Work of grief over infancy in street adolescents in Cameroon

Amana Evelyne
[1] Département des Sciences de l'éducation,
École normale supérieure de Yaoundé, Université de Yaoundé I , Cameroon

Abstract

Adolescence is a period that is marked by an identity crisis which is itself a consequence of the balance-unsettling puberty transformations following the earlier resolution of the oedipal complex. Balance will be once again activated after the latency period. These transformations trigger others on the affective level (emotional, bonds to earlier objects). A crisis in the social bond can also be observed through this questioning of norms along with family and social values. These different crises contributing to identity construction are "developmental tasks" typical in subjects who actually go through this period; hence they constitute an important process of maturation. The subject can however face difficulties fulfilling those tasks. The article engages this challenge of *grieving the passing infancy* with its particular symbols as experienced by some adolescents in their responsibility to work out new symbols. In fact, every developmental crisis should, according to Wallon (1963), mediate the passing to the next stage. It is therefore manageable. In the special case of adolescents in the street, the persistence of the crisis characterized by anti-social behaviors specific to this population is nothing else but the difficulty in *letting go* of the symbols of infancy. This argument about the 'grieving over infancy' or mourning of infancy draws on works such as Nasio (2004); Delvenne Nicolis (2007); Marteaux (2008) and Franceschini (2012). The results collected through interviews and observations show the persistence in 'street adolescents' of behaviors unfavorable to the realization and reorganization of identity.

Keywords: adolescent in the street-grieving over infancy-crisis-development-identity.

1   Introduction

Adolescence denotes a period of life during which the rearrangements of relations to adulthood which are parents and educators, the rearrangements of relations to childhood, in the body are disrupted. The outside world is scary, we rub and even shy away from it through depression, we face it through anti-social behaviours (Delvenne & Nicolis, 2007). The question of grief is essential in adolescence: grief for parental idealized images, bisexuality grief, grief for childhood and its omnipotence, and of absolute power. Individual members who make up the family must develop alongside the adolescent in order to accompany in the process in which he or she is engaged. According to Marteaux (2008), adolescence is marked by the grief of childhood.

The process in which the subject is engaged will lead him to the realization of the specific developmental tasks of the period. He must accept his new body which is still not the one he used to dream of, also open up to the outside world to make new contacts other than those established within the family. With biological maturity, he or she progressively engages into sexual intimacy. He is free from parental control and the ability to make future choices in life is the result to reach the adult stage, in full autonomy. To achieve this, the developmental context of the subject is still required. The one in which the subjects in our current study develop is atypical, with the absence of the first libidinal objects which serve as support or bolster. To this we would rightly ask ourselves the question *how does the work of grief in childhood develop in street adolescents in Cameroon?*

We aim to review and analyze the grieving process in these subjects. As a follow-up, we present the life lived on the streets, the theory that enables us to explain the problem and then the methodology.

2   Life lived by street adolescents

The urban phenomenon of the 21st century has made the streets a place of residence by "street children", "street adolescents" and also "street adults" (Amana, 2012). In turn, the street has become a developmental context to be considered by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. This is an environment that

conditions a specific mode of living. Its presentation will be structured around the description of this living space, its culinary and sartorial codes.

The street, open space for the movement of goods and people was privatized by its inhabitants, and therefore, it has become a place of residence. No housing code is taken into account as market sheds, abandoned cars and houses or those under construction, verandas of trading areas are the habitats of the street population. Cartons may in this case serve as a bed.

The street has always been characterized as dangerous in unanimity by authors. It is a place of violence, jungle where only the fittest have citizenship. The use of white weapons for self-defence, the consumption of psychoactive substances in all forms by all the inhabitants of the street, are all aspects of their culture that rank them on the side of criminology.

The dress code does not follow that of any culture in Cameroon. These are subjects that are characterized by the absence of clothing and personal hygiene, the consequence of a lack of stable and developed toilet space.

