Difficult Circumstances:
Some Reflections on “Street Children” in Africa

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In Addis Ababa, a 12-year-old boy draws a self-portrait with red and green felt-tip pens as part of a pilot research project. It is a lively picture, using bold lines. He depicts himself with a box of objects in front of him, one hand at his mouth, and wearing a hat. At first glance it looks as if he has drawn himself selling goods on the street, the hat apparently incidental. But his explanation is different. The box contains rotten fruit, he says. He is wearing a hat to hide his face because he is ashamed to be seen eating such a bad food.

This anecdote is an object lesson in both attitudes to street children and the interpretation of information about them. It is a common assumption that children who live and work on the street either have no moral values or are antisocial, yet this boy's attitude shows a high degree of social sensitivity and dignity. Studies of children in general and street children in particular tend to rely on adults' assumptions about how children feel and what they must need. Children themselves are rarely asked about their lives. Instead, researchers ask parents, teachers or staff of institutions. If they ask children directly they seldom pay much attention to making questionnaires and interview schedules relevant to children's experiences, interests or use of language. If they do try to approach children's worlds through non-verbal research methods such as collecting drawings, they frequently fail to ask children what the drawings are intended to represent, relying instead on adult interpretations, often using psychological concepts and research instruments derived from Northern contexts. This is particularly notable, in Africa as elsewhere, in research about children.
affected by organized conflict, who are widely believed to have been traumatized in the same way and to require the same rehabilitative treatment regardless of cultural context.³

The dangers of adult-centered approaches in child research are clearly illustrated in an example Jill Swart uses to show the importance of listening to children's explanations, taken from her research among street children in Johannesburg. Swart describes two street boys, both of whom repeatedly drew graveyards. An adultist, psychological interpretation might have been that both boys were depressed and even fixated on death and dying. However, the children's explanations revealed to Swart not only that this kind of interpretation would be incorrect but also that the two boys had quite distinct motivations for their drawings. In one case, the drawings represented the boy's return to a traumatic moment, "the symbol of his unhappiness," when a quarrel with his brothers and sisters at his mother's grave-side effectively led to his living in the street. The other boy was depicting the burial place of his beloved grandmother, to which he returned as a happy memory: "Graves is good. I think of my Granny. She loved me" (Swart 1990, 26).

Besides being influenced by adultist assumptions, research about children who live and work on the streets of urban Africa also has to contend with constructions of childhood that have little to do with African contexts. In addition-- as everywhere in the world--this research is faced with the challenge of models of street children derived from Latin America.

The Child
Two sets of ideas define the notion of childhood current in the international community, both based on relatively recent Northern historical constructs. The first separates children from adults, defining the ideal family as a nuclear unit consisting of protected children and protecting adults. The maintenance of family form and the state of childhood is ensured through the existence of bodies of knowledge and groups of experts who actually or implicitly authorize the state to advise on the socially defined problems of the adult-child relationship and act in order to eradicate or alter irregular situations. The second set of ideas separates adults from children within the production process. According to this, children cannot be
workers, but they do require a special kind of socialization that cannot be provided within the family group. Thus education serves a double purpose. It teaches the skills habits required by the formal economy, while operating a process of selection and rejection that reproduces class relations. At the same time, it provides an additional form of control of childhood that is external to the private, family world.

The central figure in this complex of ideas is "The Child", apparently ungendered and ageless, although obviously small, innocent and in need of protection. I would argue that "he" is also most likely to be blonde, blue-eyed and middle-class, bearing little relationship to most children in most countries. In Northern contexts, The Child is used as an ideological control within state socialization processes, such as social work practice. The construct is also exported to the South, in a process some have called "globalization" through international agencies, media, cultural control mechanisms and even international human rights treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The fact that other notions such as The Girl Child, The African Child and The Indian Child have been used to signal the impossibility of a single model is not helpful, since they result from the same essentialist fallacy as The Child. With respect to The Girl Child, for example, it is clear that the girl who was to become Queen Elizabeth II has as little in common with girls in Manchester suburbs as Benazir Bhutto had with girls in Islamabad slums, but both shared childhoods that had many features similar to that of the young Jack Kennedy. Similarly it is difficult to see what, apart from geography, makes a Cairo shoeshine boy, a ten-year old domestic servant in Lagos, an Afrikaans schoolboy and an Ethiopian youngster herding camels fall under the same rubric of The African Child. Just as it is now
regarded as archaic to talk about The Man or The Woman, so it is best to recognize that children are individuals who experience a variety of childhoods in different ways.

