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CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MOBILITY: A STUDY OF TACTICS AND STRATEGIES AND INVOLVEMENT IN MANAGING THEIR SOCIAL TRAJECTORIES

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Introduction

The issue of protecting children and young people has led, distortedly, to the emergence two main caricatures in the policy field: that of the torturer and that of the passive child living powerless in a situation they have not chosen. The big baddie transports, mistreats, tortures, rapes the children and young people and must be hunted down. The child or young person is a victim that needs protecting. Among the ways to protect them, are the systems to prevent trafficking, which sometimes overlap with systems to prevent the displacement of minors. In many of the cases observed the two are in fact identical and interlinked. This confusion lies with the argument that the displacement of minors puts them in a vulnerable situation and they must be stopped, through force, if necessary. Although this argument stems from painful observations of the tragic situations that these minors endure in certain instances, it can sometimes over generalise and can misleadingly bracket together various different situations and social practices.

This situation has led to strategies being developed by children and young people at points of departure. This document aims to present a specific approach to the issue of the displacement of children and young people in Africa. This approach favours the points of view of these children and young people and the actual conditions they are dealing with, in order to be able to better understand the practices observed among these groups. In terms of its design, this approach gives primary focus to the relations between men and their social groups in terms of the mobility of children and young people. It also places emphasis on the types of mobility and cross-cutting social dynamics. Focus is mainly on the protagonists, but also on the structural constraints of their actions. It aims to empirically assess existing mobility practices and the social principles behind them. We will not focus in on the issue of understanding what migration, through the transfer of money, brings to the country of departure's development, or to that of the host country, as many previous studies have (Kayser 1977). The framework of this study relates to one single concern: understanding how social factors are at the root of strategies developed by minors, with regard to issues linked to their displacement that are seen as "risky" – this will be assessed in terms of them as social beings ahead of taking the specific structural constraints of their environment into consideration. Also, what tactics do they use on a daily basis to help them implement their strategies?

It has been decided that this displacement analysis will go above and beyond concepts such as "migration" and "trafficking" which respectively give the impression that displacement frameworks are

static and that there is a high moral burden on those involved. This analysis will also go further by demonstrating that not all displacement of children and young people is forced and that sometimes it occurs within frameworks that these young people are fully involved in, and that they can be the main organisers of their own routes. This angle, which is firmly based on the specific experiences of children and young people on the move, shows us that there is an ongoing dynamic backwards and forwards between departure zones, transit zones and arrival zones. The status of these different zones does not remain static during a young person's migration route: a departure zone could become a transit zone or an arrival zone, or vice-versa.

Methodological implications of research into the trajectories of young people on the move

Research into mobility was carried out on the move and in this way had the constraint of itself being mobile. On a practical level it was organised by taking into account the three socio-spatial locations – the departure zone, the transit zone and the working zone.

All human activity observed in the transit zones of children and young people in mobile situations are just as important as observations that can be made in departure zones and places of work. To this end, there are two ways of producing data: the first, which is the most desirable, is to be able to discretely follow candidates at their point of departure, where their movement begins, and follow them to their places of work. Opportunities of this kind are very rare due to the complex nature of the displacement processes of these children and young people. This complexity can be linked to discourse on the displacement of minors, the moral burden that sanctions them and above all to anti-trafficking activities on many major roads. The first idea of following minors in their movements in real time has not often been possible. The other possibility is to follow the route of young people who have already left. Their progress can be pieced together by talking to those involved at both ends – the point of departure and the point of work. By talking to former young migrants we learnt that there had been an increase in the routes undertaken, which led us to identify different transit locations and the main people managing them. We must note that a number of transit points are also departure, reorientation and swapping points, etc. By employing this alternative technique we were able to carry out many interviews at transit points, with people who, due to their positions, had often witnessed the process.

Understanding mobility by looking at the trajectory of young migrants

It is necessary to make a clear distinction in our understanding: the displacement itinerary is not the same as the mobility trajectory. The displacement itinerary is linked to the spatial dimension of

movement and in many of these cases has been highly documented through migratory journeys. It does not however allow us to understand the dynamics underway in these areas of displacement or in the roles of the different people involved.