The culinary code equally is of cultural marginalization insofar as Cameroonian meals obey every local specificity and is a ritual that brings together members of a family, strengthening ties and affection, that which does not fit into the habits of street inhabitants. Everyone takes it to his convenience and according to his income to the street vendors who sell cooked food. Beverage sales areas attract this population whom alcoholism lays as one of their characteristic.

This open space, transformed into habitat with its characteristics thus described has consequences both for the subject, the family and the society at large. At the individual level, their health is threatened and remains an issue of much concern. At the family level, there is disaffiliation and weakening of the family unit. On the side of the society, it demands huge expenses to direct this street population coupled with insecurity, an issue to whom may be attributed responsibility. Although this description is bleak for the street milieu, the fact remains that not only as a developmental context, it also remains a bolster/support environment for street adolescents.

3   The street: a support environment for adolescents

Adolescence in general is characterized by the weakening of first links with libidinal objects which are family members, and establishing new links in this context, between "street adolescent", the "street parental substitutes ", the police, etc. Unlike Brazil, Madagascar and China to name a few cases, where the

population of the street consists of both sexes, that of Cameroon remain exclusively male. Within the group, values such as solidarity, endurance are developed.

The activities performed, although described as devaluing the human person (Amana, 2012), questionably the specificity of childhood, are adaptive. They have as a whole for finality the search for income, a condition for survival in this environment. Street adolescents clean cars, carry on small ambulant trades, recover scrap metal from trash for sale, and are also sack-carriers in the markets. The money they earn takes an emotional value and remains a prerequisite for survival in the street.

Thus having presented the life lived in the street, a review of theoretical works and their integration into the grief work are necessary.

4   Literature review and theoretical integration

Nasio (2004: 70) defines grief as "a long and gradual learning of a new way to love." The intrusion of death into life is an event and an essentially important stage of development in the individual. The death of childhood is in turn an important step in the life of every individual. Grief is also defined as a state of loss of a loved one accompanied by distress and mental suffering, which can cause a real depressive reaction that will require intrapsychic work, called "work of grief" (Freud, 1915) to overcome it. It is the reaction to the loss of a person or an abstraction put in its place, any libidinal object. It is necessary to divest the subject and be able to desire another. In the case of this study, childhood and all its features must be divested. This process is a progressive detachment, without breaking or tearing that requires relaxation of the fantasy envelope and its re-adaptation.

According to psychoanalytic analysis, there is already an early grief in children reactivated during each grief experience. From the beginning of life, the ego introjects the good and bad objects. This is the case of the mother's breast which is good when it gives pleasure and its deprivation; its lack makes it bad. (Winnicott, 2006). This cleavage of images leads to the constitution of an inner world where the loved object that is lacking becomes a persecutor and every object or experience of loss will come back to re-actualize it. Every grief re-actualizes the unbearable of the lack of the other, its imperfection. Adolescence is equally a time of grief. According to Nasio (2004) Delvenne and Nicolis (2007), Marteaux

(2008) and Franceschini (2012), this is the period of childhood grief and psychological reorganization to approach adult age, one where specific roles for independent living are provided by the subject. "The adolescent must detach and separate oneself from its objects and delights of childhood, the only bond of love to his parents, to choose from elsewhere an object of love in his generation" (Ferrari et al, 2001). It is a period of elaborating separation, from where it is necessary to take into account all the psychological development of the young. The difficulties of developing the grief work process can register itself very early in the mother-child relationships and family relationships. These are reactivated in adolescence, with more or less violence and development capacity.

Although each aspect of grief is perculiar, the clinical course always goes through the same steps as described by Franceschini (2012). The first phase is marked by a reaction of shock coupled with denial. This raises questions about the relationship of the adolescent to his new body, lived painfully, causing anxiety, and self-abuse, depression that marks the entrance into the second phase.

