

From Exclusion to Reintegration: The Case of Street Children in Bernard Ilunga Kayombo's *Quand les enfants crient misère*

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Abstract

The present study seeks to explore the challenges faced by street children in Kayombo's novel Quand les enfants crient misère (2008). The paper establishes that children are found in the street mainly due to abuse and neglect by parents, as well as the breakdown of traditional African family support system. However, these disinherited children were able to reintegrate into the social fabric of their communities and families due to the resilience, tenacity, a collective enterprise essentially carried out by the children themselves. Their success was also due to the careful patronage of a Catholic nun, Sister Consolatrice, who was able to listen and take new initiatives.

Keywords: Street children, parenting, support system, exclusion, resilience, re-integration.

It is not enough to sow the seeds of human life in quick, repeated sessions of ecstasy. Beyond the delight of tears, beyond the passionate intensity of countless orgasms, the future of our own morality and ancestry awaits our constant vigilance and careful nurturing. No seed grows into harvest joys without planter's diligent labour of love. Until we come to understand this as parents, as family, as community, we will forever stand condemned by the anguish in the eyes and the voices of our children, forever guilty of the nurturing of [...] prospective soul(s) into the devouring jaws of the streets.

Kofi Anyidoho, Introduction to *Faceless* (2003: xxi)

1 Introduction

In the introduction to the novel *Faceless*, Anyidoho (2003) says: "The phenomenon of street children has become one of the most widely discussed social tragedies of our time" (*Faceless*, XIX). This assertion shows the extent to which the problem is persisting, spreading and contaminating rapidly the urban cities of independent Africa. This is one of the reasons for which writing about children is of great interest (Koffi 2017). Through this paper, we propose to conduct an analysis of the life of street children, as depicted in Kayombo's novel *Quand les enfants crient misère* (2008). As a spokesperson of the community and voiceless fringes, Kayombo goes "beyond the silence of cemeteries to light on disrupted families, bungled marriages, and street children" (Mohamed 2021: 292).

The child is the future of tomorrow. As a result, he must enjoy special protection to guarantee his well-being. The family and the community remain privileged and favourable places for the protection of the child, in spite of all the other forms of benefits that can be offered by other protection institutions with good accommodation and alternative settings. It is surprising, however, that some children in the world today are found in the streets rather than their homes where they should be safely protected and cared for by parents.

1.1 Defining Street Children

There is no clear definition of street children. However, researchers have attempted to define the term “street children” in different ways, here are some of them. According to Panter-Brick (2002), street children are those who occupy the public spaces of urban centres and whose activities are largely unsupervised by adults, which leads people to view them as different from other children. This scholar argues that the United Nations has defined the term “street children” to include “any boy or girl [...] for whom the street in the widest sense of the word [...] has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults” (cited in Imtiaz 2009: 151).

According to Lusk (1989), the most commonly used definition comes from UNICEF and distinguishes two groups: Children on the street: these are “Home based” children who spend much of the day on the street but have some family support and usually return home at night. The other group is that of Children of the street: these are “Street based” children who spend most days and nights on the street and are functionally without family support. In the words of Raffaelli and Larson (1999), “The term street youth or street children conceals enormous variation in the experiences of youngsters who share the common condition of being ‘out of place’ in street environments, spending their lives largely outside the spheres typically considered appropriate for children, such as home, school, and recreational settings” (1999: 1). Focussing on Zambia context, Lungwangwa and Macwan’gi (2004: viii) apprise that a street child is understood to be that child aged 18 and below who make the street a place of his/her habitual abode. These scholars further observe that street children are: (i) homeless children who live on the street; (ii) those street children who are detached from their families and live with friends on the streets; and (iii) those children who live with their families on the streets.

Although there are variegated definitions of street children as seen above, they all share a common characteristic, that is, they all emphasize two peculiarities about street children: the *place* they occupy (the streets) and the absence of proper contacts or *links* with adults in the family home and in society. In other words, a street kid lives and sleeps in the rough besides being left at the mercy of cut-throat adults. The definition of street children adopted in this study is the one by Farrow et al. (1992) who argue that street children are typically those in the six and seventeen age range, and they live without the support of traditional societal structures, such as family, school, church, and community institutions.

1.2 Categories of Street Children

Generally, street children are a heterogeneous group of youngsters. In Natasya Rizki Yuanasari’s thesis titled *Vietnamese Children as seen in John Shors’ Dragon House* (2011), the scholar contends that UNICEF (n.d.) presents three categories of street children based on their background and living situation. These include:

a. *Street Living Children*: these are children who have lost ties with their families and live alone in the street.

b. *Children of Street Living Families*: these are the ones living with their families on the street.

c. *Street Working Children*: those who spend all or most of their times working on the street. They earn income on the street for their families or for themselves. These children have a home to return to and do not usually sleep on the street.

