

What about those shoes? Street children and NGOs in Maputo, Mozambique

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**What about those shoes? Street children and NGOs in Maputo,
Mozambique**

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RESUMO: The implementation of a structural adjustment program in a war damaged Mozambique in 1987 had devastating consequences for the majority of the population. As people became squeezed between the increasing costs of living and no access to formal employment, more and more children and youth are seen making a living and/or living on the streets. The 'phenomenon' of street children has been targeted by many non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

As NGOs, in the context of economic liberalisation, take the place of governments regarding social services, it is important to understand the nature and quality of NGO assistance. Furthermore, the question of how street children view and experience these services is one that needs to be explored. In this paper I aim to explore these questions in the context of urban Maputo.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: crianças da rua, ONGs, desenvolvimento, infância, Maputo

KEYWORDS: street children, NGOs, development, childhood, Maputo

Introduction*

As De Boeck and Honwana (2005:1) remarked, nowhere is the challenge of youth in the twenty-first century more acute than in Africa. On the one hand, we behold the overwhelming demographic dominance of young people on the continent. On the other hand, the uncertain socio-political context and mass unemployment felt throughout many African states has positioned them under continuous and systematic strain. However, and despite this environment of limited resources and social instability, many young actors have ‘invaded’ the public space of the streets of African expanding towns (Biaya, 2005) and have demonstrated tremendous creativity in making a living for themselves (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005). In many ways central to negotiating continuity and change in any context (Durham, 2000), youth in Africa have revealed a remarkable capacity for local agency, transforming urban and rural contexts (Bordonaro and Carvalho, 2010). Nevertheless, groups of children and youth making a living on the streets are usually depicted as something to be contained, intervened upon; essentially ‘a problem to be solved’ (Hecht, 1998).

What draws so much attention towards street children is their visibility in the city centres. By ‘invading’ the city centres, street children defy the segregated order of the modern city by illegitimately occupying public space (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). They cannot be ignored and society is confronted with the fact that poor, sometimes very young, children have to search for a livelihood on the streets. They are poor children in the wrong place. It is this visibility that has triggered much non-governmental organizations (NGOs) intervention with street children.

According to Olga Nieuwenhuys, the term ‘street children’ has been part of a discourse constructed around the children of the urban poor, which has become very powerful in appealing to the ‘international charity market’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2001:551). Hecht (1998:157) has argued that all work with street children is shaped by moral judgments of how childhood ought to be. Children themselves have learnt that they can adopt the role of a ‘street child’ in order to gain access, through NGO services, to ‘proper childhood’ (Nieuwenhuys, 1999:45).

As NGOs, in the context of economic liberalisation, take the place of governments regarding social services, it is important to understand the nature and quality of NGO

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assistance. Furthermore, the question of how street children view and experience these services is one that needs to be explored.

I carried out fieldwork in different locations in Maputo but the Xipamanine *bairro*¹, with its huge informal market, was the main site of research. This was the place where the street boys receiving the services of the project “Centro de Encontro” *hung out* and carried out their livelihood. The techniques employed include participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with street educators and other NGO employees.

‘Street Children’

Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is not universal, but rather a specific structural and cultural component of societies (James & Prout, 2001). All societies have their own way of caring and protecting their children, but modern childhood is a Western conception exported around the world (Stephens, 1995). The category ‘street children’ is itself part of the globalization of western understandings of childhood, which took place through colonialism and further through the imperialism of international aid (Ennew, 1995 in Lee, 2001:61). The idea that the street is morally dangerous for children was a peculiarly northern European creation, which is now accepted well beyond the frontiers of Europe (Boyden, 2001).

Boyden (2001:207) argues that a universal standard of childhood has the effect of penalizing, or even criminalizing, the childhoods of the poor. Concepts like children *at risk* or *as a risk* are overly employed when young people’s actions or life styles fall outside western idealizations of childhood. Not surprisingly, street children fall in the categories of abnormal childhoods, outside the norm and particularly outside the control of adults. In fact, street children defy “Western cultural fantasies of children as innocent and vulnerable, in need of adult protection” (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005:3). Street children cross boundaries when they defy the dependency model by searching for autonomy and independence.