The author describes the symptoms in adolescents as thus: suicide attempts, clastic crisis that is to say violent agitative crisis and object breakage, running away from home, severe anorexia. Accompaniment is required for the acceptance of his new status as an adolescent, and a growing awareness of personal problems with anxiety to promote adaptation.

Cornos (2000 a;b) adolescent psychiatrist, talks of alexithymia that is characterized by the inability to express oneself verbally. According to the author, in the absence of childhood grief, the subject finds in an addictive solution of eating behavior disorder the avoidance of state of depression and grief work is not attained.

Psychoanalytic and psychiatric theories describe three types of grief: normal, complicated and pathological (Bacqué & Hanus, 2000). The first is rapidly disposed of through the following three phases: Phase of distress, of depression and coping as a result of divestment process, internalization and identification with the lost object, guilt and final detachment. The second is characterized by a blockage of work with extension of the depressive phase, stress reactions marked by the possibility of serious psychosomatic manifestations and the passage to particularly frequent suicidal act. The latter leads to mental illness and is characterized by a delay of affliction, an extension of its evolution beyond two years, with a real threat on mental / emotional health. It could be a question of a real melancholic or manic psychosis or obsessional grief or hysteric grief. Complicated and pathological forms require support at a very early state from

psychoanalytic inspired therapies with social and emotional rehabilitation measures. The current study addresses the loss of the object which is his childhood

According to psychoanalytic theory of crossing the bridge of adolescence presented by Nasio (2004), this developmental period is that of a noisy crisis reflecting the brutal shock between wild impulses that burst in and the desperate repression of an ego still too young to manage. The author precises such that we can also explain the passage this period using a different model, that of work grief in past childhood. This is not only a visible and spectacular crisis, but also a direct and silent process that will end with the conquest of maturity, symbolizing lost childhood.

He adds that adolescence is not only a process of grief, but of creation: behind the flashy appearance of a young person in crisis hides a slow underground work of renunciations and substitutions. A craftsman ego is built step by step in the meticulous exercise of renouncing childhood and replacing it with symbols. The young must simultaneously leave childhood and open up to new desires, develop new thoughts, change his behavior and install new links. Losing your childhood means losing two idealized illusions: his and that of his parents. It is also losing the fantasy of the infant king he believed to be, the all powerful child, the phallus child and also lose the desired parental Oedipal fantasies. However, infantile fantasies are indestructible, but remodeled, transformed. This period of grief and creation is a painful adjustment process of the infantile fantasies to the solicitations of the new body and to the conditions of new emotional encounters.

Grief is therefore a long and gradual learning of a new way of loving. The teenager used to love as a child, now having grown up, he must learn to love in his new body as an adult. As much as the disappearance of the loved object triggers grief, so too the disappearance of the infantile body has to be overcomed and work of grief is the same: to adapt to the new fantasies lived, that of much full impulse generated pubic awakening

The work of grief is a dynamic process. Indeed, one does not leave childhood in the painful tearing of a day. It takes time and from time to time, we bring back, we live it and regression promotes the growth of the young to adulthood. It is a progressive detachment, without breaking or pulling where the need of easing the fantasy envelope and its re-adaptation: symbolic appropriation of his new body and his new feelings, and confirmation of his sexual identity. This is a step towards the assumption of being oneself, capable of accepting oneself

among others within the society.

According to the author, being an adult is an unattainable ideal, but two attitudes come close and are signs that attest to the end of juvenile crisis: "not to be ashamed to play as a child, which does not threaten the strength of the ego; not to be afraid to depend on whatsoever authority "(Nasio 2004: 71). To be an adult, is to live without fear of appearing puerile and unashamed to admit dependent. The impact of breaks and object loss hinders the child from acquiring a feeling of continuity and therefore, self-esteem; fluctuating psychic state difficulty of social and relational orders; inability to project into the future.

In the case of this study, street adolescents are the subjects which the taking of psychoactive substances promotes the fluctuation of the psychic state, with relationship difficulties that are a consequence of instability and the multitude of items of attachment.

