4

Traditional Quranic students (*almajirai*) in Nigeria: Fair game for unfair accusations?

Hannah Hoechner

Abstract
The enrolment of many boys and young men in traditional Quranic schools rather than in formal education has become an issue of growing concern in northern Nigeria. The *almajirai*, the students of such schools, have attracted attention in the context of increased attempts to universalise primary education and growing concerns about child welfare. They have also been discussed as potential 'foot soldiers' for violence in the context of Boko Haram. As systematic evidence does not exist to substantiate such claims, the link between *almajirai* and violence is often made with reference to the conditions of their upbringing. That the *almajirai* grow up defying the norms of 'modern' childhood is taken as proof of a violent predisposition. This chapter shows the problems of such reasoning. In terms of skills and future prospects, little differentiates the *almajirai* from other poor undereducated youth from rural households. Young people frequently move between different educational systems, which means few children are 'pure' *almajirai*. Lingering at the bottom of the status hierarchy, the *almajirai* often lack the power to refute unjustified accusations. These feed negative stereotypes, which may give rise to fresh accusations. Widespread prejudice and stigma are major concerns to the *almajirai*.

Introduction

The issues at stake

The enrolment of many boys and young men in traditional Quranic schools rather than in formal education has become an issue of growing concern in northern Nigeria. The students of such schools, many of whom while young beg for a living, have attracted attention in the context of increased attempts to universalise primary education and growing concerns about child welfare. The *almajirai*, as they are called, have also been rightly or wrongly associated with Islamic radicalisation, militancy, and the periodic riots that have blighted many northern Nigerian cities. The current spate of Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria has car-

ried such modes of thinking to the extreme. Many have jumped to the conclusion that the Islamist sect finds easy recruits in traditional Quranic schools. Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka (2012), for example, declared in an article in *Newsweek* magazine about Boko Haram that the "butchers of Nigeria":

> [have] been deliberately bred, nurtured, sheltered, rendered pliant, obedient to only one line of command, ready to be unleashed at the rest of society. They were bred in madrassas and are generally known as the almajiris. From knives and machetes, bows and poisoned arrows they have graduated to AK-47s, homemade bombs, and explosive-packed vehicles.

Other authors have declared the *almajirai*'s deprived living conditions responsible for violence. Former Minister of Education Aishatu Jibrin Dukku, for instance, found that "[m]ost of these children, because of the harsh realities they found themselves in, end up becoming juvenile delinquents and, subsequently, adult criminals" (Alkali 2009).

Some *almajirai* may well be, and probably are, amongst the followers of Boko Haram. But there is no systematic evidence to support such assertions. What empirical evidence exists refutes the "simplistic application of economic deprivation theory" (Anon. 2012: 118). This chapter asks why, in the absence of sound data, the *almajirai* have become such a popular target for accusations and explores the mechanisms that make the *almajirai* convenient scapegoats.

I argue that the people participating in the *almajiri* system are often imagined to be opposed to 'modern' developments and even as the quintessential challenge to a 'modern' Nigeria because they defy the norms of 'modern' childhood as a protected phase of economic dependence, embedded within the nuclear family and the formal education system. Many take the fact that the *almajirai* do not conform to such blueprints of 'modern' childhood as a sure indication of their violent potential and inability to become functional members of society. There are undeniably problems and dangers related to the circumstances under which many *almajirai* grow up. Yet, many narratives construe negative outcomes as an automatic and inevitable result of *almajirci* (the practice of living as *almajiri*). As they overly simplify matters, such narratives have little explanatory power

The argumentative logic underpinning most accusations against the *almajirai*, I argue, builds on problematic assumptions. Contrary to received wisdom, many *almajirai* and many parents of *almajirai* are anything but opposed to 'modern' education. Rather, they struggle to access 'modern' education that is affordable and of acceptable quality. While the link between *almajirai* and violence is often made with reference to their putative refusal to acquire 'modern' skills and knowledge, the *almajirai* are hardly alone in lacking skills to safeguard their economic futures, and educational disadvantage extends far beyond them. In brief, if educational disadvantage and opposition to 'modern' developments constitute the causal link between young people and violence, then we have little

reason to conclude that our concern should focus merely on the *almajirai*. I argue in this chapter that they do not constitute the neatly separable social category they are often portrayed as. Clearly, we need to be mindful of the broader dynamics that produce problematic outcomes.

I argue in the second part of this chapter that, regardless of whether or not *almajirai* actually engage in problematic behaviour, for many it may be convenient to accuse them. They mostly lack the economic and cultural resources to participate in displays of status in their places of study. In addition, they often do not have social superiors to speak for them. Blaming *almajirai* carries little risk of stepping on the toes of powerful protectors, which makes them convenient scapegoats. What is more, low status can engender even lower status. As *almajirai* often lack the power to refute unjustified accusations, these feed negative stereotypes, which may give rise to fresh accusations.

Widespread prejudice and stigma against the *almajirai* is anything but inconsequential. Aware of the negative views people hold of them, the *almajirai* struggle to defend their sense of self and of purpose by embracing self-conceptions as devoted scholars migrating in search of sacred knowledge. In their experiences of being treated as underdogs and nuisances lies a source of frustration and alienation. Being shown respect as human beings would be as important for the *almajirai*'s well-being as improvements to their living conditions and access to 'modern' skills and knowledge. On a more general note, offloading the blame for violence and militancy onto the shoulders of the *almajirai* alone and thus framing the challenges the Nigerian nation-state is facing today in terms of the presumed backwardness and conservatism of a specific group is problematic. It risks obscuring widespread inequality, poverty, and alienation from the values 'modern' Nigeria has come to represent.

The remainder of this introduction discusses the methods and data collected and introduces the *almajirai* in more depth. The second section engages with the discourses surrounding the *almajirai*. The third section juxtaposes the discourses about the *almajirai* with their lived realities and experiences. The Conclusion summarises the argument and emphasises the importance of an empirically informed analysis of the *almajiri* system.

Methods and data

The material for this chapter stems from media records (national and international English-language news, and Internet sources including blogs and online forums), official narratives, institutional publications (from local and international organisations working with children), and local academic production. I collected the newspaper material through keyword searches ('almajiri') on individual

newspapers' homepages,[1] including both Abuja- and Lagos-based newspapers, and via the online newspaper database *allafrica*. Most articles were published after 2009. I collected blog and online forum entries[2] via the Google search engine, using 'almajiri' as a search term. As my searches yielded over 900 results, I conducted an NVivo word frequency query (search terms 'almajiri' / 'almajirai') to identify the most pertinent articles.