Similarly, in a study on street children across the world, Robinson (2014) observes that some street children known as street-living children live entirely on the streets, alone or in small groups. Others, known as street-working children, spend most of their time on the streets trying to survive, but return home from time to time. There are also those who live on the streets with their families. Meanwhile, Stearman (2000: 11) categorizes street children as follows: *Run from* and *Run to* Children. According to this scholar, “Running from” refers to children who are essentially escaping from unresolved personal and/or family problems. They tend to become hard-core gangsters on the street because of the anger they have against people and society at large. They feel let down by the people they thought they could trust. These children are often living in groups on the street, as this serves as the family they do not have. This group is often controlled by older boys or men and everyone has to contribute with what they can which means they have to go begging, working or do crime to have value on the group. Most of these children long for a day when they can be reunited with their families or will be able to live a normal life in a normal home. On the other hand, “Running to” Children are those that often find themselves addicted to drugs on the street as they tend to experiment with everything done on the streets. They find themselves having to go into drug trafficking or prostitution in order to support their addiction. These children often do not want to be reunited with their families or be taken into shelters as their urge for independence and addiction to drugs is too much. They often find themselves owing their lives to other people on the streets like drug lords who supply them with drugs. These children often operate alone and have spot in which you can identify them with (ibid. 2000: 11).

1.3 Causes of Streetism among Children

Perhaps an appropriate question to ask at this juncture is: why are children on the street? The reasons the children are on the streets are not always simple. Various factors have been used to explain the origins of street life involvement in African countries. According to Kopoka (2000), the world and Africa in particular are witnessing rapid and wide ranging socioeconomic and political changes. There is rapid urbanisation, excessive population growth and increasing disparities in wealth. Additionally, the introduction of structural adjustment programmes and globalization are changing the very fabric of African society. One of the negative consequences of these changes is the emergence of large numbers of children on the streets. City residents used different derogatory terms to describe these children; in Tanzania these street dwellers are known as *watoto wa mitaani*, in Kenya they are referred to as *chokora* and in The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) they are called *moineaux*, meaning “sparrows”. By whatever name these children are called, Kopoka (2000) concludes that what stands out is the sad fact that everywhere, children living and working on the street are ignored, scorned, mistreated and misunderstood by society and by governments.

Meanwhile, Oyaya and Esamai (2001: 624), and Mahlangu (2002: 30) articulate that the street child phenomenon cannot be related to a single causal factor. Most researchers agree that the leading causes of street children are extreme poverty, unemployment, family breakdown (divorces), the death of parents, physical violence within the family, child abuse and neglect (West 2003: 12; Montane 2006: 9; De Moura 2005: 194; Le Roux 2001: 107; Malindi 2009: 4; Lewis 1998: 14; Pare 2004: 221; Plummer et al. 2007: 1532; Vogel 2001: 244; Robinson 2014: 1); as well as dropping out of school, behavioural disorders and civil war (Mahlangu 2002: 18).

In the same breath, Ibrahim (2012) argues that there are two main causes of the phenomenon of street children. The first is the economic stress and poor conditions that families face due to industrialisation and urbanisation. The second cause is changes in the traditional family structure, especially when women became the main contributor to households' economies (Patel 1990; Le Roux and Smith 1998; Lugalla and Mbwambo 1999). Additionally, Ugwuanyi (2020) observes that some of the contributing factors to street children phenomenon include poverty, absentee parents, and misplaced priority on the part of government.

2 Synopsis of the Novel

Authored by the Congolese Catholic Priest and novelist Bernard Kayombo, *Quand les enfants crient misère* (2008) – which I have translated as *When Children Cry Misery* – as the novel has not yet been translated in English – tells the story of some teenage boys in a merciless world dominated by greedy, irresponsible and often cruel adult men and women in their life. The novel is a tale of what can be termed as: “a diseased society that seems to have lost its hold on the lives of its children” (Anyidoho 2003: ix-x). In this novel, the author gives the portrayal of street children that include Sinandugu, Sikosalangu, Bahati, Mulanda, Mambo ya haya, Masikini, Munene and Tshibwabwa, among others. These children left their homes and community for various reasons amongst them poverty, lack of educational opportunities, rural to urban migration (Mambwe 1997; Sampa 1997), social changes, the weakening of family structures and family abuse (Aptekar 1997; Mambwe 1997; Sampa 1997; Suda 1997), alcohol abuse from the parents, family instability, the declining role of the extended family, just to mention the few. Consequently, they find escaping to the streets as a safe heaven. Once on the streets, these children beg, pilfer, grab and steal in order to survive.