Young people dislocated from the places that are usually defined as normal for western, middle-class children, like family homes, schools and clubs organized by adults are ‘children out of place’ (Connolly & Ennew, 1996). Therefore, “to be a child outside adult supervision, visible on city centre streets, is to be out of place” (Connolly & Ennew, 1996:133). This notion is drawn from the work of Mary Douglas (1985), which conceptualizes that dirt is ‘matter out of place’; it is inappropriate in a given context. Objects which fall in the interstices of conceptual structures, that fail to fit a classification, are often seen as dangerous and mysteriously powerful (Stephens, 1995). Children on the streets are inappropriate elements in a given context; they draw our attention because of the conjunction between *street* and *children*, which contradict dominant ideas about situations suitable for children to grow up in (Glauser, 2001).

Thus, we have seen that the term street children is not impartial, it is biased by political discourses on the urban childhood of the poor by placing them outside modern childhood (Nieuwenhuys, 2001 & 1999; Stephens, 1995). It is a generic term, which obscures heterogeneity and is associated with pejorative connotations (Panter-Brick,

¹ The neighborhood of Xipamanine is situated approximately 5km northwest of the city center.

2002). Comprised in the term are a large group of children and youngsters who may be working on the streets and return home regularly or be homeless and live on the streets. There are many different ways to be a child of the streets, while most return home at night to sleep, many alternate sleeping outdoors with sleeping at home, and a minority live full-time in the streets. The children are active in the urban informal economy, varying from street vending and providing low-cost services to the public to begging, petty crime and prostitution (Nieuwenhuys, 1999; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). In varied contexts, researchers have found that there are much more boys than girls on the streets. Boys spend more time on the streets and the attractions of street life make it easier for boys to leave home because the street is not only a place of work but also a place where they enjoy friendships and have plenty recreation options. For girls it is more difficult to leave home and the street is more of a rough place. Although boys and girls alike may face violence, girls are more vulnerable to it, including sexual harassment and stronger discrimination (Nieuwenhuys, 2001). Not only are girls more vulnerable to physical violence but the gendered nature of public and private space makes it more difficult for them to leave the home (Hecht, 1998).

Development and NGOs

In the past 50 to 60 years, the relationship of Europe and North America to most Southern countries has been often related to the word *development*. Mark Hobart states that the discourses around it suggest an “altruistic concern for the less fortunate”, but it shouldn’t be forgotten that “development is big business” (Hobart, 1993:2). Esteva (1992) defines it as a comparative adjective, a very Western one, based on the assumption of a linear evolution of the world, with the industrialized nations heading the evolutionary progress. Modernity, as synonymous to science, technology and rationalism, and as opposed to tradition, was to be achieved by the ‘modernization project’, in which underdeveloped nations would be helped to ‘catch up’. Thus international organizations, with their Western inspired aid policies and interventions, conceived part of the world as ‘traditional societies’ in need of development and cultural modernity, following the European and North American models (Arce & Long, 2000:5).

Since the 1980s, NGOs have played growing roles in mainstream and alternative development projects (Edelman & Hangerud, 2005). The boom of NGOs in the South coincides with the structural adjustment reforms promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in which the state was to reduce substantially its expenditure on the social services. This led to a mushrooming of NGOs filling the gap left by the retreat of the state from the social services.

NGOs have been idealized as organizations that help others with no profit or no political agenda. This seems quite paradoxical when many European NGOs obtain funding from their respective national governments or the European Union, and likewise when NGOs are promoted by the World Bank (Fisher, 1997; Edelman & Hangerud, 2005). As international funding for NGOs increased, competition for such external resources intensified (Edelman & Hangerud, 2005), even competition with governments for foreign development funding (Fisher, 1997). This makes local NGOs dependent on uncertain largess of donors and redirects accountability towards funders.

Unaccompanied minors on the streets were rapidly earmarked as a target group for NGO initiatives. As remarked by Nieuwenhuys, street children represented in the media as both a threat and a challenge, as objects of pity and fascination largely appeal to the ‘international charity market’. Nieuwenhuys (1999:40-41) argues that these children, represented as urgently in need of help but competent enough to take charge of their own lives, have been the perfect allies for NGOs in their bids to raise funds and gain legitimacy. Ennew (1994:413) states that governments tend to abstain from developing policies for street children in favor of funding and encouraging NGOs engaged in actions to combat the problems, particularly actions which diminish the visibility of children on the streets. Therefore, the problems faced by these children are tapped by NGOs dissimulating the necessity of a state that provides for their welfare (Nieuwenhuys, 1999; 2001). This is also problematic in the way that it obscures the situation of the vast majority of impoverished children still living with their families. Children have learnt that to be a street child is a mediated role that they can adopt in order to gain access, through local NGOs, to proper childhood. For, they are not entitled to any help or intervention if they stay at home (Nieuwenhuys, 1999; 2001).