In addition, I build on 13 months of fieldwork that I carried out as part of my master's and doctoral research in Kano State between 2009 and 2011. My fieldwork included four months in Albasu, a small rural town in Albasu local government area in the east of Kano State. For the remaining time, I lived at Sabuwar Kofa within Kano's Old City. I collected data in the form of fieldwork observations, as well as semi-structured interviews, group conversations and casual interactions with *almajirai*, their parents, caregivers, and teachers as well as some former *almajirai*. Furthermore, I use translated and transcribed 'radio interviews' the young *almajirai* conducted amongst each other with my tape recorder and discussions of the photographs they took with disposable cameras.

In addition, I draw on data from the production process of a participatory documentary film/docu-drama about the perspectives of *almajirai* on their lives and the challenges they face.[3] This includes stories narrated or written down during the script-writing process, as well as discussions about the way they would like to see their lives and identities represented on screen. The nine participating youths were aged 15-20 years and came from three different Quranic schools in both urban and rural Kano, in which I had previously taught English.

Who are the almajirai? External ascriptions and internal self-conceptions

Many people conceive of young *almajirai* as 'neglected', 'exploited' or 'abandoned', as "an eyesore or a pest" (Tilde 2009), and as a "generation lost" (Ekaette in Abubakar 2009). When they are adolescents, the *almajirai* appear in the public imagination as potential "[b]utchers of Nigeria" (Soyinka 2012) and "monsters" in the "breeding" ("Rehabilitating our almajiris" 2011). The *almajirai* that I conducted my research with conceived of themselves neither as "child urchins" (Olagunju 2012) nor as a "cancer" in society (Suleiman 2009, commentator). Rather, they saw themselves as *matafiyi mai neman ilimi* (Hausa: "those who have left their homes in search of knowledge"). I was told by *almajirai* that the syllable AL in *almajiri* stood for Allah, whereas MA was short for the Proph-

[1] Among them, *234NEXT* (Lagos); BBC Africa; *Business Day* (Lagos); CNN; *Daily Times* (Lagos); *The Guardian* (Lagos); *Leadership* (Abuja); *The Nation* (Lagos); *Punch* (Lagos); *Sun News* (Lagos); *ThisDay* (Abuja); *Nigerian/Saturday Tribune* (Ibadan); *Daily/Sunday Triumph* (Kano); *Daily/Weekly/Sunday Trust* (Abuja); and *Vanguard* (Lagos).

[2] Among them, Nairaland; Nigerian Village Square; and gamji.com.

[3] Available online at: http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/research/video/video-hlg

et Mohammed, and JIRI for the angel Jibril. While this interpretation does not reflect the word's actual etymology (*almajiri* derives from the Arabic word *al-muhajir*, which means 'migrant'), it captures well how *almajirai* manipulate the word's meaning, making it a category still able to instil a certain degree of pride and self-worth. The gap between external ascriptions of what it means to be an *almajiri* and internal self-conceptions of those young people living as *almajirai* could hardly be wider.

Discourses about young people often address and open up for debate issues at the heart of the social imaginary (Durham 2004). Comaroff & Comaroff (2006: 268) describe youth as:

> complex signifiers, the stuff of mythic extremes … simultaneously idealizations and monstrosities, pathologies and panaceas… [Y]outh stands for many things at once: for the terrors of the present, the errors of the past, the prospect of a future … In all of these tropic guises, of course, they are figures of a popular imagination far removed from more nuanced social realities.

The claim that children/youth are 'lost' or, given the circumstances under which they grow up, have 'lost out on' certain experiences deemed essential for their life stage may well reveal wider fears about the social reproduction of society (see Durham 2004: 591). But the *almajirai* are not only young but also male. Whitehead & Barrett (2001: 8) suggest that:

> whenever larger social and public concerns raise their head … very quickly the issue of boys/men comes to the fore; usually how to change them, control them, provide them with purpose, or simply avoid the worst excesses of anti-social male behaviour. What emerges, in fact, is a moral panic around men and masculinity.

Considering that prevailing ideals of childhood/youth and masculinity – and corresponding notions of deviance – bear the impress of wider societal concerns helps us understand and analyse popular discourses about the *almajirai*.

This chapter is about boys and young men self-identifying as *almajirai* – who may or may not conform to the mental picture that people have of them. What makes them *almajirai,* in their view, is that they are away from home and living with a Quranic teacher (*mallam*) to study the Quran. Using Arabic script, they learn to read, write, and recite it. They are young males from primary-school age to their early twenties, mostly (though not exclusively) from poor rural families. Their schools are largely beyond the state's purview and regulatory interventions, the teacher receiving no salary but living off the support given by the local community, the alms given in exchange for his spiritual services, the contributions of his students, and supplementary income-generating activities. Most teachers are not formally certified but are themselves products of the *almajiri* system. Many schools lack physical infrastructure beyond a canopied forecourt where the teaching takes place. The students do not necessarily sleep, eat, and bath on the actual school 'premises', but often cohabit in other spaces, for example mosques and

neighbours'/employers' houses. To sustain themselves, the *almajirai* engage in a plethora of activities, ranging from begging for food and money, to farm work, petty jobs, and trade. Secular subjects do not form part of the *almajirai*'s curriculum, and Islamic subjects other than the Quran are the preserve of advanced learners.

Enrolment in Quranic schools all over Nigeria is estimated to exceed 9.5 million, with more than 8.5 million in the northern part of the country (UBEC 2010). How many of these students are *almajirai*, however, is subject to speculation, as the existing statistics do not differentiate between day-students (who stay with their parents, potentially attend 'modern' school in addition to Quranic school, and include females) and 'boarding' students. The most reliable estimate for Kano suggests that some 300,000 boys and young men – more than an eighth of all 6-21-year olds – live as *almajirai* in that state (Ministry of Education 2008).

Modernity, appropriate childhoods, and the future of the nation

Almajirci as antipode of modernity/development

Concerned discourses about the *almajirai* can be traced back to the early years of the newly independent state, when modernist nation builders called into question the ability of the 'traditional' Quranic education system to forge a 'modern' citizenry for a united Nigeria. The British during sixty years of indirect colonial rule in northern Nigeria had neither reformed the Islamic education sector nor introduced secular education on any noteworthy scale. In this way they sought to avoid tensions with their Muslim subjects, as Christian missionaries provided most early secular schooling. But financial reasons and fear of self-assertive opponents to colonial rule (as had emerged in southern Nigeria from mission schools) also motivated their lack of engagement in the education sector (see Fafunwa 1974; Umar 2001). The needs of the colonial administration were met by employing secular-educated southerners and by offering 'modern' education only to a small section of society (Abdurrahman & Canham 1978).

Mustapha (2004: 11) writes that regional differences in education had "a knock-on effect on the regional formation of human capital, and general economic development" and that "a destabilizing inequality in educational attainment was built into the fabric of the Nigerian state" (*ibid*. 12). At the time of Independence, "Islamic education … appeared to many people to be a positive hindrance to the creation of a united and independent nation". In 1978 Abdurrahman & Canham (1978: 63) wrote that "[t]his impression, which is often deliberately encouraged for political reasons, still persists in many areas of Nigeria". More than thirty years on, discourses about the *almajirai* continue to reflect similar concerns.