According to Chima-Udeh (2011), Achebe sees the African writer as one that functions in the African society as “The record of the lores and experiences of his society, and the voice of vision in his own time” (Chima-Udeh 2011: 159). In this regard, Kayombo (2008) as a novelist, is a social observer; through his searchlight, he records the social malaise that many of us overlook. It is by close observation that Kayombo (2008) is able to capture the problems of Sinandugu, Sikosalangu, Mambo ya Haya, Bahati, Mulanda, Tshibwabwa and many other street children as recorded in *Quand les enfants crient misère* (2008). These children are plunged into the streets primarily by parental neglect and the resultant poverty and hunger they face, as well as disintegration of traditional African family support system. But through their resilience, and united as one man under the guidance of their leader, Sinandugu, these street children decide to make their voice heard and take up the challenge: to leave the street and reintegrate into normal life.

3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Guerin (2005: 16) contends that there is no single theory that is adequate for gaining a complete understanding of a text and that several theories would have to be used together. Thus, this article benefits immensely from the lens of the resilience theory and the concept of exclusion

as frameworks to explore the lived experiences of street youth in Kayombo's novel *Quand les enfants crient misère*.

Resilience has been defined in a variety of ways, including the ability to bounce back or recover from stress, to adapt to stressful circumstances, to not become ill despite significant adversity, and to function above the norm in spite of stress or adversity (Carver 1998; Tusaie & Dyer 2004). Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker (2000) have defined resilience as the "dynamic process compassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (2000: 65) or, as Edwards (2007) puts it in the context of developmental psychology, "resilience [...] is a capacity for adaptation along appropriate developmental pathways, despite disruptions such as family, breakdowns" (2007: 62).

We should hasten to add that resilience does not mean giving up. Quite the opposite, it calls for more courage. In a nutshell, resilience emphasises the strengths that people have rather than their vulnerability, through exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit. It should therefore be mentioned that a resilient individual is the one that possesses the quality of "stick-to-it-iveness." Such a person perseveres until the task is completed or the goal is achieved. He or she views obstacles as just one of the many hurdles of life to be jumped.

Another important concept that has been adopted to examine the plight of street children in this paper is exclusion. According to Levitas et al. (2007), social exclusion involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

Additionally, in the analysis of social exclusion in Yemen, Adra (2006) posits that social exclusion refers to relative rather than absolute deprivation. The denial of rights to land ownership in a community where income security depends on land, denial of education or health care when these are available to others, denial of access to community projects or social life in a community; all indicate forms of social exclusion. Adra (2006) further contends that social exclusion is not only disempowering, but it makes it difficult for the excluded to take advantage of opportunities for employment, education and health care, thus keeping them in chronic poverty. Furthermore, Walker and Walker (1997) define social exclusion as: "the process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be seen as the denial (or non-realization) of the civil, political, and social rights of citizenship" (1997: 8).

For young people who become homeless, social exclusion is experienced in terms of access to shelter and housing, employment, and a healthy lifestyle, for instance. It is also manifest in their restricted access to (and movement within) urban spaces and their limited social capital. In most cases, the process of social exclusion begins before street children become homeless, but it intensifies through their experience living on the streets. This experience of social exclusion is cumulative, making it difficult to escape, particularly when constant exposure to risk compromises health, safety, and opportunity. As an outcome of their homelessness, street children are typically pushed into places and circumstances that impair their ability to ensure their safety and security and, consequently, increase their risk of criminal victimization.

From the above, it is clear that social exclusion is a complex and multifaceted notion. It refers to both individuals and societies, and to disadvantage, alienation and lack of freedom.

While the former case may refer to disadvantage which individuals may perceive, the latter refers more to the institutions that are necessary to minimize exclusion and bring about social integration (Gore 1996).

4 Textual Analysis and Discussion

An old African adage states: “It takes a village to raise a child.” This saying suggests that raising a child is a communal effort. In traditional African society, a shared responsibility involved members of the extended family (older children, aunts and uncles, grandparents and many others). For example, a child’s welfare and conduct was the concern of everybody in the community, and adults could discipline a child for misconduct and the parents would further punish the child if a report was made to them. This is in line with Suda (1997) who aptly argues that in traditional African family, life depended to a great extent on kinship relationships and support networks across extended family lines. Close relatives were expected to take the initial responsibility to provide needy children and other poor members of the family with food, clothing, shelter, health care and education. She says, for example that, “among the Luo of Western Kenya, if a parent died, the surviving members of the extended family were often close at hand to ensure that the children and other dependants were cared and provided for. Part of the obligation of the extended family system was to assist those who were in need” (1997: 200). Adding their voice to the debate, Kilbride and Kilbride (1990) point out that this support network served as a barrier to the problem of child abuse and neglect in East Africa (Cited in Suda 1997: 200). These scholars further posit that the kin-based support system served to ensure that the death of one or both parents did not necessarily spell destitution for orphans or other family members in deprived and difficult circumstances. Consequently, these support networks had the potential to reduce destitute children in the family or community, as such children will not have to be left to cope on their own or to turn to the streets to beg, or to be taken to institutions. In line with this, Ogbeide Victor (2015) observes that “in traditional Africa, little or nothing was heard about the phenomenon of street children as every community took care of its inhabitants” (2015: 147).

