine power of human evolution. Already since men started to exist and then for every type of society, however organized, they have always been able to count on others like them in order to save themselves from some difficulties or in order to take a step forward from where they were<sup>34</sup>.

Learning to help the other from inside, in his being, is the best way of giving a helping hand. This method has been proved right by Carl Rogers. Another academic to which we can not fail to make reference is Robert Carkhuff.

In his book *The art of helping. Guide for teachers, parents, voluntary workers and socio-sanitary operators*, he presented the stages and phases that must be passed through in the dynamics of an empathy-oriented method of rehabilitation. This study is very interesting to see. The method proposed by Carkhuff can be summarized this way:

helping is a process through which the person that is helped will acquire new behaviours, the helper has the responsibility of encouraging this “development” in the other. In order to be able to offer an effective help, initially, there is need to be capable of “feeding” the other, that is, knowing how to respond adequately to his needs.

This initial phase serves to prepare the person that is being helped to be sensible to the following active behaviours of the helper. ..when the person that is being helped comes to be “nutritive” and “prospective”, be it with regard to himself or with regard to others, then one can say that he is mature to an “adult” level. In other words, we can say that the person that requested for help becomes capable of offering help, of helping both himself and others. He becomes himself a helper. The persons that live their lives fully can help others to live theirs even more fully.

The behaviours of “response” and of “initiative” are the basic dimensions of life and of the help process. ... If an individual is to learn

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<sup>34</sup> R.R. Carkhuff, *The art of helping. A guide for developing helping skills for parents, teachers and counsellors*, HRDP, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1973, p. ii.

a new comportment, he would have to first “explore” his situation, and understand very well where he is. It will not be possible for him to obtain any result if first the person does not know where he is. He would have to be capable of exploring himself in relation to himself. He would have to explore, trying to discover himself in relation to the world that surrounds him. It is indispensable that the person knows his problems first in order to then change his comportment<sup>35</sup>.

In this way, self-exploration is the first objective of help relationship. Whoever projects orientation puts himself in the point of view and of life of the person who is being helped in order to show some light on the aspects of his life in a friendly position. The concept of help expresses the identity of the educator as one who accompanies the other in the journey of discovery of better ways of comporting oneself in order to live a better life.

The true protagonist is the person that is being helped, he alone discovers his problem and he alone does the necessary exploration, though he comes to be helped by an educator who acts more or less as an informed guide.

The second phase is that of self-understanding:

the only scope of self-exploration is to understand.

At this level, help consists in making the clarification of one’s experience possible so that the person may be able to understand himself profoundly.

The helper must filtrate the experience of the other through his own, see it in prospective and therefore, just as it’s done when one puts together the pieces of a puzzle, he must do it in such a manner that the other understands better and more deeply his own experience.

When the helper goes beyond the simple response to the experience of the other and takes initiatives departing from his own experience, he facilitates in the other person, the process of better self-understanding<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Ivi, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, p. 11.

Understanding here is to be understood in the sense in which Socrates was saying that “no one does evil knowingly”. Every body that does evil does it because he believes he stands to gain some good from it. When the person to be helped understands himself, such knowledge of self obligates him to act. For this reason,

one could say that there is no true self-knowledge until the individual undertakes some type of action.

The primary objective of understanding is of being capable to act in order to learn new behaviours. In the phase of action, the person acts in order to move from where he is to where he wants to be. The more radically an individual knows himself, the better would he succeed in acting for himself and for others.

The more effective the active comportment (initiative) of the helper is, the greater will be the possibility that the other person models his comportment on him<sup>37</sup>.

The last phase of the process is constructive action. In this dynamic process, one can identify some competences which the helper must acquire: paying attention, responding, initiation and communication. Paying attention constitutes the moment of reception in a structure.

The operators dedicate themselves to take care of the person first of all in his physical needs (physical attention: health, alimentation, clothing, etc.), psychological needs (psychological attention) and listening to him actively (empathic attention).

Response is the request of reciprocity of the communication, having paid attention, there is need for a response to the comportment, sentiments and the system of personal significations. Initiation requires a personalized project that must be sustained to the end.

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<sup>37</sup> Ivi, p. 12.

### 3.18. *An eye on the dangers*

Empathy is a demanding project which may have some risks for the operator.

Relationship is the most delicate part of the work of a socio-sanitary operator. The difficulty is in the capacity to always maintain the “right” emotional distance in the help-relationships, without allowing himself to be overcome by the waves of emotions that often people shower on those near to them, but without putting up excessive defences which may often render the operator distant from his patient and his needs. Normally the subject has on his shoulders, a personal story dense with tragic experiences, and the choice to enter a rehabilitation centre represents an additional and painful step ... Listening in silence to a soul dense with sadness, or to his cry, beyond every word, is undoubtedly a challenge, a risk, a fatigue<sup>38</sup>.

For this reason, empathy is associated with high concentration of sensibility towards the mental state of the other; a concentration more negative than positive because it could cause excessive stimulation, stress, etc.

It is important recalling the attention of whoever makes reference to this method that he risks falling into depression or the burn-out syndrome.

In reference to this, Prof. Gatti writes:

All operators of social and sanitary services, ... beyond an adequate, specific and technical preparation regarding the task they must carry out, should have what for many people is obvious; but it does not always happen that the obvious is concrete:

- a psychological disposition to change;
- a disposition to team work
- an experimental attitude;
- a meta-disciplinary methodological approach<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> R. De Cicco et al., *cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> F. Gatti, *Psicologia dell'orientamento*, *cit.*, p. 60.



### *3.19. Synthesis of the third chapter*

As we have seen, global intervention is a demanding intervention, it requires specialists of all the disciplines concerned, but at the same time, it is a very simple and interesting intervention based on empathy (if not friendship). Both the person who interprets this method of orientation and the person who is helped with it, are in a journey of trust, sharing of different worlds and mutual respect are the basic norms. Empathy is the key to understanding this method of intervention. It requires a system which puts the person in difficulty at the centre of action, not as an object of pity, but as a custodian of rights and capacities, as a gift to humanity.