Often, the *almajirai* are considered the quintessential challenge to a 'modern' Nigeria. "We are modern now; we don't send our children on *almajiranci*", I was told by an official of the local government education area in Kunchi when I asked whether any children in his family were *almajirai*. The *almajirai* are imagined as relics from the past, "stuck in a time warp" (Fabiyi 2008), their schools being likened to 'typewriters' in an era of 'computers' (Tilde n.d.). The *almajiri* system, it is claimed, needs "to be overhauled in order to conform with the new economy and modern realities" ("Almajiris: Towards Creating Brighter Future" 2012). It "has locked its students (out of modernity)", students who can neither "read newspapers nor partake in the running of government" (Tilde 2009). The *almajirai* are considered to lack "the practical skills required in the real world to contribute meaningfully to modern society, or even to earn a livelihood" (Suleiman 2009).

As a matter of fact, educational disadvantage in northern Nigeria extends far beyond the *almajirai*, as the low secular school enrolment rates for girls, or the poor achievements of even those children who do attend secular school, attest. According to the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey, 35 per cent of school-aged girls attend primary school in the North-West as compared with 47 per cent of boys. In contrast, in the South-East 80 per cent of both girls and boys attend. In Sokoto State, 91 per cent of children aged 5-16 years cannot at all read a simple sentence in their preferred language; in Lagos State, on the other hand, 92 per cent of children can either read the entire sentence or at least parts of it. Only 14 per cent of children of that age group in Sokoto manage to add two single-digit numbers correctly (National Population Commission 2011: 44-59, 159-177).

In terms of skills and future prospects, not much sets the *almajirai* apart from other poor undereducated youth from rural households. That the *almajirai* defy what have been argued to be globalised norms of 'modern' childhood today may contribute to the persistence/prevalence of the idea that they are in fundamental opposition to 'modern' Nigeria and that they, more than others, constitute a problem for development.

'Modern' children for a 'modern' nation

'Modern' Western ideals of childhood as a protected phase of economic dependence, embedded within the nuclear family and the formal education system, became a 'good' for "global export", Boyden (1997: 190) says. These ideals have become enshrined in international children's rights legislation and have influenced social policy doctrines.[4] Also, I would argue that they have been em-

[4] Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1991. Owing to resistance from different segments of society on religious and cultural grounds, it was not domesti-

braced, in theory if not practice, by many 'modern', urbanised, better-off Nigerians. I would venture that the *almajirai*'s apparent defiance of 'modern' norms of childhood as a protected phase of economic dependence, embedded within the nuclear family and the formal education system, reinforces their association with 'backwardness' and 'conservatism'. Their failure to fit into blueprints of 'modern' childhood is construed as problematic. Supposedly, the *almajirai* grow up deprived of the "hopes and dreams of a normal childhood" and with "their humanity stolen" ("Picture Of President GEJ With Students" 2012) – as a "generation lost" (Ekaette in Abubakar 2009). They "experience lumpenhood with no substance of childhood", Amzat (2008: 57) writes. *Almajirci* has been regarded as being on the same level as female circumcision and the killing of twins and child witches (Owuamanam *et al*. 2012).

As the *almajirai* do not live inside nuclear families, they are often considered to grow up outside appropriate adult care and control. Alternative upbringing arrangements are considered as being, *per se*, unable to provide sufficient support. The National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute, for instance, states that the "lack of parental participation in the moral up-bringing of the Almajiri pupils" predisposes them to become delinquents (NCWD 2001: 95). Jumare writes that many *almajirai* "have never known the love and care of parents, and living the hard life, they grow up generally without emotions or a humane side to them" (2012).

The fact that students often farm with their teacher and, if earning an income through other means, contribute financially to his livelihood has been equated with abuse. Ahmed Bello of the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons is quoted as saying the *almajirai*'s provision of free labour on their teachers' farms amounts to "sheer exploitation" (Abubakar 2009). Begging, in particular, has been criticised for being "harmful to both (the *almajirai*'s) physical and mental health with attendant physical and psychological consequences" (Okoye & Yau 1999: 45).

The street as a corrupting space is a recurrent theme. According to Aluaigba, researcher at Bayero University Kano, street begging exposes *almajirai* "to all sorts of vile and deviant behaviors and immoral acts because they interact freely with people of low virtue like prostitutes, drug addicts and gamblers" (2009: 22).

Defying the norms of 'modern' childhood, the *almajirai* are described as a threat to the project of the 'modern' Nigerian nation in its entirety. President Goodluck Jonathan calls them "dangerous to national development" (Kumolu 2012) and adds that "the time has come for the nation to build on the moral foun-

cated until 2003. To date, not all states have passed the Child's Rights Act into law. Norms prohibiting child trafficking are frequently considered applicable to the *almajirai* (e.g. Amali 2005; Olujuwon 2008).

dations of the traditional school system by providing the Almajiri with conventional knowledge and skills". An article in the *Nigerian Tribune* is titled "Almajirai, street kids and a nation's future", implying an immediate connection between the three (Olagunju 2012). M.E. Fabiyi, a blogger on NigeriaWorld, claims that "(i)t is imperative for Nigerian unity to ensure that the Northern Almajirai are provided with every opportunity to advance themselves" (2008).

It is widely acknowledged that many *almajirai* grow up in difficult conditions. However, we need to be careful when drawing conclusions about what this implies. Not every child living away from his parents is 'abandoned'; not every form of work carried out by children amounts to 'exploitation'; not every begging child falls prey to corrupting influences. What is more, for many poor children in Nigeria – and elsewhere – contributing to their families' subsistence through work (both within and outside the household) is a matter-of-course feature of everyday survival (see Boyden, Ling & Myers 1998). It is a widespread practice in West Africa to place children with guardians other than their biological parents, not only to forge links with other households but also to ease the family's subsistence burden and to allow children to seize educational or income opportunities absent at home (see Goody 1982; Bledsoe 1990; Notermans 2008). To consider economic dependence and the setting of a nuclear family as necessary ingredients of a 'proper' childhood means to dismiss the lived realities of the vast majority of young people around the globe as pathological.

Backward and neglectful parents; rogue and gullible children

The notion that the parents of *almajirai* wilfully forfeit 'modern' careers for their children is a recurrent theme in discourses about *almajirci*. Often, the parents are described as hostile to change and ready to "defy every effort aimed at addressing" the system (Kumolu 2012). Moreover, *almajirai*'s parents are frequently depicted as negligent and oblivious of their parental duties. Bala Muhammad, then head of a Kano State directorate created to promote morals and good behaviour, for instance, chides "parents who have more children than they can afford and see Koranic schools as a means to rid themselves of the extra burden" (Abubakar 2009; see Sule-Kano 2008).