The context

After ten years of war, Mozambique gained its political independence in 1975. Two years after independence the economy began to grow again. However, following independence, FRELIMO² supported the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army and Rhodesia responded by launching attacks on Mozambique and by creating a Mozambican resistance movement (later called RENAMO)³. After the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, the activities of RENAMO were controlled and supported by still white ruled South Africa. The Regan Administration backed South Africa, as an anti-communist bastion, and gave private US support for RENAMO. The main objective of the armed aggression was to destroy the social infrastructure and overthrow the government (Minter, 1994). The war was fought until 1992.

Due to the war, but also due to a serious drought in 1983, the Mozambican government had to turn to the international aid community to prevent starvation. This aid only arrived with political pressures and eventually in 1987 a structural adjustment program was initiated. The money came with certain conditions, such as cutting public expenditure, devaluating the national currency, and the liberalization of trade (Espling, 1999). The war in Mozambique (Loforte, 1994) and structural adjustment in general (Nieuwenhuys, 1999) have been regarded as the main causes for the presence of children working and/or living on the streets.

According to the census (2007), the city of Maputo has 1,094,315 inhabitants, from which half are under 20 years of age.⁴ It was during the war period, between 1980 and 1990 that the population of Maputo increased more dramatically due to in-migration of internal refugees (Espling, 1999). However, the most dramatic change in the social conditions of the population came with the structural adjustment programs. With the

² FRELIMO, the only liberation movement, took undisputed power at independence in 1975.

³ RENAMO stands for Resistência Nacional de Moçambique

⁴ <http://www.ine.gov.mz/censo2007>

breakdown of formal employment opportunities, increasing costs of living, the lack of urban services, and so on, the living conditions in the informal settlements deteriorated (Abrahamson & Nilsson, 1995 in Paulo, Rosario, Tvedten, 2007:23).

While it is estimated that there are around 300 to 400 street children in Maputo, of these only a very small minority are girls. I was told that the very few girls living on the street stay mostly in closed places, like abandoned houses, and only come out during the night for sex work. Moreover, from this estimate, many kids return to their homes at night or alternate between sleeping on the street and at home.

In Maputo, there are some, mostly religious, closed institutions (*casas de acolhimento*) where street children and/or orphans spend day and night. I did not have the opportunity to visit these institutions. My focus here is on the ‘street-based’ programs employed by NGOs. When wandering the streets, during daytime or at night, one does not feel the presence of these programs or projects, as it is difficult to get a sight of their work on the streets. The apparent reason for this is the use of centers for their activities, to which the boys go to themselves⁵. These projects do not provide for accommodation during the night, so the children and youngsters look for a suitable space in the urban landscape to spend the night. During the day they are seen earning a livelihood on the streets.

NGOs employ different strategies in their work with street children. However, by large, ‘street-based’ programs are the most common today. In the past decades it has been widely acknowledged that children on the streets see peer relationships as relevant factors to their personal growth and identity (Ennew, 1994). Therefore, a more comfortable life while on the streets and the development of certain skills gained popularity. In spite of this, reintegration into mainstream society remains a fundamental objective. These ‘street-based’ projects also tend to be less expensive as the children and youngsters continue to provide for themselves on the streets. Services include: food programs; medical services; legal assistance; street education; leisure activities; entrepreneur programs; family reunification; and other activities aimed at reintegrating children into mainstream society.

Reintegrate them

The association “Meninos de Moçambique” was set up in 2000 by “Medicins du Monde” to provide medical assistance to street boys and girls. The association has been autonomous since 2001 and extended its activities to include other social areas. Located at downtown city center is the association’s open center. They work mostly with boys and girls (although in much smaller numbers) of *baixa* (downtown). The main objective of ‘Meninos de Moçambique’ is to provide support while the children and youngsters are on the street and facilitate the decision to go home, but only if they want to - “It’s always the child’s decision” said one of the street educators. When the child chooses to go home, the association’s intervention does not end. The school costs⁶ are paid for and the child is helped to initiate a small business. The educator explained that this way the child could contribute to the family’s income, which betters the relationship with their kin and

⁵ It seems that ‘street-based’ programs had developed more into ‘indoor’ programs.