The concept of mobility trajectories seems appropriate and relevant in order to analyse from a (resolutely empirical) socio-anthropological point of view the many different types of interaction during the displacement of children and young people. This concept is seen above all as a way of analytically organising the large range of events that come into play (Strauss 1992: 144) in the displacement of a child or young person. This also assumes that there is a succession of different practices and strategies relating to the decision to leave, in terms of the way they travel and the way they fit into their host surroundings. Although to a certain extent these different practices involve recurring and more or less routine types of behaviour for those often at the centre of it, there are still things that are unexpected; contingencies and other considerable diversions from the goal. Mobility trajectories refer to both geographic routes integral to the migratory journeys and the social dynamics that accompany them, which are planned by various different people involved. By analysing the mobility trajectories of young people we can therefore capture empirical data about all the people involved, who in whatever way play a role in the displacement of these young people and in the experiences that lone children or collective groups live through during displacement. These experiences can be positive (in terms of initiation) and allow them to develop in their social maturity and therefore raise questions about the issue of protection. By taking this position we can escape from normative assumptions that show the experiences of young people during displacement in a negative light. This analysis therefore shows us a three-way transaction for these young people: interpersonal transaction, biographical transaction and an economic transaction.

According to whether or not the young person is "mature", the interpersonal transaction could relate to mobility to allow them freedom or to undertake a placement with a guardian, who is a fairly close relation. In the interpersonal transaction, the individual also improves their relationship and knowledge skills; things that are useful for their lives.

The biographical transaction relates to the individual's social mobility. This is what is most visible in the life of the individual. The elements of the biographical transaction show us what has become of the individual due to their mobility. Here what was experienced and the psychological and physical resources mobilised during this process come together to build a post-mobility identity, which is not

always the same as their departure identity. Biographical transactions, which can be productive, relate to positive or negative discourse on the impacts of their mobility: "they copy the way of life of other people", "they don't want to hear about our cultural initiation"....

The economic transaction relates to the role of the local micro-economy that feeds mobility and to the more or less non-local financial issues that affect them. In terms of the cases observed of mobility due to cotton, for example, we can see that the economy of the cotton industry relies on dynamics involving these children and young people as farm workers. Farmers recognise that they cannot do without the services of these workers. They establish their relationships with these young people as a way of satisfying their needs. This process is embellished by some people with the image of two hands mutually washing each other. One has a need for the other and by interacting they can both take advantage of the situation.

Two aspects must be taken into account when assessing different types of mobility insofar as by combining them we get the general framework of understanding that we can have in terms of what these individuals give through their behaviour in this domain: spatial mobility and social mobility. We must note, however, that in all instances that the actions of social actors themselves relate a range of arguments, which are worth noting.

Social reasons of the mobility of children and young people

Social factors here refer to the issues related to the social structures which are taken into consideration when preparing and executing a strategic plan (Naville 1961:7). An analysis of the recurring issues in the social structures in different migration zones is therefore essential to be able to understand the reasons for movement.

The main causes of child and youth displacement in many towns are historical and structural. Studying historical reasons shows that this issue has been mentioned by many people as having a certain influence over the current attitudes of young people. The displacement trend for young people is recognised almost unanimously as not dating from current times. There is therefore a feeling that in the towns investigated that when looking at the issue of migration, more in-depth historical aspects need to be highlighted. It appears that the trend for population displacement in whatever way it is defined is part of some kind of continued behaviour from the past. We must note, however, that around this practice

there are many different trajectories and an infinite number of different arguments to justify their behaviour. Their motivational factors are also diverse.

Gradually the displacement of young people has led to the search for various specific material goods. These are things that life in the village does not give them access to and which in the eyes of young people determine social differentiation. The general feeling is that once the needs of a young person includes elements that they cannot find where they are, they are driven to displacement to find what they are missing , but above all to the financial resources to be able to acquire them. This fact, which is seen as a constraint of the rural environment that the children and young people grow up in can also be linked to wider structural dimensions: the socioeconomic and political structure and objective material constraints which mean that the young people are often obliged to move away at a given time to fulfil their needs. From these factors that are seen as structural constraints in the displacement of children and young people, the economic and financial argument is the biggest issue. From this point of view, the issue of their displacement is no longer a simple copycat of historical behaviour but a response to the precarious material conditions that these populations in the departure zones are living with. This precariousness relates to the main activities of these populations and the difficult conditions that they undertake them in.