In this paper, we propose to evaluate the plight of street children and the resilience strategies they use to emphasize and draw attention on the serious and growing phenomenon of street children, particularly in Africa, and how they eventually reintegrate into the society. The predicament of street children portrayed by Kayombo (2008) in his novel *Quand les enfants crient misère* reveals the social tragedy which the contemporary African society in general, and DRC in particular, is confronted with. One question that comes to our mind is: “why should somebody living under a secure roof let go of his or her child on the streets?” (Awitor 2003: 126). Even if “there is a story behind every street child”, it is obvious that parents, society as a whole and government have failed to cater for them. Their plight is overlooked, ignored or seen as normal. Sent away from home by their own parents, these children find refuge in the “devouring jaws of the streets” (ibid.).

Before going further, let us comment on some of the names of street children that are found in Kayombo’s *Quand les enfants crient misère* (2008). It should be mentioned that, unlike in the Western culture where name is merely a tag, pointer-out which in itself has next to no meaning (Adamic 1942), in many African societies, personal names are not just arbitrarily concatenated words but rather words that reflect the world-view of the people, this explains

why they are not randomly bestowed on people; they are given for specific reasons. Certain names are given based on the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child. For instance, among the Lunda of Zambia, if a child is born soon after the death of any member within the homestead, the child will be named *Kamfunti* “the one who has come back.” This is because such a person is thought to have returned to the homestead where he or she once lived as a family member (Mutunda 2011).

As far as the use of names in literary text is concerned, Wamitila (1999) submits that names of characters go beyond the confine of being seen as a mere tag that distinguishes one character from another to being a semantic, pragmatic, allusive, and symbolic import that must be seen in the perspective of the overall structure of a particular work. In the same breath, Ennin and Nkansah (2016) contend that names play a significant role in the narrative and lend a special aesthetic quality to the story; they foreground particular themes or motifs, reveal the fictional character, situate a character within a specific and identifiable cultural setting, reveal different point of view and even used as a plot device, as a sarcastic or a satirical strategy. It should also be noted that, writers of literary texts have the tendency to use allegorical names that reflect the important traits of a character either humorously or ironically. It is therefore justifiable that we give some attention to the names of the major characters and their meanings in the Kayombo’s (2008) novel,

The street children in *Quand les enfants crient misère* (2008), have circumstantial names. The main character and leader of the street children is Sinandugu, which means “I do not have relatives” in Kiswahili, one of the languages spoken in Lubumbashi (DRC). Sinandugu was nicknamed Rambo by his peers because of his physical strength and character. Thus, the narrator describes him as follows :

Sinandugu [était] surnommé Rambo par ses petits copains à cause de sa force physique. [...] Taille moyenne, torse bien fait [...] Le petit bout d’homme était bâti à chaux et à sable. Ces avantages physiques cohabitaient harmonieusement avec ses qualités morales. [...]

(Kayombo 2008: 9-10)

[Sinandugu [was] nicknamed Rambo by his friends because of his physical strength. [...] Medium waist, well-made torso [...] The little man was well built. These physical advantages matched harmoniously with his moral qualities.

We learn that the man who made Sinandugu’s mother pregnant when she was just seventeen abandoned her. When his child was born, Sinandugu was taken in by his grandmother, who took care of him. At the age of ten, the boy had just finished his fifth year of primary school when his grandmother also passed away. At the time of her death, she told his uncle and aunt to take care of Sinandugu. Living with his uncle was not easy. Soon, his uncle’s wife started accusing him of being a thief and was punished for that. Having had enough, the boy left and sought refuge at his maternal aunt who was a prostitute and homeless; thus, Sinandugu could not count on her. That is how he found himself on the street.

Unlike Sinandugu, Sikosalangu, whose name signifies “it is not my fault” in Kiswahili language, had both parents. Sikosalangu was suffering from albinism, everyone despised him because he was the shame of the family. Each time he was walking on the street with his mother, people pointed at his mother saying: “The mother of the albino child.” Sikosalangu was not only disliked by his family but also in the neighbourhood, at school, and everywhere!

Therefore, having had enough of humiliation, Sikosalangu slammed the door and left for the street.