⁶ School is for free but a small fee must be paid, which can be unaffordable for poor families. There are also schoolbooks and material to buy.

propitiates a feeling of responsibility and self-efficiency. This, in the end, prevents them from going back to the streets. “Crianças da Rua” was initiated in January 2008 as a project of a local NGO (KULIMA) financed by the French embassy. A team of 5 street educators worked with street boys in different locations in the city center. However, by September/October 2008 the activities were being held at the project’s center in Maxaquene, a *bairro* (neighborhood) about 5km north of the city center. In KULIMA’s project ‘Crianças da Rua’, boys who had been supposedly *reintegrated* would show up on the streets again after a while. About the reintegration process the assessor of the project, a Canadian expat, said - “The children often tell us they eat better while living on the streets than in their family environment... When trying to reintegrate them in their homes this reality plays with us because we see the precarious conditions...” Conticini (2008) argues that getting the child off the streets through family reunification activities is a simplistic approach. What if the child’s decision to leave the family home and move on to the street was the best option available? There is a general perception that the child or youngster needs to be rescued from *street life* in order to restore a childhood that is supposedly absent in the street. The insistence of removing children from the street and integrating them into the family rests in the idea that childhood is synonymous with domesticity (Hecht, 1998:160).

In my conversations and interviews with the boys it was apparent that for most of them, with a few exceptions, staying on the street with their friends and earning their own money was more appealing than staying at home or going to school.

Edu is twelve years old and was born in Maputo. His father passed away and his mother left to South Africa two years ago, leaving Edu with his grandfather. He now sleeps in the market, in the company of a few friends because his grandfather also left to South Africa. Edu does not like anything about his street life but finds no alternative for it.

In most occasions the boys actively choose to live on the street, even when their parents make effort in trying to bring them back home.

Sixteen year-old José says, “In the streets I started stealing and didn’t want to know about my home anymore. My parents looked for me and took me back home. I started school but after a while left again. This time I went directly to Xipamanine. I circulated the market stealing things and that’s when I met these guys.” Simião is fourteen years old and lives with his father in Maputo. He explains that he did not want to go to school, preferring to hang around in the market. He says “My father hit me for not going to school and that’s why I left home. But now he doesn’t hit me anymore.” Simião now sleeps at his father’s house but continues to use the market’s opportunities to make money, “To get money I steal at the market. I steal at the *calamidade*⁷.” The motivation to go on the street is explicitly stated by fourteen year-old Salomão, “What makes me stay on the street is money. I catch money at *calamidade*, or at Bazuca, a long time ago getting beans or at Malhanga getting garlic and selling to get money. With that money I can buy clothes, slippers and eat”.

The street can in fact be a place where children and youth make money. Consider the following case of Paito who has been able to build his own room with money earned on the street.

⁷ ‘calamidade’ refers to second hand clothes.

Paito is seventeen years old and has been on the street since he was eleven. He sleeps in his own house and even provides occasional accommodation to his friends. He tells, “Left home because I lost my slippers and was afraid to go back home without them... my mother came to look for me and said she wouldn’t beat me. So, I went home but as I was used to the market I came back... Here in Xipamanine I have no difficulties nobody does me anything. At *baixa* they (others on the street) would take my money. Sometimes the *misters* or the *ladies* at *baixa* would call for you to help them take out the garbage or push the car to the gas station and then give you money. Others would give us food in their homes. The days I didn’t have money I would come here (Xipamanine) to do *biscates*⁸ and then return to *baixa*. Even Quito lived there with me at *baixa*. I stayed 2 or 3 months at *baixa*. I slept at a bus stop, there close to the police station in Alto Mae. Now here, in Xipamanine I carry furnaces, pots and pans, or they give us food. But now I don’t sleep on the street anymore. I made a house, a room. I caught some money, 20€, and my friend here in the market changed it for me. So I bought plastic bags that you can put in water (waterproof) and started selling. After, another day, I caught some more money and increased the plastics; and bought broth to sell. That’s how I got money to make the room. Now I do the same thing”.