The fact that the young people are looking elsewhere to find the resources they need to feel better in their home town points to the larger issue of environmental problems. Climatic conditions mean that for farming work (numbers increase according to the number of relations) to be undertaken in good conditions, it must be moved to richer and more fertile land. In general the only resources families have are their agricultural products. Food, material and financial needs are provided for using this sole resource. In many cases this results in serious problems to fulfil all the family needs. The young people, who are the able-bodied ones in the families, have more and more responsibility for production and making the necessary resources available for their family. Moving away in this context is seen as a way of escaping this responsibility.

Among the factors that affect the behaviour of young people and which push them to move away, another issue is the local understanding of the willingness to work hard. In certain towns this relates to working in the fields; the young person who wants to quickly gain their independence has to be good at working the land. Skills of a student or of an apprentice of a craft do not have much value. The fact that they are linked to dependency and disillusion around school does not help to change how they are

perceived. This perception is largely due to the parents whose behaviour shows the young person clearly that the price of social consideration is dedication to working on the land and being able to "look after yourself". Looking after yourself means freeing yourself from the family's responsibility, but above all to actively participate, at a very young age, in taking care of the family's needs.

From this perspective, displacement does not just happen randomly. Leaving and returning are linked to a certain number of rationalities that include the scale of the harvest and their adequate/inadequate contribution to the family. Mobility is seen as a family tactic which allows the harvested produce at the end of the season to satisfy the family's food needs. Young people on the land are therefore encouraged to leave just after the harvest to reduce the pressure on the others, but also to produce additional resources by working elsewhere. The social structure can be seen as a favourable or unfavourable element with regards to the migration of children and young people. In the cases observed in the north west of Benin, for example, where minors work in the cotton fields, the young people have very strong free-thinking spirits. Young people from the different towns in the regions gain their independence at a younger age than in other regions of the country. At a very young age they therefore undertake activities more or less freely that are done by adults in other places. In these conditions of minors having too much freedom, the mechanisms of them migrating do not involve any discussion with their parents. The minors therefore find themselves the main ones who liaise with intermediaries if they come across them in their migration path.

Children and young people at the start of their mobility trajectory

Children and young people play a major role in managing their migration paths. All the strategies they develop during this time aim to limit the effectiveness of systems to combat trafficking of minors. However, these strategies are put in place by the children and young people themselves or at least with their full involvement in order to achieve the goals they have set themselves or that have been set by their social groups. Implementation of these strategies involved employing certain tactics, such as concealment, the effect of surprise, solidarity within gangs led by minors of the same age, departing without an adult intermediary to stop them, etc.

In the departure towns investigated the issue is reflected in semiology, as this proverb demonstrates: "*la poussière des pieds est mieux que celle des fesses*" (literally translated as: dust on your feet is preferable to dust on your behind). This proverb promotes displacement that brings hope to the harvest. A person who migrates must, when they return, be able to bring something back, compared to people

who have stayed, which is not an enviable position in the areas studied. The factor that triggers the desire to "leave" comes about therefore from a structural environment that is generally favourable to the displacement dynamic. The way in which displacement occurs often depends on the destination and the thing that has triggered the process. If the desire to leave has been brought about by an intermediary that has arrived in the town, they may give the travel costs to the candidate and then set up a place to meet in a neighbouring town. The ways in which young people and children move have developed over time. Reports state that young people used to leave en masse and in convoy. However, these methods of displacement, which were easily apprehended by child anti-trafficking committees, have changed to adapt to the constraints of check points and controls.

Minors themselves are becoming more and more involved in developing "easy" departure mechanisms. The tactics developed give rise to clever ways of bypassing the safety nets set up by child anti-trafficking committees. This strategy of bypassing is often put in place using various tactics, such as concealing preparations for departure. These tactics can sometimes occur within the family, with the parents in collusion. In other cases the parents remain outside of this and state, like everyone else, that their child has disappeared from the village. In many of the recorded cases, therefore, it is the work of children and young people.