Like Sikosalangu, Bahati, whose name means “good luck,” in Kiswahili, has a father, whom he vowed never to forgive for being the cause of all his suffering. Bahati had three siblings. When their mother died, they remained with their father. The father was a big drunk, a chaffed and lazy man who did not know how to work and take care of his family. For a long time, it was his wife who sustained the family, thanks to a small business she was doing. When she died, Bahati was seven years old. As a result, the children started dropping out of school, they also had to rely on themselves to find food. The search for food put Bahati in contact with some prostitutes in the neighbourhood. He provided his service as their pimp in exchange for money. One day, a prostitute who had hired him for a week kindly begged Bahati to get out of her house. Consequently, the once lucky provider found himself on the street.

One other street child is Mulanda, meaning “the unfortunate or miserable one,” in Bemba language. Mulanda attributes his misery to the break up of his parents. His father used to come home late, sometimes he could not return at all. And once he came home it was to scold, beat and insult his wife without any apparent reason. Finally, one day Mulanda’s mother told her sons that she was being sent away by her husband, who wanted to bring in a younger woman. The moment their stepmother moved into their house, she mistreated the children so much that they wondered if she was not a wizard. Having had enough of torments, Mulanda and his brothers decided to run away to their paternal aunt where they took refuge. While there, they were made to understand that they were not wanted. Thus, Mulanda and his brothers ended up onto the street.

One other “child of the street” is Mambo ya haya. In Kiswahili the name means “A shameful matter.” Mambo ya haya was born of an incestuous relationship. His father was his mother’s maternal uncle. Mambo ya haya’s scandalous coming into the world was a source of division. His grandmother was repudiated by her husband who wouldn’t tolerate the scandal. Not everyone in the family wanted Mambo ya haya except his mother. Eventually, when he felt himself fit to hustle and stand on his own, he took his few belongings and went to the street. Other street children in the novel include Masikini, meaning “Poor person” in Kiswahili. Then comes Munene, which signifies “Fatty or fat boy.” This thirteen-year-old boy was chubby and dark-skinned, hence his peers nicknamed him *Corbeau* or “Crow.” He was sent to the street by his poverty-stricken family.

All of these lines above clearly reveal that these street children known as *moineaux* or “sparrows,” did not land onto the street on their own volition. It was primarily due to what Udogu (2018) terms dysfunctional parenting. Citing Bulus (2013), Udogu (2018: 83-84) argues that parenting is a divine calling that involves not just bringing a child into the world but being involved in promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of the child from infancy to adulthood. Being a parent therefore demands making provision for the child’s safety, shelter, nourishment, protection and physical development. However, this was not the case for these street children.

We should mention that in Africa, like elsewhere in the world, there are many people who believe that a man becomes a father when he impregnates a woman. However, fatherhood involves more than just procreation. As Anyidoho (2003) rightly points out: “It is not enough to sow seeds of human life [...]. No seed grows into harvest joys without planter’s diligent labour of love. Beyond the passionate intensity of countless orgasms, the future of our children, of our own morality and ancestry awaits our countless vigilance and careful nurturing” (2003:

xxi). Here, Anyidoho (2003) reminds us that procreation comes with responsibilities. Indeed, like a farmer who expect good yield ensures that he weeds his field of unwanted vegetation, a man should be prepared to fulfil his fatherhood roles and responsibilities in order to see his children grow happily. Surprisingly, not all men accept this role of fatherhood by promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. For such men, abandonment, flight and denial are seen as ways of avoiding fatherhood.

In our view, another important factor contributing to Sinandugu and his friends being on the streets is the declining role of traditional African support system. As alluded to earlier, traditional African family life depended to a great extent on kinship relationships and support networks across extended family lines. For example, among the Luo of Western Kenya, as pointed out earlier, if a parent died, the surviving members of the extended family were often ready to ensure that the children and other dependants were cared and provided for. Part of the obligation of the extended family system was to assist those who were in need. These support networks had the potential to reduce destitute children in the family or community. Such children did not have to be left to cope on their own or to turn to the streets to beg, or to be taken to institutions.

4.1 Hardship and Survival Strategies in the Streets

In *Quand les enfants crient misère* (2008), Sinandugu, Sikosalangu, Bahati, Mulanda, Mambo ya haya, Masikini, Munene, Jeki and Tshibwabwa are deprived kids who have turned the street into a temporary haven to protect themselves against the vicissitudes of a miserable existence. As Mohamed (2021) rightly points out, “the street is then described as problematic as the lives of its occupiers are. From infinitude, [the boys] move towards a finitude dead-end in turning their beings into instrument-bodies that flash out their physical mourning which is accorded to the harsh reality of the street lives” (2021: 296).

Once on the streets, children are exposed to different kinds of vices, abuses, and violence (drug, sex, alcohol, thieving, police mishandling and above all, absence of respect and love). They steal, pickpocket and do odd jobs to survive. Sacked from home by their own parents, they find refuge in the “devouring jaws of the streets” (Darko 2003: 42). Their living environment is a cocktail of explosive evils. Hygiene is lacking, security is absent, as are the possibilities of accessing to the most basic health care. Their dormitory is a space of extreme dehumanity, a perimeter of dumping ground for social effluvia. Misery becomes their all-occasion companion.