Other boys referred to playing with their friends as a reason for having left home and staying at the market.

Says thirteen year-old Juanisse, “At home, my mother died. I don’t have a mother. My father was sick but he’s good now. It was a boy that brought me here and I met these ones, I liked to play with them and didn’t want to go home anymore.” Juanisse describes what he likes to do in the street, “Here, at Xipamanine, I like to play pool, when I have money. Sometimes I go take a walk, pass by that stall and have a talk with the mister from there...” Juanisse also explains that he likes to study and that’s the reason why he comes to the project, “I was in the 7th grade but just went 2 days and then left... I don’t know why I left... I don’t know how to explain... but I want to recuperate. I like studying!”

Furthermore, NGO employees were very aware of the fact that many of the children in the projects were not sleeping on the streets. However, they continued to be portrayed as homeless street children in order to fit into the category for which funding was asked for. Many of these children went back to their family homes at night or alternated their time on the streets with days or even months spent at home. ‘Centro de Encontro’ is a project active in Maputo that divides itself into several intervention areas, among which there are activities targeting street children. This project’s main objective is to assure the boys education by providing primary school classes. Complementary to this, the boys received assistance regarding basic needs, such as health care, personal hygiene, the provision of clothes and a meal following the classes. At ‘Centro de Encontro’, when a boy would be absent for a few days, the street educator would say- “He probably went back home but he’ll be back”. When asked about his reason to leave home, fifteen year-old Dercio answered, “I just left, nothing really happened and when I want I go back home”. Dercio used to live with his stepmother and two of his brothers in the province of Gaza, until he decided to move to Maputo to look for work. In Maputo lived his grandfather and his sisters. He explained that when he felt like it, he went to sleep at his grandfather’s house. Just a few days before I left Maputo Dercio went missing. His friends explained he had to go back home to hide. He had to disappear for a while because he had stolen a big bag of *calamidade* and the owner of the merchandize was after him. Often the boys would say they were going home for a while, for example for the holidays. When asked if they were going back home to stay, they usually said, “No, I’ll be back”.

⁸ ‘biscates’ means odd jobs.

‘Sandwich politics’

Tobias Hecht found that the children do not see the social service institutions as a way out, or a means of leaving the street. Instead, they tend to view them as an integral part of street life from which to obtain material benefits (1998: 174-176). From what I could perceive in Maputo, although the underlying aim always seems to be to reintegrate the child in the family or simply just take him/her off the streets, there is always some kind of service provided to attract the child or youngster to the project.

The ‘sandwich politics’ – as these kinds of interventions have been nicknamed - has been heavily criticized for keeping the boys and girls in artificial dependency and even encouraging their stay on the streets (Pirot, 2004). Some NGOs have taken this very seriously and contend that street children should not be given ‘free’ meals.

What ‘Meninos de Moçambique’ does not do is give food and from the beginning the kids know this. An employee explained that it is not recommended to provide a meal a day to the street child when there are very poor families unable to provide this at home for their children. What they do is pay 15 meticais (about 50 cents) a day to the participants of their theatre activities because they have to spend some of their time on this activity, which is time not spent on providing for their food. A street educator said “they always have ways to get money for food, sometimes they even ask us to keep the money of the theatre, as a savings account”.

At ‘Centro de Encontro’ the boy’s education was attended to and the boys were entitled to a meal a day. The founder of the project explained that during school vacation the boys were not entitled to a meal because food should not constitute a stimulus. The aim was to give the boys the opportunity to keep up with their studies, or for the ones who never went to school, to begin preparing for the eventuality of entering formal education. The boys at ‘Centro de Encontro’ expressed their annoyance several times when the meal they were entitled to would not be provided. However, they never complained about not having class when the teachers would not arrive.

NGO employees working with street children in Maputo referenced the fact that donors want actions in which the results can be rapidly visible, “you take a photo and make the report to prove you did what was proposed”. They perceived that most donors do not have a clear idea of what takes place; neither do they really care, “as long as some good pictures are taken”. Accordingly, many projects are thought of in terms of short-term results and not in the long term, the donors “have their own agendas”. Furthermore, donors are inconsistent in their preferred areas of funding, which render the projects vulnerable to a sudden shortage of funding.