Following young mobile populations in control of the course of their lives

The idea of piecing together the journeys and different activities undertaken to manage the trajectories of young mobile populations arose from the discourse of various participants and observers of the process. This analysis covers very little of the directly observed data. The accounts of these trajectories are just as much the result of those who have experienced them first-hand as those who have observed them directly. By reconstructing them we have been able to pinpoint a group of actors and the roles they play in the processes described.

Following the trail of young migrants we encounter many different people. One example are students who take up temporary jobs in order to save up enough money to allow them to go back to school so they do not have to rely on their parents who do not have the means - or do not want to support their child who has chosen to go to school to the detriment of the family fields.

On the trail we also come across members of anti-trafficking committees for children and young people. The presence of these committees sometimes results in a failing of the system whereby children are exploited: some parents promise their children to the intermediaries or farmers who come to collect

them whilst the parents inform campaigners who intercept them as they leave the village. Traffickers are then forced to pay money to negotiate a favourable outcome of what can be considered a blatant case of trafficking a minor. Revenue made this way is often shared between the campaigners and the parents.

We also encounter professional or occasional intermediaries, taxi drivers and other hosts. The intermediaries are becoming ever younger and are they themselves agricultural workers from a previous generation. They take their new colleagues to employers who has made a good impression on them. The fact that these agricultural workers as so young is due entirely to a certain category of participant in this framework: the *'tuteurs'*.

The tuteur's role is central to the social trajectory of the young mobile agricultural worker. All the dynamics and the changes they bring about are constructed for the most part around the tuteur. In this way we become aware of a widespread feeling within the system and of a connection between the migratory experience of each young person with the nature of their relationship with their tuteur.

The role played by taxi drivers is also important. The role of this participant and the scope of their work in the trajectory of mobile children and young people is explained to us by an observer who points out that these taxi drivers, who can be found at bus stations in villages, are complicit in everything that takes place. They act as an accomplice for both the young people and the intermediaries. Some of them even play the role of the intermediary themselves.

Although on the whole the young people we come across in the phases of agricultural mobility do not attend school, it is worth noting that there are some who have dropped out of the school system even though the movements of this latter group are often not oriented towards agricultural activities. This group of young people are more drawn to urban environments. Their movement appears to be more of an "adventure" because they allow themselves to be influenced by the allure of the town and the idea of being "adventurers". Some of them never return to the village and quickly become part of the urban Diaspora.

The general feeling shared by the different villages is that the Diaspora strongly encourage migration. Some villagers, who are established in other towns that are more or less favourable, ask their parents who have remained in the village to send children to them to help them to work in their fields. Some

believe that the children who are sent in this way can often be exploited at will. This practice generates migration because:

"...Once there, the guardians or new parents do not take the age of the children into consideration before throwing them into the cotton fields. After 3 or 4 years others leave for new, often unknown destinations. This makes them into perpetual adventurers. They are of no use either to the person who brought them here or to the parents who stayed in the village".

We may observe that in many cases, the parents of migrant children and young people have an important role to play. The majority of the observers and other participants recognise the responsibility of the parents in the migration of their offspring. Their role varies from indirect encouragement to taking children directly to places of work. Anti-child-trafficking activities have seen many children who were stopped by the committees or the police force and sent back to their parents then returned to their places of work. In general, once children are returned home, it is the parents (the fathers in particular) who take them back again. There are indeed cases of contracts between the farmers and the children's parents for which the conditions are often linked to family needs. In this scenario, the child is like an ambassador with a mission to improve family circumstances. In the majority of cases the child works for the farmer who at the end of the contract buys construction materials to allow the family to build a home. In this case, the young worker just gets a radio or a couple of outfits bought by the employer. The ideal farmers are those who once the job is done buy what they have promised and return the child with the fruits of their labour. These farmers are never short of young workers. There are even those who brag that they have facilitated the building of half of the village homes.