As their parents are dubbed backward and neglectful, the *almajirai* themselves are considered gullible and rogue. The circumstances of their upbringing are often presented as sufficient conditions to make them inherently dangerous. Saudatu Sani, a federal legislator from Kano State, claimed about the *almajirai* that "[t]he pathetic life they live ... breeds heartless criminals" (Abubakar 2009). It has been asserted that, "[h]ungry and angry", the *almajirai* can easily be mobilised to engage in looting and killings during ethno-religious clashes so as to pay society back (*ibid*.). Awofeso *et al*. (2003: 320) write of the "immense" "terrorist

potential of having about one million hungry and gullible children roaming aimlessly in Nigeria's northern cities, from whom any fanatic, religious or otherwise, could readily recruit disciples for antisocial purposes".

To my knowledge, the claim that the *almajirai* participate in violence, whether interreligious or sectarian, has been investigated systematically only on one occasion, namely in the aftermath of the Maitatsine crisis of the 1980s. A federal government-constituted Tribunal of Inquiry established that children aged 10-14 years, unaccompanied by their parents, were amongst Maitatsine's followers.[5] Yet, it would be hasty to conclude from this that *almajirai* are violent *per se*. Assuming that violence results automatically from some inherent feature of the *almajiri* education system aborts prematurely the search for more meaningful explanations of violent behaviour. Some 9.5 million boys and girls all over Nigeria attend Quranic schools, either in addition to attendance in a secular school, or as their only educational experience (UBEC 2010). Clearly, little is gained by suspecting all Quranic students indiscriminately of becoming violent militants. On the contrary, such general suspicion may even be dangerous as it can alienate the constituencies of the traditional Quranic education system.

Last (2009a: 4) argues that it is easy to declare disengagement from the national project to be 'backward' and 'conservative', "but that is to take on, unthinkingly, the perception of the modernising faction in the country, with its different moral values and modes of living". Those parts of society commonly associated with the new Nigeria, amongst them non-Muslims, 'southerners', the nouveaux riches, and 'modern youth', often do not conform to Muslim / Hausa codes of behaviour, which emphasise "truthfulness, restraint (in words and actions), courtesy to others including strangers, [and] deference to seniors" (*ibid*. 6). To juxtapose 'Muslim/Hausa values' with 'modern Nigerian values' assumes that they can be told apart neatly and overlooks their historical entanglement. But there is an argument to be made about the disjuncture between the norms (if not behaviour) reigning among many 'commoners'/poor (*talakawa*) in Hausaland – among them the constituencies of the *almajiri* system – and the more cosmopolitanised Nigerian middle and upper classes (be they Hausa/Muslim or not) that have larger stakes and a greater presence in the 'modern' Nigerian project.

Framing the challenges the Nigerian nation-state is facing today in terms of the presumed backwardness and conservatism of a specific group carries the danger of dismissing alienation from the values 'modern' Nigeria has come to represent as a mere cultural defect. If having an 'non-modern', 'conservative' or 'backward' childhood can explain problematic behaviour and even violence, one is spared having to look further for reasons accounting for the current crisis, and

[5] Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981): *Report of Tribunal of Inquiry on Kano Disturbances (Maitatsine)* (cited in Awofeso, Ritchie & Degeling 2003).

especially for reasons that might be corollaries of specifically 'modern' developments in Nigeria – such as the growing inequalities and individualism brought about by economic change. As long as the inadequacies of the *almajiri* system can serve to explain the Boko Haram-related violence, it is possible to blank out more complicated questions about poverty, inequality, and alienation.

The *almajirai*'s lived experiences

Complex social realities defying one-dimensional narratives

The narrative of 'backward' parents refusing their children access to 'beneficial' knowledge is easily digestible. It does not call into question the set-up of Nigerian society or dominant conceptions of appropriate 'development' interventions (such as universal basic education). It also suggests that apposite policy responses to the *almajiri* system are an uncontroversial and straightforward choice. Could the 'problem' posed by the *almajirai* not be 'solved' with a ban on the system? The Northern Traditional Rulers' Council at least suggests such a ban (Folaranmi 2011), as does Senate President David Mark (Ogunmade 2013). Plateau State outlawed street begging by school-aged children in 2009, and on the federal level a similar law is in the legislative pipeline. Unfortunately, however, social realities are more complex than the dominant narrative suggests, making punitive and abolitionist approaches a problematic choice.

It is a commonplace that the parents enrolling their children as *almajirai* do not appreciate secular knowledge. Yet, throughout my research, I have not actually met anyone who considered secular education as principally *haram* (forbidden) and met very few who thought it not particularly desirable (see e.g. Brigaglia 2008). Appreciation of different forms of knowledge is reflected in children's educational trajectories. Many young people do not live as *almajirai* throughout their childhood and youth, but – voluntarily or forced by circumstances – switch between different educational options. Their schooling trajectories may, for example, include episodes in so-called *Islamiyya* schools. These are modernised Islamic schools that teach the Quran but also other Islamic, and in some instances 'modern'/secular subjects. Many *almajirai* also attend secular school for a couple of years before enrolling as Quranic students and plan to further their secular education in the future. Former *almajirai* are likely to make up a large part of the clientele of adult evening schools.[6]

Various people in Albasu informed me that in the past people did not value secular education, but now most had come to understand its benefits. Yet, increasing acceptance on principle has been thwarted by state withdrawal from the

[6] This impression is based on visits to two different adult evening education centres in Kano City and on information from older/former *almajirai*.

education sector since structural adjustment (Umar 2003; Baba 2011). While basic education is officially free, in reality it involves recurrent expenses: for text books and writing materials, uniforms, transportation where necessary, levies for the rehabilitation of school facilities (which are often in a deplorable state), levies to buy chalk, brooms, report cards, and such sundry running costs. Post-primary education in particular has its price – beginning with the bribe sometimes required to secure one of the limited places[7] – and often requires students to commute/board. Poor-quality teaching (see Johnson 2010), costs – including lost opportunity costs in terms of foregone children's work (see Tomasevski 2005) – insecurity about transitions to the next level of schooling, and more than insecure pay-offs in terms of future opportunities: all these make parents wonder whether secular school is quite worth the investment.