4.1.1 Violence and Hostility

Violence and hostility remain some of the main threats to street children’s existence. Indeed, once on the streets, the children are exposed to different kinds of vices, abuses, and violence, untimely and brutal death, and so on. Their fundamental human rights are constantly trampled upon to the extent that they are reduced to the status of animals. In the novel, Masikini, for instance, is killed as he attempts to snatch a bag of money from a market trader:

Un matin, au marché Lusonga (le marché principal de la ville de Lubumbashi), Masikini exerçait son métier de routine : le chapardage. Par manque de prudence, il fut pris la main dans le sac. Le sac d’argent. L’argent d’une vendeuse de choux et de pommes de terre. Mal lui en pris : toute la cohorte de mamans commerçantes [...] fonce sur le frêle être

humain. Une pluie de coups se déversa sur le corps rachitique du pauvre gamin. Et voilà : deux jours après, le gamin s'en fut dans un autre monde.

(Kayombo 2008: 6-7)

[One morning, at the Lusonga market (the main market in the city of Lubumbashi), Masikini was doing his usual job: pilfering. Unfortunately, he was caught with his hand in the bag. The bag of money. The money of a cabbage and potato seller. Unfortunately, [...] the whole cohort of market sellers pounced on the frail human being: a rain of blows poured over the body of the poor kid. And two days later, the boy passed away.]

From the foregoing, we can say that the attitude of the society is averse to street children. They have hardly any social status in the context of larger society. They are looked down upon by society as delinquents and are not trusted. As a result of societal mistrust and lack of love, street children are sometime lynched and even killed.

As the story unfolds, we learn of another incidence of violence. After spending some moment in the street, Sinandugu and his friends find refuge at a place of young adults of doubtful character. Sinandugu and his friends knew that their guests were criminals. But that did not bother them at all. For them, what matters was that they had a roof on their head. Later, we learn that, while the boys were asleep, they heard a booming voice of police officers: “Durango et consort, sortez de votre mesure, les bras en l’air” (*QECM* 42) [Durango and company, come out of your hovel, hands up]. The police raided their hovel and the boys were taken to the police station and tortured, later on they appeared in court where they were charged with aggravated robbery. Despite having claimed their innocence, the boys were locked up in cells. Two days after their release, the children went back to the streets and doing menial jobs such as selling cigarettes in order to survive. The boys returned to the streets with the determination to fight for a better and more humane life. Sinandugu puts their dream in this way:

Je rêve de fonder [...] un mouvement, un rassemblement; quelque chose comme une association de tous les enfants de la rue, qui lutterait pour l’amélioration de nos conditions de vie pour notre réinsertion dans la société.

(Kayombo 2008: 18)

[I dream of founding [...] a movement, a gathering; something like an association of all the street children, which would fight for the improvement of our living conditions for our reintegration into society.]

In the aforementioned excerpt, it is clear that the dream of Sinandugu and his friends is very simple: they want to live like everyone else. What they need is to be secured and know that somewhere there is somebody who cares for them. Unfortunately, they are abandoned to the streets like a vulgar and unwanted burden. Around them there is a void of sympathy and attention. As children, they are already at the margin of their society.

4.1.2 Health Problems

There is no doubt that the unhealthy urban environment in which these children live is a major cause of health problems among them. In a study on the health profile of street children in Africa, Cumber and Tsoka-Gwegweni (2016) observed that among the health problems identified are growth and nutritional disorders, physical injuries, violence, sexual abuse,

communicable diseases including diarrhoea diseases, malaria, respiratory diseases, neglected tropical diseases, mental health issues, substance abuse, reproductive health disorders, mortality, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. According to Rose-Junius (1993), concern with the health of street youth has been due to three factors. First, is their exposure to unhealthy elements, accidents and risks while on the street. Second, the difficulties that they face in accessing medical services including their inability to pay for such services, and lastly, their lack of motivation to use and ignorance of existing medical facilities.

In Kayombo's (2008) novel, we learn for example that when Mulanda fell ill, he had to struggle walking back to their temporal shelter. When his friends returned in the evening, they found him drenched in sweat. Sinandugu went to ask for pills from the three young lads who were temporarily hosting them, but they sent him away. Following that disappointment, the three colleagues of Mulanda contributed some money to buy him some anti-malaria drugs. Sinandugu remembered having seen somewhere in the neighborhood a dispensary. When he got there, he just sneaked into the reception room. The nurse gave him a rather cold welcome and ordered him to leave: "Fripon! [...] ne vois-tu pas que les gens entrent en ordre ? Ouste ? Dégage !" (*QECM* 27) ["Rogue ! [...] don't you see that people are getting in order? Oust? Get away!"]. As he was trying to resist while pleading, the head nurse came over, grabbed the kid and kicked him out.