Types of mobility resulting in the analysis of young people's social trajectories

We now turn to analysing the role played by young people and children in the negotiation of their mobility trajectories. This analysis presents the sum of interactions between these young people and children and the main participants who work towards achieving these trajectories. The departure points, transit zones and places of work are therefore viewed as continuous and as a playing field in which the children and young mobile people interact on a daily basis in either a real or symbolic way. The collection of dynamics observed in the mobility trajectories can be synthesised by geographic and social mobilities. Combining these two brings about various different reasons that are either favourable or unfavourable for mobility as the observed practice.

- **Geographic mobility**

This refers to territorial displacement which can lead to movements, but are not necessarily permanent migration. Geographical mobility are not just movement from place A to place B. They are often constructed around two linked points, between which people move to and fro, like a pendulum; the departure point, and the place which the migrants visit. The concept of geographical mobility therefore departs from a linear understanding of spatial displacement and encompasses the continuously negotiated social contingencies, which frame movement. The itineraries envisaged do not always become the itineraries followed. These encompass diverse forms of displacement involving a more or less permanent in the destination, depending on whether the reasons for departure are structural problems and whether the destination areas are favourable for long term installation. The actors encountered in the transit zones can influence and modify the itineraries of the young migrants. Here the displacement, while geographical, depends on social networks, which influence the routes and movement. This is therefore not about getting from A to B in a mechanically constituted fashion or about following the analysis of the migratory flow.

This type of mobility (geographic) is the one given most media coverage and is linked to the misconceptions about children and young people. This is the main area of action to combat the trafficking and exploitation of children. This comes from the idea that there is a huge amount of risk of abuse associated with displaced children. The types of geographic mobility vary according to the length of stay, the methods of organisation, the end goal, the destination, the number of people involved etc. The links between geographic mobility and different vulnerabilities linked to such moves are complex. As a result, this practice is morally charged and always remains sanctioned by all those involved in combating the trafficking of minors.

On the whole, geographic mobility appears to be perceived in many different ways. At population level opinions depend largely on the end goals of the displacement in question. When minors leave with a view to producing useful collective resources, the practice is well appreciated. However, when children or young people leave in order to produce resources for themselves, the practice is stigmatised.

The regulations put in place to protect children aim to stop the geographical migration of children and young people. In an operational sense, analyses of the mobility of children and young people have revealed that displacement strategies implemented by these youngsters are dynamic and respond to

the anti-trafficking framework, which in actual fact comes across as a set of anti-movement measures.

Ces stratégies conduisent dans certains cas à des déplacements individuels et des regroupements sur des lieux précis préalablement retenues par l'ensemble des candidats. La mobilité géographique est aussi liée au fait des pratiques de changement de parcours du fait des influences dans les zones de transit. En effet certains enfants et jeunes engagés dans le processus changent de localité de destination sous l'influence de quelques acteurs tels que les tuteurs dans les zones de transit.

In certain cases, these strategies lead to individual movements and regroupings at precise locations, which are known by all the candidates. Routes are often changed as a result of issues affecting transit areas. Indeed some children and young people involved in the process change their destination town.

- **Social mobility**

Social mobility largely structures territorial mobility insofar as it relates to all the reasons or the end goals of the moves. In a general sense, social mobility encourages the movement of children and young people between borders linked to cultural, economic and/or social statuses of a given social milieu. Consequently, it is not the biological age of social migrants that is important to the locals involved but rather their social age. By the same token, they believe that it is not so much the conditions of work which are important but the end goal of the work being carried out. It is therefore a question of moving socially, reaching borders established by the statuses and the different social contingencies and ensuring geographic mobility is followed by an upward and fulfilling social mobility. The children and young people therefore place this main concern at the centre of the dynamics in which they are involved, which defines a whole range of strategies that they develop.

For example, we have found that young agricultural workers often try to secure relationships with farmers. This leads for example to the tactic of changing bosses. This is a form of mobility noted among young people who change bosses within a village. This switch generally happens without the consent of the employer who has been let down. In many cases, this happens between seasons. In this scenario, this means the employer not being happy with the agricultural worker. It has been reported that on the odd occasion these changes have happened within the same season. The employers then believe that this is due to a failure to meet the workers basic needs, in particular their daily supply of food. These experiences are largely in keeping with the interactions between the young agricultural worker and their employer. The village where the workers have come from discredit the farmers who fail to keep their

promises. But their attitudes have also lead to the formalising of contractual relationships between the two parties with a growing preference for short tenant farming contracts.