5 Methodology

In this part, we specify at first the question that guides our study, then the categories to analyze and finally the method used.

5.1. Research Question and Categories

The experiences of work of grief emerge early in individuals and will vary during the developmental process. During adolescence, doing the work of grief of his childhood remains a task to realize and described by authors. The street adolescent evolving in an atypical developmental context, we thus posed the question that guided the study.

Research Question

The question around which this present study articulates is formulated thus: *how does the work of grief in childhood develop in street adolescents in Cameroon?*

To find some answers, categories of grief and their characteristics will be objects of identification and analysis.

Categories of grief and indices

The three categories of grief described by psychoanalytic and psychiatric theories (Bacqué and Hanus, 2000) are: **normal grief** which disposes rapidly through the successive phases of distress, depression and coping; **complicated grief** where there is a blockage of work, an extension of the depressive phase, stress reactions marked by the possibility of serious psychosomatic manifestation and the passage to particularly frequent suicidal act; and **pathological grief** that leads to mental illness is characterized by a delay of affliction, an extension of its evolution beyond two years, with a real threat on mental / emotional health.

5.2. Research Method

The study uses the qualitative method of descriptive and explanatory type according to the model of Deslauriers (1988; 1991). Descriptions of different categories of grief by theorists leads us to the hypothetico-deductive approach. Data collection techniques are the focus group with adolescents from the street, interviews with social workers and educators, and observations of the study subjects. To achieve this, focus group and interview guides, observation checklists were developed.

The study took place in social centers in charge of this category of subjects. We had our participants through the "snowball" and "rational choice" methods. We thus had a sample of six teenagers from the street; two social workers and two educators as resource persons. The content analysis technique was used through the use of the analytical checklist developed on the basis of the categories of grief and their characteristics. The results of this technique are the subject of the following.

6   Presentation and analysis of results

Anamnestic data of the study subject, the identification of categories of grief in these subjects constitute the quintessence of this part.

6.1. Anamnestic data of subjects

The presentation of the cases under study focuses on their origin, age and background.

The case of Belo: Originates from the Adamawa Region. He is 16 years old, from a polygamous family; he ranks fifth in the sibling of 8 children from his mother. Without schooling, he led a childhood without conflict within his family. But him leaving his region of origin to the capital is justified by his desire for change and especially to explore the city. To this effect he says, "I have come to Yaoundé to explore the beautiful city I've always seen through television." He has a duration of two years on the street.

The case of Ayissi: He hails from the Centre Region, 17 years old and eldest of five siblings. Coming from a single parent family, he attended school up till Form three. Economic difficulties did not allow his family support him in his schooling and as such he decided to put on in petty trade within the street in order to take care of himself. Recidivist because he benefited from family reintegration. He has had two years of life in the street and declares no conflict between him and his family.

The case of Leo: Originates from the North West Region, is the eldest of a family of six children. His retired father had left the city to her village. He is 19 years old with three spent in the street. Born into an extended family, the presence of a new member in his nuclear family trigger conflicts that which has led him to the choice of the street as living environment.

The case of Keby: He is from the North Region and 19 years old, with four passed in the street. With lack of education, the desire to explore the capital is the reason for the abandonment of his family. Recidivist, he comes from a polygamous family where he ranks sixth in a sibling of 11. The subject says he does not have conflict with his family.

The case of Zibi: He is from the Centre Region, 16 years old, including a year spent in the street. He comes from a nuclear family of five children, in which he is the youngest. He attended school until the Form two and leaving home is justified by the use of his mother dues for he said: "I was given the money to go and give to the meeting and I ate it, I was afraid of being punished, I left. "

The case of Bibi: He hails from the West Region, 17 years old, including two passed on the street. Born into an extended family, he ranks eighth in a family of 12. He attended school until the Form three and the economic difficulties of his family led him to trade in the street to help his parents, later he subsequently decided to manage his income, hence leaving home for the street.