We can not possibly offer any reasonable and comprehensive help by treating people as “non persons”; but retaining that every person can himself find the potentialities for producing inside himself, the changes he needs to rise to greater heights. Orientation intervention from this point of view is the result of a work of bulldozing the obstacles which suffocate these potentialities i.e, a work of rehabilitation and empowerment. At the end, only the person being helped is the real protagonist, the helper is a facilitator. In this process the more irrelevant the helper is to the person he is helping, the more successful becomes the process of training.

In the next chapter, we shall see how this method has been applied in a concrete experience.



## Chapter 4. Demonstrative example

### 4.1. Foreword

The methodology of global and empathic orientation is not an impossible enterprise to realize. History demonstrates in the charisma of the Somascan Fathers, a religious congregation committed to the apostolate with abandoned youths, a living process that has brought to a prototypic foundation and that demonstrates the global intervention which we have described above. In this chapter, we wish to understand the originality of the apostolate which the Somascan Fathers received from their founder, Saint Jerome Emiliani, and see as it has been demonstrated in one of their structures for the systematic and personalized orientation of street children.

### 4.2. The model of St Jerome Emiliani

#### 4.2.1. The history and person of St Jerome Emiliani

Jerome Emiliani (Miani) was born at Venice in 1486 to Angelo Emiliani and Dionora (Eleonora) Morosini, both, Venetian nobles. His family was not very rich but well to do<sup>1</sup>. Jerome received a decent education and Christian training from his mother and from the Lateran Canons of the Casa di Santa Maria della Carità, an institute near the family house of the Emilianis.

Little is known of his infancy and youth until his participation in the war of the Republic of Venice against the Cambrai League and his employment in the State public administration.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Pellegrini (ed.), Anonimo, *Vita del carissimo signor Girolamo Miani, gentil huomo veneziano*, Curia Generale dei Padri Somaschi, Roma 1985, p. 5.

As is recounted by his first biographer, an anonymous Venetian,

During his youth he found himself in times of changes, to which he knew how to adapt himself. He told me that during the war fought by our Republic against the Cambrai League, he enlisted as a knight for a certain period and did not know how to avoid the sins of the armed people of our times ... libidinous, insolent, cruel and avaricious, and not honest, disciplined and magnanimous<sup>2</sup>.

He was mandated by the Senate of the Republic, in March 1511, to defend the castle of Castelnuovo at Quero.

Castelnuovo at Quero was an obligatory passage and strategic boundary for the defence of Venice.

In August 1511, the Austrians sent machinery troops in an attempt to break down this defence post in order to move towards the conquest of Venice “it was a butchery, only the lives of Jerome and two captains from Belluno, Paul Doglioso and Christopher Colle, were saved, people on who Mercurius Bua (the commander of the Austrian troops) had imposed a tangent in order to be redeemed”<sup>3</sup>.

Jerome was locked up in the tower of the castle for days, his legs and hands were tied with heavy chains. It was during the period of his detention that he was miraculously liberated, a miracle that was faithfully recounted in code 646 of the Communal Library of Treviso, the so called “Fourth book of the Miracles”:

Jerome Miani, gentleman of Venice and caretaker of Castelnuovo of Friuli with 300 soldiers under his command, was surrounded by a big army of the Austrian majesty. Since they did not want to surrender, they had a very hard fight, the castle was taken and all the men were cut into pieces, the caretaker was put in chains in the underground of a tower, living on bread and water. Being so much afflicted

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> L. Netto, *Da Castelnuovo di Quero alla Madonna Grande di Treviso*, Padri Somaschi, Milano 1981, p. 110.

by his situation and the torture meted out to him, having heard the mention of this Madonna of Treviso, with a humble heart he asked for her help, promising to visit this miraculous place, on bare foot and to ask for a mass. At that time a woman appeared to him dressed in white, having in her hand a key, and said to him: take these keys, unlock these chains and this tower and run away. And since he needed to pass through the camp of the enemy army and not knowing the way to Treviso, he was very sad and discouraged. Therefore he asked the Madonna and prayed to her to help him to pass through the army and to teach him the path through which to go away. Then the Madonna took him by hand and through his enemies, such that nobody said anything, and she guided him on the road to Treviso; and as soon as he could see the walls of the city, she disappeared. And it was he himself who recounted this stupendous miracle<sup>4</sup>.

This experience changed the life of Jerome who from then on dedicated himself to religious practices,

frequent listening to the Word of God induced him to remember his ingratitude and his offences to his Lord. Often he used to cry and at the foot of the Crucifix he was begging him not to be his judge, but his saviour. He detested himself and his past life with all his heart. He we visiting churches, listening to sermons and participating in masses. He was always looking for the company of those who could help him with counsels, examples and prayers<sup>5</sup>.

This experience of introspection lasted many years, from 1511-1522. It was a very turbulent historical moment be it at the family, local and international levels. In his family, two of his three brothers died leaving many nephews at his care. Even at Venice, there was a precarious economic, social and political situation. In 1528 a famine broke out at Venice:

God wishing to punish the souls of the Italians immersed in profound and shameful vices, through his just social and political judge-

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<sup>4</sup> *Acta et processus sanctitatis vitae et miraculorum Venerabilis Patris Hieronymi Aemiliani*, "Fonti per la Storia dei Somaschi", 9, 1980, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> C. Pellegrini (ed.), *cit.*, p. 6.

ment and through his merciful love, in 1528, there broke out a fearful famine, as all knew and remember with tears in their eyes. All over Italy and Europe, in the rural areas, in the zones and cities, thousands of people were dying of hunger. Great was the poverty in grain (there was little and that little was at an impossible price) that poor people were eating dogs, mules, and for vegetable, they were not eating fruits of the garden but wild herbs without oil and salt. But how do I talk about herbs? In some places they even looked for old straws used for the roofs of houses<sup>6</sup>.

Many families were disintegrated. People were dying of hunger along the roads and major streets. Many children were orphaned, abandoned to their destinies without any hope.