**Street Children: The Latin American Model**

The ideal childhood of The Child is often contrasted with a similarly mythological figure, The Street Child, which has been a particular focus of attention for international bodies of all kinds since the United Nations International Year of the Child in 1979. Throughout this period the definition of street child has been the topic of considerable, repetitive debate and despite the fact that neither UNICEF nor the International Labour Office can give any reliable or authoritative figures for the number of working street children worldwide, some numbers are in circulation and have gained credibility. They, like some popular definitions derived from early street work in some Latin American cities, are often cited at the beginning of accounts of street children. But they have no validity or basis in fact (Glauser 1990; Lucchini 1996, 251-285; Connolly and Ennew 1996).

Although some excellent studies of children who lived and worked on the street in Latin America predate the 1980s, the Latin American model of street children is due to what Irene Rizzini has called a "prodigious outpouring of texts" using "oversimplified methodologies and approaches" since 1979. The model has two facets. In the first place it is aligned with the largely negative public image of street children, in which they are seen as antisocial, amoral, impossible to rehabilitate and easily drawn into criminal or terrorist activities. They are regarded with a mixture of fear and pity and are the constant subject of newspaper reports and articles. Nevertheless, in the 1980s a new image began to emerge that, if it has not exactly eclipsed the old, has at least been merged with it. Based initially on largely journalistic accounts of the gamines of Bogotá, and popularized internationally through the work of UNICEF and the non-governmental organization Childhope, this new figure of the street child began by having heroic qualities. As Rizzini notes about this new version of The Child,

> although exploited, poor and oppressed, 'he' was a 'strong and astute' being, a surviving hero for whom it was necessary to create 'critical, creative and participative action on the part of educators, who always had something to learn from the children and had to face opposition from the public, who only demanded immediate results.' There the children would be playing their part as, denouncers of an unjust society that evaded its due responsibilities (Rizzini 1996).

The notion of street educator was derived from a particular reading of the work of Paulo Freire (UNICEF 1987), in which children became viewed as protagonists and the street as a battleground (Leibel 1994). This focus on the relatively small numbers of children visible on urban streets obscured the needs of the far greater numbers of invisible children in slums, or working in agriculture or as domestic servants. However, it was backed up by widespread circulation of guesstimates of the number of street children that were as incredible as they were irresponsible.
As long as they are viewed as heroes, street children are, to a certain extent, made to bear the symbolic weight of adult political agendas. Thus it is not surprising that the Brazilian Movement of Street Children (or "for" street children, translations differ) although often cited as an example of child participation, has largely adult leadership (Ennew 1995). Nor is it surprising that the battlefield has become increasingly violent as street children become increasingly subjected to extra-judicial executions, particularly in Brazil, Colombia and Guatemala (cf. Dimenstein 1991). Accounts of the killings of street children are exaggerated by the mass media so that the international image of Latin American street children is now becoming dominated by this aspect.

Within international development agencies focusing on child welfare, however, earlier models of alternative work with street children now predominate, with the result that there has been a globalization of The Street Child based on Latin American work, but promulgated by Northern-based welfare agencies, parallel to the globalization of The Child. This tends to use the idea of outreach work with street educators, although their role has different local interpretations and seldom approaches the degree of political involvement assumed in Latin America. Indeed, although Enda Jeunesse Action, to a certain extent, espouses a similar protagonist role for working children in its work in Africa (which incidentally predates the better-known Brazilian Movement) (Diaw 1996), it appears that African children and youth have sometimes taken more spontaneous political action, without adult stimulus. The importance of children's political actions in the fight against apartheid cannot be underestimated, but there are also some less well known examples, such as the set settal (to be clean and make clean) street activities of youth in Dakar which began in 1990 and, unlike the Brazilian Movement, largely petered out once adult political interests began to try to shape the action (Ebin 1992, 28-34).

One apparently ineradicable effect of the Latin American model has been the widespread espousal of a categorization of street children that had its origins in observations made by program workers in the early 1980s. Anyone who works with street children in research or programming comes up sooner rather than later against the issue of definition. One definition that is sometimes used identifies street children in terms of the places where they are found and the lack of adult supervision. This is widely quoted, but does not provide exact parameters. Various UNICEF texts made popular a distinction between children "on" the streets (visible and working there, but still living with their families) and children "of" the streets (for whom the street has become their major point of reference). A further refinement occasionally used distinguishes a smaller group of "abandoned children" within those "of" the streets. Although unworkable even in Latin America, this is often applied as an operational definition in other parts of the world. However, because it is unclear it is applied in different ways according to local circumstances, leading to varied interpretations so that the meaning is further obscured.