Despite this disappointment, Sinandugu wanted Mulanda to be cured. He remembered the traditional medicine his grandmother used for curing malaria, which is the leaves of the papaya tree mixed with boiled water. Thus, he sent Thibwabwa to pluck some papaya leaves from the tree at the neighbour's house. Tshibwabwa hesitantly knocked on the door of the neighbour who was already in bed. The neighbour asked the boy furiously before opening the door. Keeping a good distance, Thibwabwa answered him by pleading: "Je m'appelle Thibwabwa, l'un de vos voisins. [...] Je voudrais vous demander la permission de cueillir quelques feuilles de votre papayer" (*QECM* 31) ["My name is Thibwabwa, one of your neighbours. [...] I would like to ask for your permission to pluck some leaves from your papaya tree"]. But, before the seemingly furious neighbour could open the door, the boy escaped. Tshibwabwa went back home bare-handed and informed his friends of his ordeal. At this point, Sinandugu told his friends to fight so that they could change their life for the better. He thus said:

Il faut que ça change ! Vivre ce n'est pas ça. Tu veux acheter une chloroquine, On te rebrousse. Tu veux demander des feuilles du papayer, on te menace. [...] Nous devons nous battre pour mettre fin à cet état de choses.

(Kayombo 2008: 32)

[Things have to change ! This is not living. You want to buy some chloroquine; they turn you back. You want to ask for papaya leaves, you are threatened. [...] We must fight to put an end to this state of affairs.]

It should be mentioned here that, one of the attributes of resilience is determination. A resilient person does not give up before his objective is attained. Despite the many challenges encountered, a resilient person remains focused and courageous for s/he views obstacles as just one of the many hurdles of life to be jumped. Therefore, after the failed attempt to secure some papaya leaves at their neighbour to cure Mulanda, Sinandugu suggested to his peers

Thibwabwa and Jeki that they seek the help of catholic priests and nuns in order to help save the life of their friend Mulanda.

Thus, determined to find a solution to Mulanda's illness, the trio arrived at the gate of a convent for nuns. As they waited, a slender nun appeared, then Sinandugu rushed to her and presented his request on behalf of his two comrades. But after narrating their problem to the sister, the latter could only give them a meager sum of money which could not even cover the five percent of the amount sought. Disappointed, the three boys went to see a priest. When they got in front of the parish priest's house, the monk appeared and asked for the purpose of their presence at his house. Unfortunately, once again, the three boys received a negative and hostile response. This incident made Thibwabwa doubt about religion: "Si même les hommes de Dieu deviennent mechants, qu'est-ce qui reste encore de bon dans ce pays" (*QECM* 40) ["If even the men of God become so wicked, what is still good in this country," he lamented].

4.2 Road to Reintegration into Normal Life

It has been forcefully argued that a portrayal of children as "vulnerable, incompetent and relatively powerless in society" (Morrow & Richards 1996: 90). However, to present street children as helpless victims of social discrimination does little to recognize their remarkable initiative and ingenuity in coping with difficult circumstances (Ennew 1994; Panter-Brick 2001).

Indeed, as we can see towards the end of novel, the children being tired of the harshness and danger of living in the streets, use their tenacity, initiative and ingenuity to reintegrate into society. Thus, Sinandugu and his peers devised a plan to draw the attention of adults' responsibilities. The collective enterprise essentially carried out by the children themselves help them achieve their objective. Sinandugu, assisted by Tshibwabwa, set up teams of five to seven children to roam the streets of different townships, with the mission of spreading ideas, sensitizing companions in misfortune, winning them over to the cause. Everywhere, marginalized children applauded the project. Under the patronage of the Canadian nun, Sister Consolatrice, the unfortunate children met somewhere in town, at the house of a man who was won over to the cause of children by Sister Consolatrice. At the end of a debate led by Sinandugu, ideas were put forward. The sister assisted the children in preparing a press release to be read in the different Catholic churches of the city. The goal was to refuse to be marginalized.

In one of the churches, Thibwabwa urged to the audience not to abandon them as they were their children: "Chers parents, frères et soeurs, ne nous oubliez pas! [...]" (*QECM* 73) ["Dear parents, brothers and sisters, do not forget us! [...]."] Moved by Tshibwabwa's speech, one lady among in the audience commented: "Voilà, la balle est dans notre camp. Voici venue le moment d'aimer en verité les enfants [...]. Dans la mesure du possible, nous répondrons à votre requête" (*QECM* 73) ["The ball is in our court. Now is the time to truly love the children [...]. As far as possible, we will respond to your request."] After mass, Tshibwabwa and his companion were surrounded and questioned by a group of sympathizing mothers. Some of these women handed banknotes to the two kids, while a journalist asked them what they wanted the most, Tshibwabwa replied: "Nous voulons la suppression ou, au moins, l'allègement du fardeau de nos misères. Nous voulons vivre comme tout le monde [...]" (*QECM* 75) ["We want the removal or, at least, the alleviation of the burden, of our miseries. We want to live like

all men [...]”]. At that moment, a journalist took a picture with the two street boys, which he subsequently published with an accompanying story in a local tabloid the following day.