During this historical period in Europe, there was great confusion because of political, economic and religious problems. The reformation of Luther received the political support of the German princes and it had stimulated a new way of seeing the Church. It was at an entrance period into the fullest of illuminist and hedonistic currents

the individual tends to affirm himself breaking all ties with tradition. There is a burning hunger for money, for pleasure, for violence and dominance. Religiosity was reduced to forms of devotions that are more apparent than sincere. The major part of the ecclesial environment shared with the mundane world in the search for purely worldly values: culture, art, finance and so on. One could very well say that the Lutheran rebellion almost took the Church by surprise, against which having removed the appearances of the dogmatic questions, there was rise in the anti-Roman spirit by the northern European nations, nationalistic tendencies, the wish for greater religious liberty, reactions against ecclesiastical corruption, and, not the least, the wish to acquire the very vast clerical riches<sup>7</sup>.

Inside the Church, many religious movements were coming

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<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Netto L. (ed.), *Lettere morte, Parole di vita*, commentary on S. Girolamo Emiliani's works, Istituto Propaganda, Milano 1977, p. 18.

to light. Movements of catholic renovation and reformation carried on by lay people, priests and religious who were trying to find a manner of reforming the Church from inside, to that state of holiness that was at the time of the apostles. One of these movements was the Fraternity of Divine Love, where Jerome had found friendship with some of the most important figures of the Catholic Reformation: Gaetano Tiene, Gian Pietro Carafa (Bishop of Chieti and future Pope Paul IV) and many others.

The objective of these persons is synthesized in the search for self-sanctification, taking inspiration from the fonts of Christianity: the Gospel. They were expressing their faith with common practices such as: the Mass, the Sacraments, prayers with right comportment tinged with Divine Love, with poverty and with humility<sup>8</sup>.

Though this group did not ignore completely the dogmatic and theological discourses of the catholic reformation, it was first and foremost, preoccupied with personal reformation.

In the spirit of the group and in response to the experiences of his life, Jerome chose an original mode of apostolate. He chose abandoned children (street children), prostitutes, the poor and the plagued as those who better represent Christ to him

Seeing this spectacle, our Miani, pushed by ardent charity, put himself at their disposition in order to offer every possible assistance. In few days, he spent all the money he had, sold his cloths, carpets and every furnishing in his house, distributing the money for this pious and holy enterprise. He was, actually, giving food to some, to others cloths (it was winter); he housed some in his house, he encouraged others with good exhortations to be patient and to accept death with serenity for the love of God; he was reminding them that in exchange to such patience and faith, they were promised eternal life<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> S. Raiteri, *La figura e l'itinerario storico-spirituale di San Girolamo Emiliani*, Studio e Vita, Genova 1991, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> C. Pellegrini (ed.), *cit.*

### 4.3. *The methodology of orientation of St Jerome*

The help which Jerome Emiliani gave to the abandoned youths was not only that of material assistance. He had picked up children from the streets and invited them to live with him in his house, he had created workshops for working with them, and to teach and learn useful professions. It is said that his was the first professional (vocational) school in Italy. In one of his letters to people who were gathering around him to help him in his projects, he said,

In my habit of life, the wish to work has never been strange, rather, I have tried to realize it with constant effort. Actually, it is known to all how I have worked for three years in Venice, publicly with poor abandoned children; for two years now, and this is the third, I have worked on agriculture in the hinterlands of Milan and Bergamo, publicly and all know it<sup>10</sup>.

Jerome had abandoned the life of a nobleman, he has given all his riches for works of charity, he had striped himself the cloths of nobility to embrace the “raw” cloths of the common man, to share his life with abandoned children. This work will later take him to many parts of today’s Northern Italy where at the invitation of various bishops, he went to open new workshops and houses for street children and the abandoned.

A rereading of the life of Jerome makes us to understand the actuality of his educational work. His ideas must be seen as prophetic, anticipating that educational intervention which shuns cold institutes and enjoins reception of children in families or family houses: structures formatted after the family where children are inserted in little groups in order to receive individualized attention under the care of a formative team.

At the time of Jerome, this type of intervention was unthink-

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<sup>10</sup> *III Lettera di San Girolamo Emiliani*, nos. 24-25.



able. Poor people, the sick, the abandoned, the dying, etc., were destined to the “hospitals” where they had material assistance from the government, from the Church and from those few nobles who wanted to do some charity.

Actually, it was in one of these hospitals that Jerome discovered his vocation. In his charity work in the hospitals, with the Confraternity of Divine Love, his attention was drawn in a particular manner to some poor orphans and abandoned children who were flocking the hospital to sleep at night and to eat by day, “understanding that the education of these little ones was dangerously exposed to continuous frustration, because of the necessary cohabitation with a population of extremely heterogeneous inmates; sick people, beggars, ex-convicts, prostitutes”<sup>11</sup>. Knowing the fact that these children would have to face their future, he felt it was important to subtract them from this situation without exit and put them in little houses where they could find care and training.

In doing this, Jerome did not consider himself an educator in any way, but “father” and “brother” of these children. He took them to his house, he carried them along wherever he went, he was working with them, teaching them handiworks, etc. He had understood that what an abandoned child needs is not only who is preoccupied to respond to his primary needs but someone to love him, a father. Not so much a house where to sleep as to a friendship, not so much a momentary assistance, but a defined orientation projected into the future integration in the society.

For Jerome, it was not possible to receive all these children if he did not put himself in their shoes and understand their situation. The method used by Jerome was an empathic method.

His biographer recounts how

While he was in the territory of Milan, he and some of his children

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<sup>11</sup> L. Netto, *Storia di Girolamo Miani vagabondo di Dio*, Padri Somaschi, Milano 1985, p. 47.

fell sick. By chance, he found an open and abandoned cottage, where there were just some straws. He lodged there with his children, but they had no bread, wine or money, because the courageous Christian had on him, as his sustenance, only a living faith in Christ. While he was waiting for a providential divine intervention, a certain friend of his and ours passed there, having the inspiration to enter the cottage where the holy man was feverish. He recognised him and made him this proposal: “Mr Jerome, if it may please you, I will get only you transported to my house near here, you will be taken care of there”. With a most noble heart he responded: “I thank you so much, brother, for your charity and am happy to come if only you will also receive there my little brothers with whom I wish to live and die<sup>12</sup>.”