6.2. Presentation and analysis of the categories of childhood work of grief in the cases under study

Data from the speeches of the participants of the study, two forms of childhood grief does not emerge: the normal and the pathological grief.

The first case is justified by the fact that the subjects live in a developmental context of psycho-emotional insecurity without stable object of attachment necessary to the accompaniment of the crisis they are facing; psycho-cognitive insecurity because of lack of schooling, etc. That which does not allow them to do the work of grief in childhood passing through the three phases of distress, depression and coping due to the process of childhood disinvestment, internalization of the new developmental task specific to adolescence and the identification with the lost object which is the childhood body, guilt and then final detachment. Their life situation is not conducive to their stable autonomy and conveyed values are not those of the reference group, that is the society.

The second case, be it pathological grief of childhood does not also emerge because we have not observed a symptomatology leading to mental illness. Moreover, the reactions inducing a delay of the affliction and a real threat to mental / psychic health like a real melancholic psychosis, manic, obsessive grief or hysteric have not been observed. In short, there is no observation of signs that mark the break with reality because street adolescents have adaptive activities.

On the other hand, complicated grief from childhood is the one that emerges in street adolescents. It is characterized by a blockage of work with extension of the depressive phase, stress reactions with the possibility of serious psychosomatic manifestations and the passage to suicidal act particularly common from a real and fantasmatical point of view. Domiciliation in the street, dangerous activities carried out in this environment, the culinary code that does not match any cultural specificity, lack of ritual promoting stability and strength of attachment to group meals, violence and a jungle-like kind of life in the street are arguments for this category of childhood grief in street adolescents. Thus, after shock and denial which have as incidence the abandonment of the family in these cases of study, although activities in the street are a form of support, there is no identical realization manifesting by the departure from the street, a family reintegration and choices for the future life, for an independent and mature life. Recidivist behaviours obstacles to the achievement of specific tasks in this developmental period and which are the elaboration of body relations, relation to others and relation with self.

7   Interpretation of results

Just like the transition to any developmental period, that of childhood to adolescence inaugurates a work of grief to enable the achievement of specific tasks during this period. According Gaonac'h and Golder (1995), the first task concerns the relationship to the body and has traits to specific changes at puberty: to adopt a gender identity, build a sexual body image, gradually engage in sexual intimacy. The periods of installation in the street in a majority of the case study correspond to the stage of these transformations. That which may justify a sudden shock experienced by these subjects. The second task concerns the relationship with others and the relationship to others as well as the social life: getting rid of the dependency links with parents, engage in close relationships with peers. The total disaffiliation from family and the instability of attachment in this context does not make possible the ability to perform this task. The final developmental task refers to the relationship with the self. It is characterized by the construction of identity: to be situated and structured through critical stakes which are professional perspectives, interpersonal relationships, relationships with the opposite sex, values and beliefs, life plans. The activities performed in the street doesn't open to any possibility of professional integration. Also the developmental context without identifiable marks, no symbol of authority does not provide the possibilities to carry out this task.

8   Conclusion

The work of grief is a process that every individual lives regularly during ontogeny. For theorists, adolescence is also a period of childhood grief (Nasio, 2004; Marteaux, 2005; Delvenne & Nicolis, 2007 Franceschini, 2012). The article presents an approach for those who have made home the street, a developmental context different from the family. The forms of grief according to Bacquéet Hanus (2000) are the normal grief, complicated grief and pathological grief.

The qualitative method of descriptive and explanatory type was used. A sample of six teenagers from the street took part in the study, next to two social workers and two educators. Interviews and observations with them through the interview guides and observation checklist, a content analysis was made. It appears that the normal and complicated grief in childhood are not characteristic of street

adolescents. On the other hand, their behaviour are characteristics of complicated grief from childhood in these subjects.

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