Admittedly, my research may underestimate remaining resentments on ideological grounds against secular education, as people opposed to anything 'Western' may have avoided meeting me/talking to me, and as interviewees may have concealed critical views thinking they would make me, a secular school product, uncomfortable. Several people I spoke to felt that secular knowledge comes second in importance to religious knowledge. Whereas parents may find it excusable to let their children's *boko* education slide, most felt strongly about ensuring their wards acquire at least a modicum of Quranic knowledge. But whatever the role of remaining resentments against *boko* education, given the financial difficulties poor parents face attempting to enrol and sustain their children in secular education, we cannot jump to the conclusion that it is necessarily a dislike for secular education that makes children drop out of secular school / enrol as *almajirai*. Also, to dismiss critical views on *boko* education out of hand as 'backward' is problematic. It ignores the fact that negative attitudes towards *boko* education originate, in part at least, in contemporary social and political conditions. Boko Haram, for example, links its rejection of *boko* to the corruption and depravity of today's elites, most of whom are 'modern' school products (see Last 2009b).

People make reasoned decisions based on the options available to them, and costly and poor-quality secular education may not make for a particularly attractive choice. The *almajiri* system, on the other hand, offers redress for a number of situations. Gathering the resources to launch an adult career – that is, to build a room for prospective bride(s) and children, and to marry – affords a real challenge to adolescent boys and young men in an eroding rural economy where opportunities to earn cash income are scarce. Seasonal or permanent migration to the cities, which offer petty income opportunities as street vendors and odd-job

[7] I was told on several occasions that children did not proceed to secondary school, even though they would have liked to and had performed well in primary school, because they could not secure admission. I was told that admission certificates – a scarce and prized item, as the number of secondary school places is limited – are often distributed based not on merit but on 'purchasing power'.

men, promises redress. Migration, especially during the agriculturally unproductive dry season, is indeed a common strategy of Sahelian peasant households to reduce their subsistence burden and allows boys to acquire livelihood skills appropriate to the ecology of the region (Mustapha & Meagher 1992; Mortimore 1998).

Divorce is frequent and easy to attain in Hausaland. In 1959, Smith (1959: 244) wrote that "[t]he average Hausa woman probably makes three or four marriages before the menopause". The repeated efforts of Kano State governor Rabiu Kwankwaso to marry off divorcees suggest that divorce continues to be pervasive ("Another 1,000 divorcees, widows up for wedding in Kano" 2013; see also Solivetti 1994). Many marriages end in divorce because husbands fail to take care of the basic subsistence needs of their families, or because of fights between/over co-wives. In the case of divorce, the need may arise to re-accommodate children. Divorced mothers, who are expected to re-marry soon, can rarely move into new marriages with children from previous ones. Children left with fathers are at risk of suffering neglect and of abuse from stepmothers. High maternal mortality also renders children motherless (Federal Ministry of Health 2011). For boys, the *almajiri* system offers a way out under such constrained circumstances.

In summary, multiple economic, cultural, and religious factors interact together to make some parents prefer *almajirci* over other options. Poverty is a major factor constraining choice; 'modern' secular education often does not constitute a meaningful option; high divorce rates necessitate the re-accommodation of children. Norms about the gender-appropriate upbringing of children, religious beliefs in the need to prepare for the Hereafter, and a concern with boys' acquisition of livelihood skills appropriate to the peasant economy and ecology of the region – all these factors also play a role in enrolment decisions. To shrug off all cultural/religious motives for *almajirci* as 'backward' means to dismiss the potential for change that lies in understanding them. What is more, an exclusive focus on the *almajiri* system as putative radicalising agent in young people's lives overlooks the fact that the *almajirai* do not constitute the neatly separable social category which they are often portrayed as. Many young men are not 'pure' products of the *almajiri* system but have also experienced other strands of education. Any serious assessment of processes of Islamist radicalisation and militancy needs to take into account the sum total of these experiences.

Meanwhile, it is convenient for many to point accusing fingers at the *almajirai*. The next section explores why this is the case and what the consequences are for the *almajirai*'s well-being and sense of dignity.

Scapegoats at the bottom of the status hierarchy

Most *almajirai* do not know that the media write about them as "cancer" (Suleiman 2009, commentator) and about their schools as "breeding grounds" for "monsters" ("Rehabilitating our almajiris" 2011). But they know that the people in the urban neighbourhoods to which they come to study talk about them as urchins and hoodlums. While they felt fairly well accepted within their rural communities, most *almajirai* I worked with – from very young ones to almost-adults – had experienced rejection and contempt in urban areas, ranging from insults, to 'donations' of spoilt food, to physical assaults. They were painfully aware of negative opinions about them and frequently voiced their distress about being denied even a minimum of respect as human beings. Bashir,[8] an *almajiri* at Sabuwar Kofa in urban Kano (12 years old), felt they were treated as even less than animals, for no reason other than being *almajirai*:

> Some of them don't think *almajirai* are human. To some, a dog is better than an *almajiri*[9] … To some, an *almajiri*, as long as he is an *almajiri*, they just take him to be a bad person. They think he is an animal, that a donkey is even better than an *almajiri*.

As newcomers/strangers at their places of study, the *almajirai* feel they are vulnerable to abuses they would not be exposed to back home, and which young '*yan gari* ("children of the town"), youngsters living at home with their parents, are not exposed to. In a society in which individuals derive their social standing from the people they 'belong' to, be it family members or patrons, being unable to display such belonging means to be vulnerable/defenceless.[10] The term *gata* connotes a person whom you can legitimately expect to stand up, as well as provide materially, for you. The *almajirai* I conducted my research with often explained the abuses they suffered with reference to the apparent absence of such guardians/protectors. During the script-writing process for the film, for instance, the participating boys noted that *almajirai* are often mistreated because

> people see he (the *almajiri*) doesn't have a guardian/protector (*gata*); and if they mistreat him, nothing will happen to them. And the *almajirai*'s teachers want to live in peace with the people from town. That's why even if *almajirai* have been mistreated, they'll tell them to have patience. (Script-writing, 22 July 2011)

---

[8] I have changed the names of informants where I felt it necessary to protect their identity. Where informants were comfortable with statements being publicised in their name and where I considered this safe for them, I have left names unchanged.

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

[10] Conversely, being unable to protect one's 'own people' is a sign of weakness. Last argues with reference to the Biafran war that "[t]o kill a leader's defenceless, dependent women and children is to strike where he is most vulnerable, and to inflict on him maximum hurt … their weakness is his weakness. To attack them is not seen necessarily as immoral" (Last 2000b). The threat of Boko Haram spokesperson Shekau to retaliate against policemen's women and children is a case in point (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBemHl-tnsc [Accessed on 27 January 2012]).

I would not go so far as to suggest that it is considered legitimate to treat someone badly for lack of *gata*, but as an explanation for bad/heedless treatment it makes immediate sense to people. Command over / claims to other people's respect, I would venture, inhere not in the individual but in the social hierarchy she/he belongs to. To fend off assaults on their dignity, the *almajirai* participating in the film project declared they too had their supporters/protectors, rather than demanding that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity irrespective of whether or not he has *gata*. Buhari, for example, an *almajiri* in Albasu and part of the crew with whom I produced the film/docu-drama about the lives of *almajirai*, proclaims at the end credits where the *almajirai* spell out their messages to the public:

> I want those people who abuse *almajirai* to understand that they (the *almajirai*) also have people who care about them (*gata*).