When we were discussing the theme of training to self-orientation and protagonism, for Jerome, though he never explained his pedagogical ideas in writings, it was already a method experimented in his educational practice.

The street child is not to only to be educated so that he may become a responsible and autonomous citizen, capable of managing himself, he is above all considered educated when he himself becomes capable of educating others.

In the foundation of his works, Jerome used to proceed in this manner; as soon as he procured accommodation for the orphans, he provided the sustenance with fund raising among the rich people of the city, sometimes he even went from door to door asking for alms for his children. He never permitted the children themselves to ask for alms but that they should earn their daily bread themselves.

Once the urgency is eliminated regarding the basic needs of the children and as soon as he establishes himself on the post, he works with the children in workshops, teaching them useful professions for life, reducing the fund raising as much as possible. He was even attentive to the innovations in the market (his father was a merchant) he used to research for new opportuni-

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<sup>12</sup> C. Pellegrini (ed.), *cit.*, p. 12.

ties for work and new inventions that could earn more money for his household. In this regard, one of his collaborators wrote,

my conclusion is that work is a good and I continually go to look for it and I pray to God to give it to us; but for now, I do not see neither the path nor the manner. Making an exception of an activity which I think may have been a success in all the places where we work; I am talking of the preparation of braids for hairs. In this regard we have ultimately discovered many different secrets for preparing straws. Therefore I beg you to use all your prestige, so that this work could be introduced. For now begin to talk about it with your friends, inviting them to put apart tens of hundreds of rolls of ... At you request, we shall send you expert masters<sup>13</sup>.

Since the orphans were of different ages, they were organised according to what every one is capable of doing. The big and more capable ones are employed in succouring the needy or in manual work or in the teaching of catholic doctrine in the different zones of the city where they work.

The pedagogy of Miani is penetrated by a profound sense of Christianity and is based on a great practicality of method. He tended above all to create around the child, an atmosphere of family intimacy and knows, in governing the orphanage, counselling with suavity and firmness of discipline. ... To Jerome it is not enough that his orphans be good only for themselves; he wants to make them little apostles, and wishes that everyone of them may feel all the beauty of the ideal of reformation which was burning in his heart, and that each one may contribute, bringing his own grain of sand, to the construction of a great edifice of catholic reconstruction<sup>14</sup>.

Even when a child came to be given to an external worker to teach him a profession, he was not left alone: there was a “visitor” among his deputies whose task was to go and visit them,

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<sup>13</sup> *III Lettera di San Girolamo Emiliani, cit., nos. 29-31.*

<sup>14</sup> S. Raviolo, *L'ordine dei Chierici Regolari Somaschi*, Curia Generale dei Padri Somaschi, Roma 1957, p. 26.

get information on how they were being treated, on their spiritual life, on their physical health, on their progress in learning the profession, etc. The visitor had to visit them many times in a month and had to bring his report to the work team. The master of the child had to also give his report on the behaviour of the child and had to be his guardian in everything: in the profession, in living, in clothing, in good comportment and in Christian life. He had to be careful not to overload him with too much fatigue or to punish him without reasons. If the child commits some error, he is advised to take him to the community, so that the correction may not be effected by the master teaching him a profession, but by the work team, in order to conserve the serenity of the child towards his master as a necessary condition for learning his profession well. When the child is given to the master of a profession, a contract is stipulated on the length of time, terms and cost of learning a profession. The work team ensures that at the end of the contract, the orphan is provided with some money to begin working on his own<sup>15</sup>. This dynamic method was to be seen in all the houses founded by Jerome<sup>16</sup>.

An analysis of this method reveals the exact coincidence with the position of Robert Carkhuff which we have seen in the preceding chapter. Reception of the children on the part of Jerome corresponds to the first phase of listening and response to primary needs. Professional and moral training correspond to the phase of realised self-exploration. Self-consciousness corresponds with the empowerment of the person which comes from the acquisition of a profession which is none other than the training of individual capacities and tendencies. The final phase

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<sup>15</sup> Ordini degli orfani di S. Martino e di S. Caterina di Milano, cap. V, documento originale conservato in ASPS-GE, P-M-18.

<sup>16</sup> U. Finazzi, *L'orfanotrofio di S. Martino dei Padri Somaschi in Bergamo dalle origini (1532) alla soppressione Napoleonica*, Università Sacro Cuore, Milano 1970, pp. 50-1.

of constructive action is evident in the result, making the child to be the architect of his own life and a master to other people. At the centre of all, there is empathy and a global vision of man who comes to be met in the totality of his being: body, soul, spirit, mind, all that he is and he dreams to be!

Jerome died at Somasca, near Bergamo, on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1537 leaving behind a developed and well ordered company of collaborators: with his Brief of 22 September 1747, “Beatificationis Ven. Servi Dei Hieronymi Aemiliani Fundis Congis Somaschae”, Pope Benedict XIV ordered that from then on he be conferred the title of Blessed<sup>17</sup>. Twenty years after, in 1767, he was canonized saint by Pope Clement XIII. In 1928, Saint Jerome Emiliani was solemnly proclaimed: universal patron of orphans and abandoned youths.

#### *4.4. The Somascan Fathers today*

The company of collaborators of Saint Jerome developed and grew strong even after his death and came to be known as the Congregation of Clerics of the Regular Order of Somasca, otherwise called the Somascan Fathers. The first article of the Constitutions and Rules of the Somascan Fathers affirms the following: “The humble Congregation of the Somascan religious draws its origin from the Company of the Servants of the Poor, raised in the Church of God by Saint Jerome Emiliani under the action of the Holy Spirit”<sup>18</sup>.

For five centuries, the Somascan Fathers have continued the work of Saint Jerome, succouring many children in unimaginable situations. The Somascans are first of all religious, people consecrated to God with the task of totally dedicating them-

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<sup>17</sup> A.M. Stoppiglia, *Vita di S. Girolamo Miani*, Genova 1934, p. 510.