A change in the status of former agricultural workers is also noted in the dynamics. For some it is similar to an ascending mobility. This is the case for those agricultural workers who return home and then become intermediaries (tuteurs). Their knowledge of workplaces and the social networks that they have established are important factors in their change of status. Those who have experienced a move and return home with "something" are generally the favoured ones. It is the successful young agricultural workers for whom their return has lead to them wanting more, who very easily and very often become intermediaries. They then take on others who stayed on in the village during the process. What gains respect and admiration for them is less what they say but more what they bring back with them after a long period of time away from their village. The amount of time they have spent in mobilising resources is also a determining factor in the change of their status. The ideal is to come back with a certain amount of resources and materials after a relatively short period of time away. The change in status is not linked to age. A worker who is young and has been successful working for a farmer and has achieved a good relationship with them can go on to become a more credible intermediary than others who are older than him. The advantages of this process of social mobility are more symbolic than financial. Those workers who have acted as intermediaries often do not ask to be paid benefits as the "professional" intermediaries do. Change in status is for the most part governed by self-motivation of the individual and the aptitude of the employer in respecting his duties towards his employees. The worker's enthusiasm makes them a role model and all the farmers say that the young people who come across the worker's intermediary will take him as a model. Such status changes allow for a great deal of strategies to bypass the anti-trafficking system to develop. As a result, it is the person who knows the places well who takes other young people there and so it is not easy either for the security forces or the campaigners to intercept them. Young people usually move around in groups, from the same generation and without a guardian who could be considered a trafficker and stopped. Moreover some observations of talibes show that groups of children and young people who migrate are not always homogenous. It can be noted for example that in certain groups of talibes (students studying and sometimes working with a muslim cleric), child abuse is sometimes inflicted by older children (Lagunju and Diop 2006).

A change of role is noted in the cases where farmers are all-powerful at the start of the process and are unable to keep to their promises to the workers whom they have used in their fields. An interviewee states on this issue: "When they arrive they are our slaves. We use them as we wish. But as soon as we

sell cotton, we become their slaves". This observation is all the more pertinent if the farmer finds himself unable give the worker what he owes them.

The analysis of conflicts that sometimes occur between employers who are unable to pay their workers and the workers themselves, suggests to us that we should not assume that young people are passive victims of a system which always sets out to crush them. Within these conflicts, we notice shifts whereby practices which initially had nothing to do with trafficking then do. The aim was not one of exploitation but of agricultural work paid according to the rather precise tacit contractual clauses. These contracts are themselves subjected to environmental constraints. Indeed, the provisions in terms of annual revenue in order to pay the worker can be distorted by climatic constraints or political-economic contingences which mean that the farmers do not earn what they had hoped and find they are unable to pay what they owe to the workers. In the case of adult workers, the problem is solved by the authorities who can deal with simple civil matters (police, court) or by the local authorities who deal with resolving disputes (head of the village or the president of a national organisation) or even by reaching an agreement between the conflicting parties. The shift towards mediation of the problems in the form of trafficking and exploitation comes into effect when the situation involves minors. In this case the number of people who take part in the management of the crisis and the way things develop puts us immediately in the framework of anti-trafficking.

The discourse of a certain number of interlocutors reveals that mobility also leads to young people stealing. We notice such cases in the mobility trajectories that have resulted in descending social migration. These kinds of experiences serve as bad examples to the people who have remained at home.