Elsewhere, after mass at the main Cathedral of the city, Sinandugu was invited by a rich medical doctor and his wife to their home, where he narrated his life story. Sinandugu revealed their dream, he also talked about the kind Canadian nun who help them organise the process of spreading the message in various local churches. Sinandugu’s story reminded the husband of his orphaned past life. After lunch, the doctor’s wife suggested that Sinandugu spend the night at their house, but the boy declined the offer saying that his companions were anxiously waiting to be briefed about his visit.

Back to the meeting with his friends, Sinandugu listened attentively to each person's report. He commended them for the job well done and said:

Dorénavant nous sommes lancés [...] Marchons, mes amis, marchons ensemble! Nous sommes capables de modifier le cours des choses, ensemble! Soyons sérieux. Sérieux et courageux. Courageux tant individuellement et collectivement.

(Kayombo 2008: 80)

[From now on we are launched [...] Let us walk, my friends, let us walk together! We are capable of modifying the course of things, together! Let us be serious. Serious and courageous. Courageous both individually and collectively]

As leader of the street children, Sinandugu has an authority that the others do not have. Here we see how he is encouraging his friends to be resilient, courageous and work together as a group, for they have shown their capability to change the status quo and attain their goal that is to reject the marginalization, so as to improve their living conditions. We can see here that the values of solidarity are put forward.

It is worth mentioning that Sinandugu and his companions succeeded in their fight not only with the help of Sister Consolatrice, but also the tenacity and a collective enterprise essentially carried out by the children themselves; as well as the support of civil and ecclesiastical authorities. In this regard, to answer to the call of their leader Sinandugu, the street children organized a peaceful protest as another way to draw public attention. Sinandugu had meticulously sketched out a plan as well as a programme for the protest. One morning, children from every township of the city gathered in front of the post office downtown. In less than half an hour, the crowd of kids quickly attracted onlookers. There was commotion in town, the Lebanese and other business owners locked their shops and phoned the Governor, while others called the city Police Commissioner, for fear of having their shops looted. At the sight of the police, the kids in panic wanted to flee. But Sinandugu and Tchibwabwa told all them to remain calm. After rounding up some of those who were sitting silently on the ground, the police officers took them to the police station where they were interrogated by the Police Commissioner, who suspected that the kids were supported and sponsored by an opposition political party to cause havoc. However, Sinandugu told the Police Commissioner that their objective was not to cause havoc but to be given a chance to live once again, to be reintegrated into their society and community where they can enjoy their youth and eventually become useful members of society like everyone else.

At the end of the novel, we learn that, thanks to the speeches echoed across the country and even abroad by the media, the Prime Minister was able to learn about the children's request. The Minister of Youth went on national television to address the nation. He first recognized

that the situation of abandoned children was dramatic. He then promised the unfortunate youths a better life in the immediate and distant future. In Lubumbashi, the Governor had offered the association of underprivileged children (A.O.U.C) a large piece of land where, with the help of an international organization, a school of agriculture would be built and managed by the male religious community. The kids were put to work helping with the construction.

The (A.O.U.C) worked mostly well. It succeeded in fitting into families a number of girls and boys; some as adopted children, while others were taken into families as house helpers. In addition, the association set up reception centers in several townships where children could be cared for, fed and protected. All this thanks to the help of international organizations and some citizens of good will.

5 Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of youth living on the streets of Lubumbashi, a southern city of Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C). In *Quand les enfants crient misère*, Kayombo (2008) vocalises the troublesome destinies of children in the streets of Lubumbashi. The issue of waifs, which is generally swept under the carpet in African societies, is forthrightly addressed by Kayombo (2008) who points out the ins and outs of such an unsavoury social phenomenon. The street is described in the novel as a social converter, a social transformer through which a human ecology emerges and manifests itself in Lubumbashi. In so doing, the author takes the road of denunciation to paint the street as a mirror of a failing society that can even no longer guarantee its most vulnerable stratum the minimum for a humanly acceptable existence.

The novel is a great indictment on the African family system and values, and the neglect of African leadership respectively. As Darko (2003) observes, children who are churned into the streets come from families who ought to have shielded them from the vagaries of this world. Unfortunately, government has no enduring system or legislation to protect the children's right to a decent life or lacks the will to implement such laws where they exist.

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