<sup>18</sup> *Costituzioni e Regole dei Chierici Regolari Somaschi*, Curia Generale dei Padri Somaschi, Roma 2006, 1.

selves to God's service, as prophetic signs to the world, educators in the manner of their founder, Saint Jerome Emiliani, called to be fathers of orphans and of abandoned youths.

In the Introduction to the Synod of Bishops of November 20, 1992 on consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world, it is clearly underlined that

the charismas of the consecrated life are today challenged to express new commitments and solutions of the charity of Christ, according to the founders, in order to meet the new and old poverties of our world. The necessary preferential love for the poor, according to the indications of the Magisterium, constantly pushes consecrated people to renew their efforts in the area of charity and of justice. The new poverties question and challenge the consecrated life today and with them also, many youths who are lost and disillusioned by modern culture or who are emerged in poverty without future as in many nations of the third world. They also need education, presence, guidance, dialogue, communion for a new culture of life and for a future of hope<sup>19</sup>.

In the penultimate general chapter of the Somascan Fathers, 2005, this idea of the Synod came to be presented as an obligatory vision of the Somascan mission. Actually, the convictions and lines of action presented at the end of the chapter declare:

We Somascans “are servants of the poor”; all the communities in their context must:

- identify the poor in order to respond to his needs;
- favour little ones according to the style of Saint Jerome;
- involve lay people we meet in our action of service to the poor.

We Somascans defend and promote life:

- contributing and supporting the policies for the promotion of life and for the promotion of youths;

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<sup>19</sup> *Documenti sulla vita consacrata 1990-1996*, Elledici, Torino 1998, p. 162.

- valorising 28<sup>th</sup> December — day of the Holy Innocents —, rendering it a reference point for a series of information and training to the problematic of the human rights negated to children and youths;
- trying to influence the public opinion through collaboration with healthy materials and channels with the aim of denouncing injustice<sup>20</sup>.

This state of being of the Somascan Fathers today, their aim is nothing more than the continuation of a historical patrimony received from Saint Jerome Emiliani. They have profound commitments with street children in the five continents of the world with hundreds of houses spread in Italy, Albania, Romania, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Mexico, Mozambique, Philippines, Poland, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, United States of America and, recently, Nigeria.

#### 4.5. *Arca Di Noè, a model example*

- a. *The context of the project.* One of the works of the Somascan Fathers in favour of street children is the project “Arca di Noè” sited in Pasto, Colombia. Pasto is the capital of the State department of Nariño, in the region of the south-west of Colombia. The city is in the valley of Atriz, on the Andes Cordillera, at the feet of the volcanoes of Galeras. Placed at the height of 2.327 meters above sea level and has the population of about 45,000 habitants<sup>21</sup>. The economy of Pasto is concentrated on agriculture; the rearing of bovines, goats and sheep. The forests are a rich resource for woodwork and

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<sup>20</sup> Chierici Regolari Somaschi, *Documenti del Capitolo Generale 2005*, Curia Generale dei Padri Somaschi, Roma 2005, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> [www.pasto.gov.co](http://www.pasto.gov.co).

the production of natural rubber. These resources and the nearness of Ecuador make Pasto a city of considerable commercial importance. It is a city with a cold but friendly climate and a rich joyous culture. Every year, beyond the Christian religious ceremonies, there is a very important carnival of sorts called “Carnaval de Negros y Blancos” – the carnival of Blacks and Whites, between January 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. Such a favourable situation should have made Pasto a centre of attraction for tourists, were it not to be for the turbulent history which the city has lived and is still living. A city founded in 1539 by the Spanish conqueror Lorenzo de Aldana with the name Juan de Pasto. During the independence war, the history of Pasto was intertwined with that of the entire country, making it a cardinal point. Till today, Pasto still pays for the series of conflicts that have written the history of Colombia.

With the civil war which afflicted Colombia for years now, many problems sprang up in Pasto.

Here, poverty rate is calculated in the measure of 52% for those who live in the urban zones and 83% for those who live in the rural zones, in extreme conditions and deprived of the primary necessities for survival. The city of Pasto ... is now for many years among the first cities with the highest number of violent deaths through fights and street robbery.

The problem of street children has however reached uncontrollable dimensions just as in the rest of the country. Armed actions against guerrilla fighters and the proliferation of paramilitary units have had a repercussion on the civil population which has been forced to abandon house and land to avoid being involved in what is a civil war in all its ramifications<sup>22</sup>.

The consequence of this situation is that entire families live as refugees, the youths are out of control and without ade-

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<sup>22</sup> M. Fantoni (ed.), *Un’arca per i ragazzi della strada*, Caritas Insieme, 2003, 143.



quate attention from the adults. The systems of traditional control and the institutional structures are practically ineffective and non-respondent to the social problematic. What is more, in the mountain areas around the city, the so-called drug barons go on cultivating drugs and find a fertile market in these frustrated children and youths. The situation is very difficult!

- b. *The plan of operation.* It is in this situation that a Somascan father, padre Mario Ronchetti started a very interesting initiative, with him, the Somascans initiated a project of openness to the problem of street children in Pasto. This project started in 1997 and it was a pioneer experiment worthy of attention both for social pedagogues and for the specific field of psychology of orientation. The “global project Arca di Noè” departs from a biblical image. It means to “help the most little ones to survive the flood of misery, violence, guerrilla fights, abuses, lack of freedom”<sup>23</sup>. The project is articulated in three distinct phases: the point of the iceberg, the big family and towards a new citizenship.
- c. *The point of the iceberg.* This is the phase of “night reception for children who live on the streets, where the only requirement to have access to the structure is being a minor and living on the streets”<sup>24</sup>.