There are other sources of vulnerability for *almajirai*, apart from their difficulties in displaying 'belonging'. Unlike in a village context where nearly everyone knows nearly everyone else's family background, in an urban environment anonymity characterises many encounters. Displays of belonging have thus been complemented with novel ways of signalling one's status. Demonstrations of wealth are of course a popular default option for those wishing to make claims to high rank: posh cars are the preserve of the rich; flashy mobile phones and glamorous clothes belong to the symbolic repertoire also of the somewhat less-lavishly endowed. Finally, shows of one's mastery of prestigious and hard-to-attain forms of knowledge – for example, conversing in English (preferably in the presence of Hausa-only speakers!), reciting the Quran in the *qira'a* of Hafs (rather than the 'folk' Warsh version), or at least greeting (*Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah he wa barakatuhu*) with an Arabic accent – work effectively to create instantaneous hierarchies. Unfortunately, most *almajirai* lack the economic and cultural capital required to participate in such new styles of differentiation. For the most part, they do not command the financial resources for displays of wealth, and 'modern' forms of knowledge are difficult to acquire, especially for those attending Quranic school only.

On top of this, their often precarious access to food compounds the *almajirai*'s low status. In Hausaland, the language of food is often used to express social relationships. Eating (*ci*) plays a central role in metaphors of power, the word 'eating' being used to describe situations such as winning a victory, conquering a place, or having coitus with a woman (see Last 2000a: 374). Having stable/secure access to food signals status. *Almajirai*, conversely, often toil to find enough food for the day. "Not to eat is to experience what it is to lack power," Last writes (*ibid*.). Not to be in a position to choose whose food to accept and whose food to refuse means to lack leverage to signal discontent, protest against

bad treatment, or pass moral judgement. Social harmony is sealed/expressed by the exchange of food. Refusing somebody's food, on the contrary, subtly signals dissent in a culture where open confrontation is shunned. Yet, this option is not always open to *almajirai*. The *almajirai* I befriended knew of fellow students who are so hungry that they would dry and re-boil food that had gone off. Food is usually eaten communally, and refusing to share with the members of one's community is hardly legitimate. Going hungry means to be excluded from the benefits of community membership.

Altogether, there is little to protect the *almajirai* from lingering at the bottom of the status hierarchy. This makes them easy prey to those searching for scapegoats. The *almajirai* involved in the film project were upset about having to serve as scapegoats for all kinds of incidents in their neighbourhoods. Without someone answering for them close by, they felt they had become fair game for unfair accusations. Auwalu, for example, stated during the script-writing for the film:

> Some offences, it's not an *almajiri* who committed them; it's the people/kids from town (*'yan gari*). But they'll just say an *almajiri* committed it. If there's a school close by, they'll just go and tell the *mallam* [Quranic teacher]: "Look what your *almajirai* did"; whereas it wasn't them who did it. The people from the neighbourhood don't see their own children's faults. (Script-writing, 22 July 2011)

It is handy for people to blame *almajirai* for petty incidents in their neighbourhoods, as it carries little risk of stepping on the toes of powerful protectors. The children in my neighbourhood at Sabuwar Kofa had understood this very well. On two occasions, I witnessed how young thieves in my house attempted to put the blame on the *almajirai* studying with my neighbour, a teacher of the Quran, after they had been discovered. Low status, then, can engender even lower status: since *almajirai* often lack the power to refute unjustified accusations, these feed negative stereotypes.

Struggling to come to terms with prejudice and stigma

What are the consequences of widespread prejudice and stigma for the young people living as *almajirai*? Aware of the negative views people hold of them, they struggle to defend their sense of self and of purpose. The *almajirai* I got to know well embraced time and again self-definitions as devoted scholars migrating in search of sacred knowledge, in order to challenge narratives that cast them and their fellow students as the product of parental neglect and poverty. During the script-writing for our film/docu-drama, for example, the boys involved in the film project invoked any number of social, cultural, and religious arguments to justify enrolment as an *almajiri*:

- At home, he [a child] becomes stubborn, quarrelsome with other children and disrespectful towards elders. If he's told to go to school, he doesn't go. He just goes for a stroll, annoying the people in the neighbourhood.
- Some are worried about the kind of kids their children associate with. That is why they decide to take them to school. Because if they left them at home, they might become spoiled; but if they take them to school, someone is looking after them because it's the *mallam*'s work to look after them.
- Parents want their children to get to know their religion, and know people, and know how to live together with people.

On other occasions, the *almajirai* categorically refuted explanations invoking poverty or difficult conditions at home as reasons for *almajiri* enrolment. Nasiru, for instance, an *almajiri* at Sabuwar Kofa (15 years), contended that

> especially now that there is *boko*, if you come for *almajirci*, some people think it's because you don't have food in your house: that's why you come out to beg. But it's not like that; it's because you're searching for knowledge.

Habibu (15 years) refuted the claim of parental neglect, suggesting that

> people bring their children to Quranic school not because they hate them, but because they want them to have the knowledge.

Being vilified as miscreants leaves its mark on the young people living as *almajirai*. How strongly a concern respect was felt by the *almajirai* participating in the film project becomes apparent in the messages to the public they included in the end credits of the film. Six of the nine participants voice respect as their biggest worry and call for a more sympathetic view on *almajirai*. For example:

- I want those who think *almajirai* are bad people, to know that they aren't. Either speak good about us, or keep quiet. (Kabiru Idris)
- I call upon you to stop accusing *almajirai* of things they didn't do. Please inquire first before you just accuse the *almajirai*. (Naziru Usman)
- I call upon those people who insult us, who think we are useless, to stop as of today, for the sake of Allah. (Auwalu Mahdmud)

Elsewhere I have described how the *almajirai* struggle to maintain their sense of self and self-worth in this context of rejection and denigration (Hoechner 2011). The young people I got to know during my research embraced an explicitly moral conception of what it means to be an *almajiri* that allowed them to take pride in their identity as *almajirai* despite widespread societal disapproval. To know that they knew how to 'behave well' and possessed the 'moral knowledge' society often claimed they lacked helped them to maintain dignity in the face of negative attitudes. By asserting their moral superiority over their traducers – for example, behaving well and properly when treated in an obviously ungodly way – they could win at least a moral victory. Also, the *almajirai* frequently shifted (justifiably or not) the blame they felt was unfairly offloaded unto their shoulders to *'yan daba*, the members of urban ward gangs (see Casey 2007, 2008). Yet, such strategies cannot dispel completely the frustration caused by repeated con-

frontation with negative attitudes. The *almajirai* I spent considerable time with during the film production were quite frustrated with the rich and ruling classes, who in their view did not live up to their obligation to provide for the *almajirai* in the same way as they provide for the students of *boko* school (‘*yan boko*).[11] As citizens (‘*yan ƙasa*), the *almajirai* felt that they deserved to be accorded the same rights (‘*yanci*).