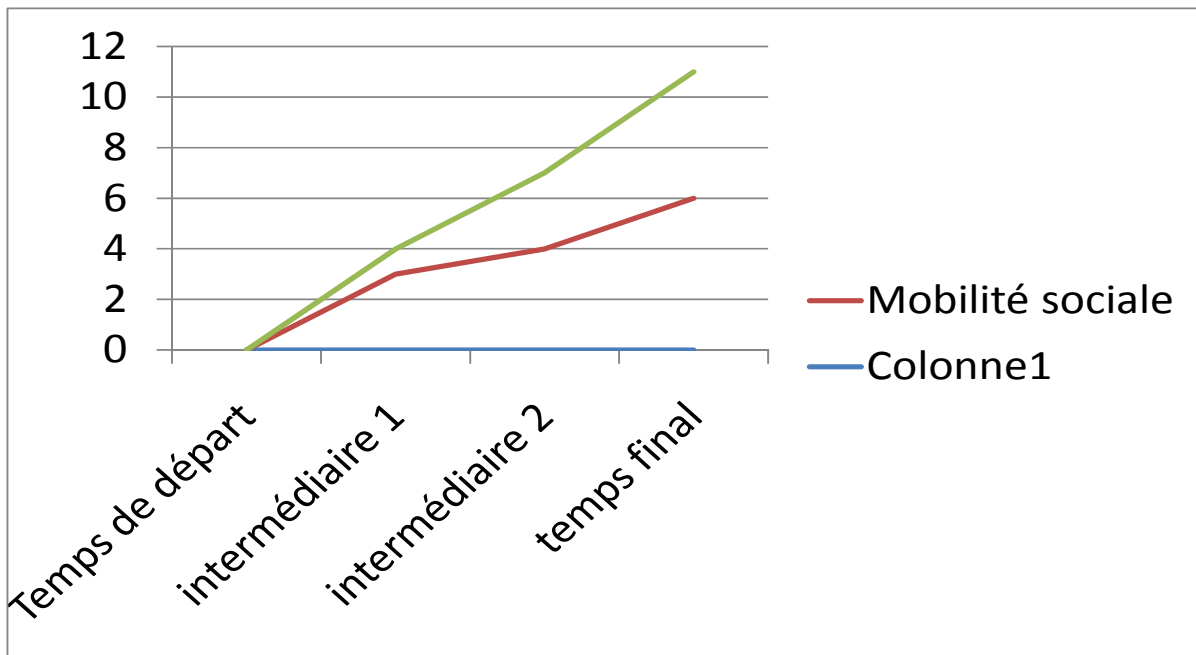


Figure 1: Situation socialement favorable à la mobilité.

Figure 1 illustrates the social benefits which migration can entail. This happens when geographical movement leads to an increase in social status. In these cases we found that in the home areas those people who were seen as successful were migrants; migration offers the hope of realising personal dreams and also of mobilizing resources for the family. When this happens, the bad experiences of the child migrant are minimised in comparison with the positive outcomes - the migration experience is so highly valued socially, that there is a tendency to collectively dissimulate about the realities of the experience, and to focus on the valuable material objects brought to the village etc. Young labourers (or other workers) who return home and become intermediaries experience a change in social status. This change in status is not linked to age, but rather to success in the work place and whether the worker has developed good enough relations with their employer to become a credible intermediary. In these circumstances migration is encouraged and the anti-trafficking committees are not able to stop departures.