In this phase, we may include all the boys and girls living and working on the streets who come in contact with the project. The project is housed in a structure that is always open, where all may find some help. Here, the children are given hot meals, an opportunity to take a bathe, to have access to sportive and games materials, to have medical care, etc. They try to satisfy their primary needs without necessarily offering them a residential structure. Some of these chil-

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<sup>23</sup> C. Cattini, *Arca de Noè, non solo cena e letto*, “Vita Somasca”, luglio-settembre 2001, 116.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

dren stay back to sleep in the structure once in a while, others ask for medicine when they are not feeling well or pieces of advice for the different necessities of their daily life.

The educators in-charge of this phase try to stay close to these street children without making unnecessary demands from them. The golden words are: reception and listening. They try to establish a relationship of trust, and to offer them a familiar and friendly environment. To the children who establish a friendly relationship with the structure, some rules are given, very light and simple rules. Especially rules with the objective of maintaining order in the structure and for helping the children to assume little responsibilities such as cleanliness and other little tasks in the house. They are continuously solicited to freely give a helping hand in the house chores. They do not do this alone, “they help” the educators who “do the work with” them and who “do not make” them do the work as if it were a method of paying for the help they receive.

The idea is to make them feel part of the house, that they may arrive at considering it their “family”. In this way, many of them with time establish a good friendly relationship with the structure and they are passed to the second phase. Those who do not wish to continue to the next phase continue to have the structure as a reference point whenever they have some necessities, problems with the police, problems with feeding, health problems or when they simply can no longer resist and they have need of some shoulder on which to lean or some ears to which they can recount their many life frustrations. The structure is a point of reference for street children.

- d. *The big family.* When the structure wishes to integrate a child permanently in the structure, there is a very careful and studied work to be done. The work team tries to deepen the knowledge of the child, analysing his personal history, meet-

ing with his family of origin, etc., in order to know in details the personal problems of the child and the realities that have pushed him to the streets. This historical anamnesis is also accompanied by an analysis of the personality of the child, and of the actual situation in which he lives. Effort is made to see things from the point of view of the child in order to understand his joys and the difficulties and exactly how he lives his situation inside him in order to understand the real responses that need to be given to him. A tutor or educator is assigned to a specific child to write a personalized project with the child and be his “guardian angel” throughout the period of orientation and rehabilitation. The first objective is of reintegrating the child in his family of origin. Only when this is not possible for very clear reasons, there can begin a process of integration in the structure of the Somascan Fathers. The educator charged to oversee the child in his daily activities, be they work, study, etc., helps him to make a journey of self-discovery and responsabilization.

The proposal is that of educating him to accepting the educational structure as “a family” to which he belongs, without losing his ties with his family of origin. The family ties are maintained and the relationships are guided with the intention of removing the problems that have expelled him from his family with the hope that he may one day go back to his family. In the weekly reunions, the educators (“guardian angels”) present elaborate reports on the success and failures of the children given to them. These things are discussed and debated by the entire work team. When it is possible to avoid the direct use of a psychologist or a medical doctor, these specialists, members of the work team, talk to the educator on the possible solutions to the problems discussed and the educator in his turn, proposes these solutions in a climate of familiarity as a friend would do, to the child so as to help him overcome his difficulty. Many children in the second

phase after a certain period of time, according to the individual cases, may return to their families of origin. In an individual case, the structure continues to visit him so as to follow his successes and help him overcome difficulties. This is because the orientation serves especially for this: to reintegrate the children in the family nucleus, the simplest social unit, where they may begin again a normal life. In such a situation, the help is also offered to the whole family, actually, as we have seen, the principal cause of the phenomenon of street children is an impossible family situation. Only when this problem can not be resolved at this point is the child passed to the third phase.

- e. *Towards a new citizenship.* The third phase has the objective of professional integration of the street children in the labour market and in this way, to an active life in the society. In order to realise this project, the centre proposes two approaches geared towards satisfying two basic needs: professional and cultural training. Apprenticeship to a trade is done in the centre or outside the centre with proper contracts between the work team and the master of the trade who accepts to teach the child. In such a case, this master is integrated into a personalised work team and participates in some reunions concerning the child given to him, in order to give complete reports on him. There is a personalised project for every child, a project that takes his inclinations and talents into consideration. After years of training, when the child must have reached an age whereby he could work in the productive cycle, and according to his specialization, he receives some pay equal to his output as if he were to be paid. Cultural training is a more difficult enterprise. The project Arca di Noè has seen the fact that almost all the children that are received in the structure are illiterates, and that about 90% of them reject the system of formal education. At the beginning, they tried to send some of the children to school,

then gradually they came to realise that since these children are not used to rules, it is difficult to educate them in normal schools. They were often emarginated by their companions or even by the regular teachers. The parents of the normal children in the schools were making protests against the children they were trying to integrate in the schools as “bad eggs” there to destroy their “well groomed” children.

This difficulty and the fact that formal education is necessary for the training of the human person has pushed the work team of the centre to an original solution in the form of “open school”. The open school is a project of primary education done in a non-formal environment. In this way, at the centre of the Arca di Noè, the primary education is done without classes. Every child is given to proper teachers prepared according to a personalised programme. The school is not structured according to years but according to the progression in learning. When the teacher is sure that a child is prepared enough to do the government certificate exams or the primary school leaving certificate, he presents the child to the work team and proper steps are taken to help him do the examination. Many of these children succeeded with wonderful results. The teaching itself is done with a methodology based on joke and with the intention of teaching the street children to read and write. The school has a continuous time table which makes it possible to learn even during manual works and other activities of the centre. Many “normal” children are sent by their parents to benefit from this form of education totally new and original. For a long time now, the “open school” of the centre of the Somascan Fathers at Pasto has been approved by the ministry of education of the Colombian government. In an interview with Cesare Cattini, the director of the centre, he explains the functioning of the centre:

The definition «centre of reception and integral training» is what best explains the mission of Arca di Noè, receiving youth habitants of the streets and offering them an integral training. We started in 2001 to give life and full functioning to two laboratories of trade training, one is mechanical laboratory for motorcycles, for about 30 youths, while the other is a laboratory of systems for about 45 youths. These laboratories gave life to a project of prevention to the consumption of psycho-active substances, for street children and refugees of the armed conflict, receiving finances from UNO through the International Organization of Migration which is the sector of the UNO that takes care of the problem. We are therefore forced to start an intense street work with family visitations and individuation of the populations received in the sectors and areas which are true refugee camps. The child is integrated in the global project “Arca di Noè” and accompanied in all the phases by a tutor who has the task of building the individualized project with the child<sup>25</sup>.