Conclusion

Since the violence related to Boko Haram has escalated in northern Nigeria, the *almajirai*, already low in the social status hierarchy before the crisis began, have emerged as a popular target for accusations. Many think that traditional Quranic schools supply the ‘cannon fodder’ for Boko Haram (“Rehabilitating our almajiris” 2011). So far, however, there is no conclusive empirical evidence to justify such conclusions. This chapter has probed why the *almajirai* are nevertheless so commonly associated with Islamist militancy and violence. I have argued that the *almajirai*’s apparent defiance of the norms of ‘modern’ childhood is often interpreted as a wilful rejection of ‘modern’ institutions and developments. Judging the conditions of their upbringing as unsuitable for children, many predict pathological results for the *almajirai*. Yet, such reasoning overlooks that the blueprints for ‘modern’ childhood prove unattainable for many poor children. It also hides from view that often it is poverty and the absence of meaningful secular education rather than a rejection of *boko* that makes parents enrol their sons as *almajirai*. What is more, if inadequate formal and vocational skills cause violence (as many discussing the *almajirai* as thugs- and militants-to-be assume), we are ill-advised to focus our attention merely on the *almajirai*: educational disadvantage in northern Nigeria extends far beyond them.

The second part of this chapter illustrated the practical mechanisms that make the *almajirai* convenient scapegoats. The *almajirai* are at the bottom of the status hierarchy and lack guardians to speak for them in their places of study. Blaming *almajirai* carries little risk of stepping on the toes of powerful protectors. But accusations that are experienced as unfair not only alienate and frustrate those whom they target; they also develop a reality of their own. As *almajirai* often lack the power to disprove unfounded accusations, these accusations remain in the air and feed negative stereotypes, which may lead to fresh accusations.

To improve the *almajirai*’s situation, rethinking stereotypes is necessary. Rather than reviling the system, viable alternatives need to be made available to poor rural households. The *almajirai* (and other poor undereducated youth) must

[11] Given the low standards and limited resources of most government *boko* schools in northern Nigeria, it is somewhat ironic that someone would envy them for the support they receive.

be offered opportunities to further their education and to find work. These are more demanding tasks for governments than simply drafting legislation to ban the system. This chapter aimed to show that the presumably easy answers provided by punitive and abolitionist approaches to the *almajiri* system are chimaeras. Banning the system without providing alternatives will not help the current crisis in Nigeria's North. Blaming the *almajiri* system for negative outcomes without thinking about the larger societal forces underpinning the crisis – inequality, poverty, and alienation from the values 'modern' Nigeria has come to represent – may well compound rather than solve Nigeria's problems.

References

ABDURRAHMAN, A.M. & P. CANHAM (1978), *The ink of the scholar: The Islamic tradition of education in Nigeria*. Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria.

ABUBAKAR, A. (2009), "Nigeria struggles to curb rise in child beggars", *The Telegraph*, 18 November. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/expatnews/6596232/Nigeria-struggles-to-curb-rise-in-child-beggars.html (Accessed on 25 September 2013).

ALKALI, A. (2009), "10 Million Kids Beg in the North – Minister", *Leadership*, Abuja, Nigeria, 22 November. http://allafrica.com/stories/200911231395.html (Accessed on 25 September 2013).

"ALMAJIRIS: TOWARDS CREATING BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE STREET KIDS" (2012), *ThisDay*, 22 April. http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/almajiris-towards-creating-brighter-future-for-the-street-kids/114304/ (Accessed on 25 September 2013).

ALUAIGBA, M.T. (2009), "Circumventing or superimposing poverty on the African child? The Almajiri syndrome in Northern Nigeria", *Childhood in Africa* 1(1): 1-37. http://www.afrchild.ohio.edu/CAJ/articles/AluaigbaCAJ2009.pdf (Accessed on 25 September 2013).

AMALI, A.U. (2005), "Almajirci as child trafficking", *Daily Trust*, 14 October. http://allafrica.com/stories/200510140663.html (Accessed on 25 September 2013).

AMZAT, J. (2008), Lumpen childhood in Nigeria: A case of the Almajirai in Northern Nigeria, *Hemispheres* 23: 55-66.

ANONYMOUS (2012), "The popular discourses of Salafi radicalism and Salafi counter-radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 42: 118-144.

"ANOTHER 1,000 DIVORCEES, WIDOWS UP FOR WEDDING IN KANO" (2013), *Premium Times*, 23 May. http://premiumtimesng.com/regional/135915-another-1-000-divorcees-widows-up-for-wedding-in-kano.html (Accessed 25 September 2013).

AWOFESO, N., J. RITCHIE & P. DEGELING (2003), "The Almajirih and the threat of non-state terrorism in Northern Nigeria – Lessons from Central Asia and Pakistan", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26(4): 311-325.

BABA, N.M. (2011), "Islamic schools, the Ulama, and the state in the educational development of Northern Nigeria", *Bulletin de L'APAD* 33.

BLEDSOE, C. (1990), "No success without struggle: Social mobility and hardship for foster children in Sierra Leone", *Man* 25(1): 70-88.

BOYDEN, J. (1997), "Childhood and the policy makers: A comparative perspective on the globalization of childhood". In: A. James & A. Prout, eds, *Constructing and reconstructing childhood* (2nd ed.). London: Falmer Press, pp. 190-229.

BOYDEN, J., B. LING & W.E. MYERS (1998), *What works for working children*. Stockholm, Sweden: Rädda Barnen.

BRIGAGLIA, A. (2008), "'We ain't coming to take people away': A Sufi praise-song and the representation of police forces in Northern Nigeria", *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 10: 50-57.

CASEY, C. (2007), "'Policing' through violence: Fear, vigilantism, and the politics of Islam in northern Nigeria". In: D. Pratten & A. Sen, eds, *Global vigilantes.* London: Hurst, pp. 93-124.

CASEY, C. (2008), "'Marginal Muslims': Politics and the perceptual bounds of Islamic authenticity in Northern Nigeria", *Africa Today* 54(3): 67-92.

COMAROFF, J. & J. COMAROFF (2006), "Reflections on youth, from the past to the postcolony". In: M.S. Fisher & G. Downey, eds, *Frontiers of capital: Ethnographic reflections on the new economy.* Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 267-281.

DURHAM, D. (2004), "Disappearing youth", *American Ethnologist* 31(4): 589-605.

FABIYI, M.E. (2008), "Misconceptions in analyzing northern Nigeria and the implications for Nigerian unity: contextualizing & addressing the almajirai challenge", *NigeriaWorld*. http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication/fabiyi/121908.htm (Accessed 23 July 2012).