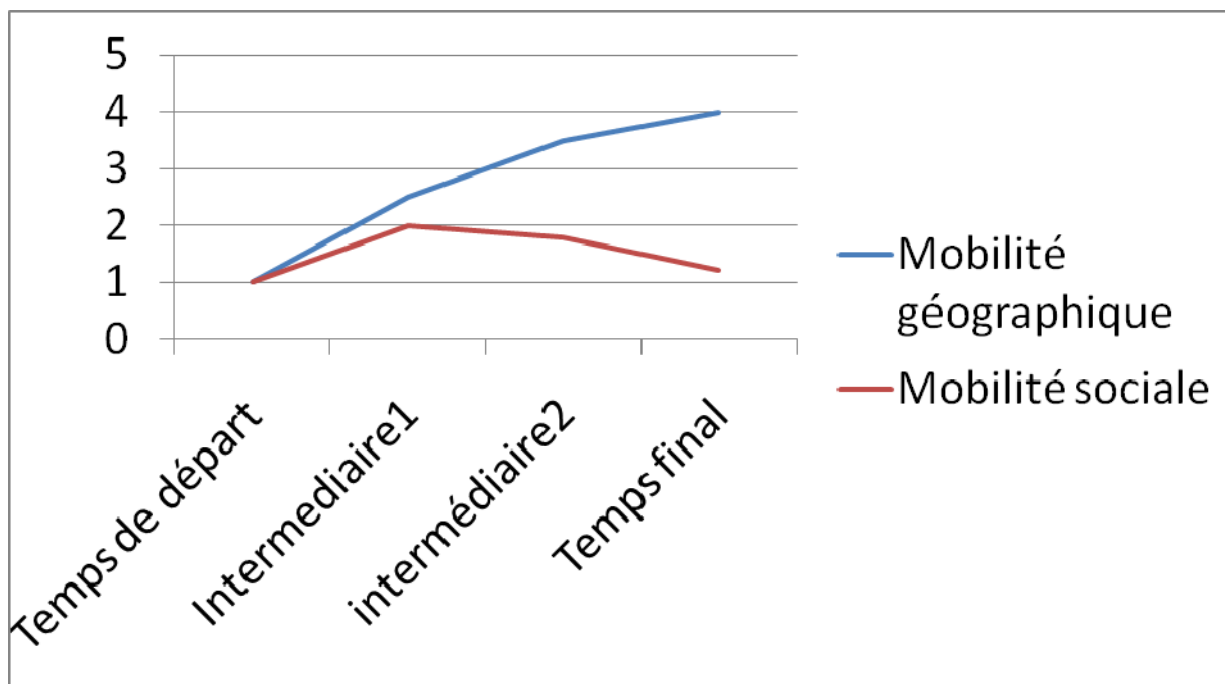


Figure 2 : Situation socialement défavorable à la mobilité.

Figure 2 represents contexts where migration is not seen as beneficial. In these circumstances it is seen as a social problem, and the actors adhere closely to the protection programmes put in place by development organisations. Geographical mobility is condemned, because it leads to downward social mobility for children and young people. In this case the move brings no benefit to the child and is rejected by the home population. In these circumstance the figure of the ‘adventurer’ emerges; the young rural person who, because his journey has resulted in failure, is too ashamed to return to his village and instead becomes a ‘delinquent’ in the town. Parents use this character as a warning to their children. One interviewee said:

‘When you go, you have become someone (in quotation marks). You have come back without any problems and you are a manager, you set your self up well, the people envy you. They envy you for everything you are. It is when you come back in a bad way and you struggle to set yourself up, you have problems with your parents, or with whoever, and then you don’t understand why no one will listen to you.’ (Matéri 2007, avril).

To conclude

The notion of mobility allows us to outline multiple and diverse dynamics. There are practices that correspond to geographical displacement similar to migration and periodic moves which do not force the individual to leave their home environment. Mobility takes us back to non-linear displacement, spatial but also circular moves that link various destinations with the goal of realising an objective in life.

Consequently we understand that mobility forces us to remain realistic regarding geographical displacement with the social and the individual dynamics that accompany them without prior judgement. It is a matter of understanding the mechanisms and the reasons for the mobility of children and young people and the strategies they develop in order to fit in or better negotiate the dynamics of which they are part. Mobility moves us away from the moral and ideological burdens that present children and young people as passive victims of social situations where the adults who only think of themselves bring about tragedy.

We therefore understand that the experience of mobility in the way that we present it can only be understood by combining the reasons for departure, the displacement contingences and the experience of the time spent in the social environment of the destination. The implications of mobility are obvious as much in the places the migrants come from as in the transit areas and the places of work, which are three continuous environments affected by the same practice of movement of material and symbolic resources. These movements or transactions translate into the status changes of social, economic and even professional and political positions. They translate also in terms of acquisition of new skills and capacities. For example, young mobile populations in search of resources are neither marginalised nor selfish but rather decent people who want to portray a certain image to their families.

The problem: there are no individuals, either public or private, able to quickly put a stop to the mobility of hundreds of thousands of children, just as these different kinds of mobility do not only include negative or marginal aspects, but moreover correspond to types of regulation, development and protection that are integral to contemporary African societies.

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