- f. *After the programme, what next?* The global project continues even after the child has done all the phases of the education and training programme. A network is created to accompany him in his new life reality. As we have already hinted, at a certain point in the training, when the child must have acquired the capacity to do remunerated work, he will be paid according to the work he does. Part of what he earns is put aside for the future of the child, the remaining money is invested in the project, through this quota, the child has a share in the project and becomes an associate of the project. When the child, then an adult, moves out of the centre, he may withdraw what he has invested, including the interests of his savings, or he may choose to continue being an associate, a “share-holder”, stakeholder in the project. In this way he has a stable patrimony to which he can fall back in future difficulties. The centre also organizes a friendly network with small scale companies in the zone in order to find

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<sup>25</sup> M. Fantoni, *cit.*

working places for these children when they finish their training and rehabilitation process. In other cases, some children are employed by the centre to work in the laboratories as educators. The experience so far has revealed that these children are more successful in establishing help-relationships than people who have never been on the streets. They are more capable of putting themselves in the shoes of other children. Yet, there is need to support them with people who are professionally trained educators and to sustain them with people who have strong will so that they may not have regression into their past life or mislead the children they are trying to help.

#### *4.6. The methodology of orientation of Arca di Noè*

In our exposition of the centre of reception, “Arca di Noè”, the methodology is already clear. However, for academic elucidation, we shall try to highlight some of the points which make it a prototype of the global methodology centred on the person and animated by empathy.

- a. *Personal and personalized project, aiming at personal responsibility.* The Ark is a personalized project directed at every child, it accompanies him till he acquires a personalized school certificate and a professional identity. It is a personal project because it looks at the human person as a free being and as a being invested with proper resources. Thus,

the methodology applied is simple and disarming in its effectiveness: after they come and know the centre, the children themselves choose which of our proposals is more coherent with their social situation, though with our orientation. But what is even more revolutionary is that all these processes educate them to discover and manage their free will, and it is for this that we believe

that the Arca di Noè is a concrete proposal that educates in freedom and for freedom<sup>26</sup>.

- b. *Meta-disciplinary and business-oriented team work.* The work of the work team in the experience of the Ark is of fundamental importance. All the operators are called to be “educators” in soul and in action. There are weekly meetings where the problems of the children are discussed and where the projects are organized. The work team is also united by the intention of sharing in the charisma of Saint Jerome Emiliani. It is not simply a work for money. It is a rediscovery of the lay figure of Saint Jerome (he was not a priest) through reception, study and work. Both Somascan religious and lay people work together with clear reference to the method of Saint Jerome Emiliani. The members of the team come from different specializations: educators, psychologists, businessmen, workmen, medical doctors, politicians, etc., the work is almost like in a business firm but in its management and in its daily operations. It has a clear financial face though it is surely non-profit oriented.
- c. *An empathic project aiming at empowerment.* The project “Arca di Noè” is an empathic project in the sense that it tries to see the world of the street child with the very eyes with which the child sees it, without losing the point of view of the educator. The child comes to be helped to discover the right path as a protagonist accompanied by an understanding friend. The child is listened to without prejudices, explored with respect and directed passively. This means that the child tells his story, listening to his vision of himself in a dynamic meeting with the educator, he explores himself in order to know himself better and take the situation in his hands and act in a constructive manner. It is a journey towards a

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<sup>26</sup> C. Cattini, *cit.*



new citizenship as is explicitly put in the third phase of the intervention. The objective is the empowerment of the child: with a lucrative trade, effective education, renovation of his self-esteem and financial security.

- d. *An errant and dynamic global intervention.* The intervention of Arca di Noè is global in the sense that it aims at the reality of the street children in all its dimensions: it is for both sexes, between 0 and 18 years, pays attention to the families, to the legal, social, political and economical protection, to the emotional, professional and scholastic training, directed at ethical, social, religious values, etc. In this manner, the intervention in favour of the human person does not omit anything. It tries to respond to the totality of the human person with adequate instruments and proposals. It is an errant project in the sense of self-critique. Every week there is the opportunity to face the new problems that are met in the field, the project is adapted daily, trying to give responses to new problems. In this manner the project is never final but in continuous growth and discovery according to a dynamic reading of the signs of the times and according to the needs that are discovered every day. It is a concrete, historical, actual but oriented project.

#### *4.7. Synthesis to the fourth chapter*

The global project of intervention motivated by empathy may seem very complex, but in it is a realizable and efficacious project. We have seen how already about five centuries ago, Saint Jerome Emiliani had actuated this project and how it has been carried on by the Somascan Fathers all these years. The experience and project of the sons of Saint Jerome in Pasto in Colombia is an eloquent testimony of this.

This system of thought is functional in every place where

there are children abandoned to their destinies though for every reality and culture, there is need for cultural critique and constructive adaptation in line with the laws and cultural norms of the place. From the academic point of view, we think therefore that the discourse on empathy can not be reserved only to psychotherapy. It has to be the basis of every help relationship.

## General synthesis

In a work like this, it is difficult to write a conclusion. This is because the methodology proposed should not have a conclusion. It is an open methodology that continues and does not ever stop to integrate new realities that go beyond what we can express in the actual moment, with our limitations in time and experience. However we shall try to give a synthesis using an analogy. We shall do it through a little story we read in my primary four Igbo lessons.

Five blind men living in a village heard that an elephant would be coming to a village near to theirs. Every body was curious and there was so much talk about going to see the elephant. People were talking of its largeness, beauty and dignity. As the days went past, the blind men were hearing more news and were getting more curious and desirous of “seeing” the elephant as the others have “seen”. After some time, they succeeded in convincing their relatives to accompany them to “see” the elephant.