FAFUNWA, B.A. (1974), *History of education in Nigeria*. London: Allen and Unwin.

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH (2011), *Saving newborn Lives in Nigeria: Newborn health in the context of the integrated maternal, newborn and child health strategy* (Revised 2nd edn.), Abuja, Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Health, Save the Children, Johns Hopkins University's Health Organisation.

FOLARANMI, F.Y. (2011), "Fallout of Boko Haram bombings: Emirs spit fire", *Sun News Online*, 19 November. http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/news/national/2011/nov/19/national-19-11-2011-09.html (Accessed 14 January 2012).

GOODY, E. (1982), *Parenthood and social reproduction: fostering and occupational roles in West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

HOECHNER, H. (2011), "Striving for knowledge and dignity: How qur'anic students in Kano, Nigeria, learn to live with rejection and educational disadvantage", *European Journal of Development Research* 23(5): 712-728.

JOHNSON, D. (2010), *An assessment of the professional working knowledge of teachers in Nigeria: Implications for teacher development, policy and implementation*. Kano, Nigeria: Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria.

JUMARE, F.I. (2012), "Almajiri : The invisible child", *The Politico*, August. http://the-politico.com/development/almajiri-the-invisible-child/ (Accessed 25 September 2013).

KUMOLU, C. (2012), "Almajiri education: Modern gang up against ancient tradition?", *Vanguard*, 26 April. http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/04/almajiri-education-modern-gang-up-against-ancient-tradition/ (Accessed 25 September 2013).

LAST, M. (2000a), "Children and the experience of violence: Contrasting cultures of punishment in Northern Nigeria", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70(3): 359-393.

LAST, M. (2000b), "Reconciliation and memory in postwar Nigeria". In: V. Das, ed., *Violence and subjectivity.* London: University of California Press, pp. 315-332.

LAST, M. (2009a), "Nation-breaking & not-belonging in Nigeria – withdrawal, resistance, riot?", Leipzig. http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~ecas2009/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=57&Itemid=24 (Accessed 25 September 2013).

LAST, M. (2009b), "The pattern of dissent : Boko haram in Nigeria 2009", *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 10: 7-11.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2008), *Educational Sector Analysis*. Kano, Nigeria.

MORTIMORE, M. (1998), *Roots in the African dust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MUSTAPHA, A. (2004), *Ethnic structure, inequality and governance of the public sector in Nigeria*. UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development). http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/240da49ca467a53f80256b4f005ef245/c6a23857ba3934ccc12572ce0024bb9e/$FILE/Mustapha.pdf (Accessed 25 September 2013).

MUSTAPHA, A.R. & K. MEAGHER (1992), "Stress, adaptation, and resilience in rural Kano", *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 5(2): 107-117.

NATIONAL POPULATION COMMISSION (2011), *Nigeria demographic and health survey (DHS) EdData profile 1990, 2003, and 2008: Education data for decision-making*. Washington, DC, USA: National Population Commission and RTI International.

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

NOTERMANS, C. (2008), "The emotional world of Kinship: Children's experiences of fosterage in East Cameroon", *Childhood* 15(3): 355-377.

OGUNMADE, O. (2013), "Mark Urges Northern Govs to Ban Almajiri System", *ThisDay*, 23 May. http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/mark-urges-northern-govs-to-ban-almajiri-system/148259/ (Accessed 25 September 2013).

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

OLAGUNJU, L. (2012,), "Almajirai, street kids and a nation's future", *Nigerian Tribune*, 20 April. http://tribune.com.ng/index.php/the-friday-edition/39559-almajirai-street-kids-and-a-nations-future (Accessed 7 June 2012).

OLUJUWON, T. (2008), "Combating trafficking in person: A case study of Nigeria", *European Journal of Scientific Research* 24(1): 23-32.

OWUAMANAM, J., S. ABORISADE, O. UBABUKOH & D. ATTAH (2012), "Almajiri schools: Civil rights group disagrees with Afenifere, ACF", *The Punch*, 13 April. http://www.punchng.com/education/almajiri-schools-civil-rights-group-disagrees-with-afenifere-acf/ (Accessed 25 September 2013).

PICTURE OF PRESIDENT GEJ WITH STUDENTS OF THE NEW ALMAJIRI SCHOOL IN SOKOTO – POLITICS (4) – NAIRALAND (2012), *Nairaland Forum*. http://www.nairaland.com/912445/picture-president-gej-students-new/4 (Accessed 12 July 2012).

"REHABILITATING OUR ALMAJIRIS" (2011), *234NEXT*, 22 June. http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Opinion/5716077-146/story.csp (Accessed 22 July 2012).

SMITH, M.G. (1959), "The Hausa system of social status", *Africa* 29(3): 239-252.

SOLIVETTI, L.M. (1994), "Family, marriage and divorce in a Hausa community: A sociological model", *Africa* 64(2): 252-271.

SOYINKA, W. (2012), "The butchers Of Nigeria", *Newsweek*, 16 January, pp. 1-5. http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/01/15/wole-soyinka-on-nigeria-s-anti-christian-terror-sect-boko-haram.html (Accessed 25 September 2013).

SULE-KANO, A. (2008), *Poverty and the traditional Qur'anic school system in Northern Nigeria: The politics of the Almajiri-phenomenon*. Paper prepared for the Conference on Nigerian Youth and National Development, Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Mambayya House, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, August 5–6.

SULEIMAN, S. (2009,), "Iliya, the Almajiri", *234NEXT*, 25 September, pp. 1-6. http://www.saharareporters.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3793:iliya-the-almajiri&catid=81:external-contrib&Itemid=300 (Accessed 23 January 2012).

TILDE, A.U. (n.d.), "The future of the Almajiri (3)", *Gamji*. http://www.gamji.com/tilde/tilde107.htm (Accessed 26 September 2012).

TILDE, A.U. (2009), "The future of the Almajiri (2)", *Gamji*. http://www.gamji.com/tilde/tilde106.htm (Accessed 26 September 2012).

TOMASEVSKI, K. (2005), "Not education for all, only for those who can pay: The World Bank's model for financing primary education", *Law, Social Justice & Global Development Journal* 9(1): 1-19.

UBEC (2010), *National framework for the development and integration of Almajiri education into UBE programme.* Abuja, Nigeria: Universal Basic Education Commission, 1-26.

UMAR, M. (2001), "Education and Islamic trends in northern Nigeria: 1970s–1990s", *Africa Today* 48(2): 127-150.
UMAR, M. (2003), "Profiles of new Islamic schools in Northern Nigeria", *The Maghreb Review* 28(2-3): 146-169.
WHITEHEAD, S.M. & F.J. BARRETT (2001), *The masculinities reader*. Cambridge: Polity.