From what I could observe, the beneficiaries of these projects, the street children and youngsters, went from project to project, using the services provided according to their perceived needs or inclination. As the project from KULIMA was experiencing budget constraints and their activities were unstable, *their* boys were seen at ‘Meninos de Moçambique’ center. The boys complained about the inconsistency of the actions, the quality of the assistance that changed over time and the projects that ended without a clear justification.

What about those shoes?

At the backyard of “Centro de Encontro’s” street school, while Paulo and company prepare the *mata-bicho*⁹, cutting tomatoes, peeling garlic, boiling rice, ... I sit with a group of boys under the shade of the big old tree engaged in random conversations while playing a game of cards, of which I never seem to get the rules to. Above us, up on the tree, a few boys take the opportunity for a small nap. Unexpectedly, Juanisse enounces – “Mister! Have you seen her running shoes? They’re nice! They must have been expensive...”¹⁰, they begin to comment on the perceived quality of my running shoes. They discount my elucidations on their misguided perception, as the shoes were actually very cheap (only 10€). “Mister” continues – “Yes, they have good stuff there in Europe, good shoes...” I look around, see their bare-feet, old flip flops or completely broken old shoes and realize, how distant our worlds are, the reality of being an outsider from a privileged socioeconomic class, and feel embarrassed by the contrast, by the fact that 10€, or a pair of running shoes for that matter, means nothing to me. I also feel grateful for their acceptance of my presence among them. The *mata-bicho* is almost ready and the boys invite me to eat with them. I accept the invitation (Fieldnotes, Xipamanine, September 2008).

Among the boys I worked with, shoes were an important issue of concern. Shoes, or better, the lack of shoes, were a frequent theme in our conversations. Particularly in the interviews carried out many of the boys said that what they most needed was shoes. Obviously, being shoes (and running shoes) more expensive than the rubber slippers or flip-flops, every time they were offered clothes and footwear by the NGOs never were they lucky enough to receive what they so frequently asked for.

In her ethnography with adult homeless men and women, Simone Frangella writes,

The feet reveal mechanisms of social distinction in this universe of the street... The bare feet mark predominantly the stigma... The *Havaiana* flip-flops are a kind of ‘standard’ shoes for who is on the street... Shoes mark the difference in this universe, materially and symbolically. The shoe (which can be a running shoe) is one of the most difficult resources to find to cover the body. It is therefore the most disputed (Frangella, 2010:106-109)¹¹.

Hecht, as well, noticed that “poor children usually go barefoot or wear only open rubber slippers. Rich children may wear fashionable rubber slippers of bright colors at the beach, but not in the street, and normally their feet are not visible at all since they wear enclosed, laced shoes” (1998:78-79).

Asking ‘What about those shoes?’ implies addressing the way in which the views of street children are not seriously taken into account by those who aim to intervene on them. Children and youth are not really heard, interventions are top-down, reflecting mostly what adults, foreigners, and even the ‘international charity market’ (Nieuwenhuys, 2001) perceive is important to address. As observed by Tobias Hecht, while institutions may claim to be offering ‘salvation’, and short-term paternalistic handouts are shunned by most activist organizations, “the kids may merely seek a pair of rubber sandals” (1998:187). In conclusion, the children and youth working, *hanging around*, or living on the street in Maputo seemed to be making use of the services provided to them in the best way they could, without paying too much attention to discourses of ‘salvation’, or ‘reintegration’.

⁹ ‘Mata-bicho’ literally means kill the animal, in Mozambique it refers to the first meal of the day.

¹⁰ ‘Mister’ is the way the boys call the street educator.

¹¹ My own translation from the text in Portuguese.

Why do these children resist reintegration, and why do they keep on coming back to the street, are questions that need further exploration. Moreover, what are its implications for social interventions? I am inclined to believe that the reasons children and youth decide to make a livelihood on the street and/or actually live there are often misunderstood. Problems at home - violence, poverty and so on – are customary explanations. Yet, there are many children in similar conditions who do not decide to leave their homes. Actually only a very small minority of children considered to be in ‘vulnerable situations’ engage in *street life* and even a smaller number remain on the street. Moving away from commonplace victimization to an actor-centered perspective would permit a better understanding of the child’s motivations for running away from home (Bordonaro, 2010:15). Thus, children and youth on the streets in Maputo do not need to be ‘rescued’ but most likely better understood.

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