When the blind men arrived, every one of them touched a part of the elephant in order to “see” how it was. Later in the village that evening, they told their own stories of the elephant. One was saying with much conviction that the elephant was a big trunk as that of a pear tree (because he had only touched *a* leg of the elephant!), another was saying the elephant was an umbrella (because he had only touched the ear), yet another was swearing with all his might to have “seen” the elephant, and that it was like a wall of a house (because he had only touched the trunk) and so on. None of them had a complete vision of an elephant. There was need for the explanation of a person who could validate without negating any of the “visions” and convince them that each had only “seen” a part of a whole.

This story is analogous to the incompleteness that could re-

sult in the vision of the phenomenon of street children if it is seen only from the point of view of single disciplines or of the single departments of social and sanitary services. While the different visions are valid and useful as branches of specialization, in the dynamics of empathy in the orientation of street children, the multi-disciplinary vision is only the first phase in the dynamics.

Putting together the different visions is the second phase of the dynamics. At this level, all the contributions and different orientations on street children are collected together in order to know what is to be done for the street children and who and how every body could be useful. But this level remains also only “pluri-disciplinary”. It does not guarantee an organic relation of the different visions and competences.

There is need to climb to the higher step, from the pluri-disciplinary harvest to interaction, to the relationship, to the mutual completion that takes place in the moment in which the single visions are shared, because, in meeting and talking to each other, solution comes forth. This is the inter-disciplinary level which the little story we have told above mirrors.

However, as we have seen in the study we did, this enterprise would be useless and impracticable if we do not climb to yet a superior phase, the meta-disciplinary phase.

The concept of “meta-disciplinary” orientation is qualified by the word “meta”, a word of historic and scientific importance. “Meta” comes from Greek language and it means “beyond”. The first time it appeared in philosophical discourses was around 300 a.D., when Andronicus of Rhodes in trying to edict and classify the books of Aristotle, put the books on the natural sciences in a single compendium and classified them as “books on physical laws”, and then put the books on discourses that go beyond the natural physical laws as “books that go be-

yond the physical laws”. “Meta” comes to be seen as what transcends every particularity. Meta-disciplinary orientation is therefore the level wherein every particular vision is overcome to arrive at a more complete unity; a unity that recognises but supersedes the validity of the particulars. At this level, all the disciplines are integrated, but not rendered useless, in order to have a solution which is beyond but comprehensive of what every single specialist has to say. Till this point, we have talked about a global method which sees in a complete and integral manner. There is still lacking another ingredient of the method we have exposed in this book. An even higher step!

As many academics have demonstrated, it is not enough to describe a reality in order to know it. We can not say that the blind men know the elephant even after someone has put together their different visions of the elephant. To know the elephant would also require a study of the habits of the elephant, its species, etc. Then regarding the actual elephant which they have “seen”, they would also need to know where it is coming from and its particular history.

Even after such additional knowledge, if we want to get affectionate with the elephant, we would have to know what the elephant likes, and how it sees things. If the elephant should have any difficulty, there is no other manner of resolving it if we do not see things how it does.

It may seem absurd! But it is true! It is the most sublime level of knowledge. The level in which we do not only know what our friend is saying, even with all that we can reconstruct of his life story and of his dreams, but that we know exactly how he sees his world and how he feels it.

We do not know his world only from above as in a meta-disciplinary methodology, but we live it with him in the same manner in which he lives it, without losing grip of our own worlds. This is empathy. It is the most sublime phase of inter-

personal relationship.

In this book, we have proposed this sublime relationship as a method of orientation. First we accosted ourselves with the psychoanalytical method of Carl Rogers, and with an adequate critique, we have tried to bring this method from the psychoanalytic level to the level of specific pedagogical orientation of a street child. In this enterprise, we have involved three major authors: Robert Carkhuff, specialist in the art of helping based on empathy, Francesco Gatti, specialist in psychology of scholastic and professional orientation and Vincenzo Piccione, specialist in Pedagogy for the disadvantaged.

Our conclusion is that the use of empathy in the orientation of street children is valid and effective. Beginning with a relationship of trust in the riches present in every individual, and so also in street children, we have tried to give a three-point level of global orientation aimed at empowerment and based on empathy. This line is then demonstrated in the patrimony of Saint Jerome Emiliani as preserved and transmitted by the Somascan Fathers and still today, used in their different centres as is seen in the example of Arca di Noè.

A final thing which we have not had much space to develop in this book is that of training the educators to the capacity of flexibility. We use this opportunity to present two important instruments of psycho-diagnosis which the educators can use in order to have a better self-knowledge; a condition necessary for empathy. The first is the Gordon Personal Profile of Leonardo V. Gordon which measures, ascendancy, responsibility, emotional stability and socialization rates in help givers. Doing this test sincerely could help the social and sanitary operator in self-knowledge.

In measuring ascendancy, he can discover if he has a passive or active role in group or team work, if he is sure of himself, if

he is decided in his relation with others, if he has the capacity of autonomous decision-taking, if he would rather listen than talk, whether he leaves others to guide, whether he has little self-esteem or the syndrome of dependency.

Measuring his responsibility will permit him to know how much he dedicates himself in a role given to him, how much he is tenacious, how much he is consistent, irresponsible, etc.

Emotional stability helps him with the knowledge necessary for establishing an emotional balance in order to compare other people in emotional difficulties.

The test on his social capacities will give him adequate knowledge of himself in order to be able to develop a healthy personality for durable relationships.

The second test which we are recommending is the Eric Berne's test on the state of the ego. This test presents a useful instrument of analysis of our states of mind and our behaviours which we demonstrate in our daily relationships with others. The test presents every person as to have a "parent" ego, an "adult" ego and a "child" ego. The reactions of people we meet every day are, most times, responses to our behaviours. If one is always conscious of the state of his ego in a particular relationship, he is capable of self-control and capable of directing the relationship.

These instruments are theories, not laws; however, they remain useful for self-knowledge and for understanding the messages and impressions we receive and give to the people we meet every day. The invitation to regularly have these tests is also an invitation to constant updating and training programmes for operators in this field.





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