The Latin American Model in Africa
One striking point of contrast between Latin America and Africa is due to colonial history. Latin American countries have at least a common core of culture and
language from their past Iberian colonizers and more recently from North American cultural and economic imperialism. Although I would be the first to argue that there are vast differences between, for example, Argentina and Honduras, or Peru and Venezuela, these are nowhere as marked as the extraordinary diversity of African cultures.

Thus the imposition of a Latin American model of street children is bound to be fundamentally incorrect. In the first place it denies the differences that exist between different Latin American contexts, which are mirrored in differences in street children’s lives and activities (cf. Connolly 1996; Lucchini 1996). In the second place it imposes cultural assumptions from one continent to another, often filtered through the prism of Northern welfare agencies. Finally, it incorrectly assumes the homogeneity of culture in a continent that one hears all too often referred to in international settings as "a country like Africa."

The use of Latin American assumptions in African literature on street children appears to be more muted than it is in fact, because it tends to be filtered through the work of international child welfare agencies. Most reports on street children in Africa do not refer directly to the literature from Latin America, but do make use of the distinction between children “on” and “of” the street, usually referring to it as "the UNICEF definition." In some cases it is employed without further comment. In a major study of street children in Ethiopia it is used as a "behavioral indicator" of the "level of engagement in street life" (Veale and Adefrisew 1992, x), and at least one of the differences between African and Latin American models is discussed; there are many reasons to suspect that the profile of street-children in Ethiopia may deviate significantly from that of the Latin American profile. The long and bitter civil war in the north of the country and ongoing violence in the south compounded with the debilitating effect on rural areas of drought, famine and the breakdown of rural economies may mean that the number of unaccompanied and “of the street” children in Ethiopia may be significantly greater than in other areas of the world (Veale and Adefrisew 1992, x).

Among program workers in Addis Ababa there is a tendency to use the term "streetism" to denote ways of life associated with living on the street, rather than to use the terms “on” and “of” the street, which do not make much sense in a town
that doubled in size in the 18 months before the study referred to above took place, so that opportunities for work for children other than in street trades are scarce. Some other attempts to get away from "on"/"of" terminology have been made in African contexts. For example, in Kampala, the term "urban out-of-school children" is used, although this brings with it the assumption that all children out of school must be on the street. In some cases, local words are used, such as "stroller," which applies to both child and adult street people in Cape Town (Scharf et al. 1986). For her study of a suburb of Johannesburg, Swart uses the words of the children themselves:

Street children in Hillbrow use the slang Zulu terms malunde (those of the streets) and malalapipe (those who sleep in pipes) to refer to themselves. Members of the public commonly call them skadukinders (Afrikaans: shadow children) or 'twilight children.' The latter term was originally coined by the newspapers and then became a popular term to refer to the street children (Swart 1990).

This media term is also seen as symbolic by some human rights activists:

Street children are to some extent the product of the dismantling of apartheid, living in the twilight between the darkness of the previous regime and the dawn of something new. Many of them may already be lost, brutalized as they are by their lives on the street (Skelton 1993, 91).

The involvement of media and advocacy organizations returns in this quotation to the negative aspects of the globalized model. According to Fabio Dallape, who has many years of experience with African children living and working in the street, the term "street children" is "inappropriate, offensive and gives a distorted message" (Dallape 1996, 283). It focuses the attention of welfare agencies on a small proportion of children visible on main thoroughfares and ignores the larger numbers in slums and shanty towns who have less access to food and services. It also focuses public attention on labeling children as delinquent and gives a message to society that these children need to be rehabilitated, thus ignoring Swart's evidence that they tend to hold mainstream moral values, and taking no account of the sensibilities shown by, for example, the boy drawing a hat to hide his shame.

Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances
At around the same time that the new image of street children became current in the mid-1980s, UNICEF coined another category, Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances, which is now in use throughout the world, with the acronym CEDC (pronounced in English) entering some languages as a word. Although originally established as a group term to include refugees, children with disabilities, children affected by organized violence and unaccompanied children in disasters, as well as street and working children, CEDC now seems to be almost synonymous with "street children" in many settings. In national reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, CEDC tend to be discussed as such even though there is no specific mention of the category in the Convention. The discussion is often wholly
limited to street children. In other contexts, urban childhoods are often discussed as if all children in urban areas are street children.

Although African literature on children as a whole tends to focus on health and nutrition, the CEDC/street children category is increasingly significant. It is particularly pertinent in African contexts that "Difficult Circumstances" implies a number of specific social circumstances such as children who do not live with their families, who work in exploitative conditions, or are involved in armed conflict. "Difficult Circumstances" does not include poverty or lack of food security, which are presented in CEDC literature as causes of "Difficult Circumstances" rather than difficult circumstances in their own right. Thus Dallape correctly criticizes the entire notion of CEDC as failing to provide a class analysis, and ignoring the structural causes of children's problems (Dallape 1996, 284-5).

The Street
Although the street child population may not be so large in terms of number as is often publicized, as the authors of a report from Uganda point out, it is "staggering in terms of its complexity" (Munene and Nambi 1993). One of the more productive approaches is to think in terms of children having a special relationship to the street, among other domains of their lives (Glauser 1990; Lucchini 1996; Connolly and Ennew 1996). But this also entails the realization that the street has different meanings and connotations in different contexts. In the same city it can have many meanings. These might include being: a major site of socialization, social and commercial life in marginalized districts; places dedicated to the circulation of traffic; and spaces dedicated to the circulation of consumers and/or business employees. Streets can be paved, cobbled, grass or dust. At night they can be lit with neon lights and full of movement or pitch dark and silent. The streets on which street children move tend to be the central modum areas and, just as these areas are usually small in comparison to the vast areas of slums, suburbs and high density housing, so the numbers of street children visible in what Fabio Dallape calls the "Avenues" are almost always very small compared to the child population of any city.

Table 1. Trends and projections in urban population (Blanc et al. 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>% urban</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>% urban</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>% urban</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>217.4</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>354.4</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>163.6</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>320.5</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>411.3</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing world</td>
<td>285.6</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>635.8</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>1514.7</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>2251.4</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of world</td>
<td>448.2</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>698.6</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>875.5</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>946.2</td>
<td>74.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Urban Africa Compared to Urban Latin America

It is when considering the meaning of "the street" that major differences between Africa and Latin America become noticeable. In the first place the rates of urbanization remain dissimilar and African urbanization is of a much more recent date (Table 1), thus representing a relatively new factor among the root causes of streetism.

The literature on the problems faced by urban children throughout the continent, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, makes frequent reference to the hypothesis that rural-urban migration brings about either inter-generational conflicts over values, or anomie among young people who have migrated and are no longer protected by the certainties of traditional tribal values. This is combined with hypotheses about the breakdown of family values, the increase in single-parent families and overpopulation as primary reasons why children begin to live and work in the street, all of which accords with the "simplistic" Latin American models of the 1980s referred to by Rizzini. Unfortunately, in Africa as elsewhere, the record is frequently flawed by researchers failing to use control groups, targeting only groups of children in the streets as research subjects. It is thus not possible to conclude that these children are more or less likely to come from broken or single-parent families than contemporaries from the same socio-cultural and economic groups. A further tendency distorting the evidence is the use of Northern models of family life, even by African researchers. It is seldom that one finds discussion of family breakdown couched within the framework of a discussion of, for instance, the transition from polygamous and extended family life towards more monogamous models. More frequently it appears as if the literature assumes the prior existence of single-household nuclear families as the norm, which is surely not the case in most African contexts. I would suggest that a significant factor in this analytical distortion is the considerable influence of Northern financial resources and policy priorities on both research and program practice, as well as the use of sociological and psychological research instruments developed in Northern contexts.

Comparative urban geography also tends to show differently structured cities on both continents, although the effects of these on children have not been compared. However, different levels of industrialization and of rural-urban interpenetration will affect the juvenile labor market every bit as much as they affect adult employment patterns.

A further topic that is almost always ignored is the meaning of the street in different cultural contexts. In Latin America, as discussed above, the street is a rhetorical battleground, a site of political activity of a particular kind, in which children symbolize and are used for adult political ends. It is also, like streets everywhere, a gendered space. Women are associated with the house (casa) and men with the street (calle) in ways connected to the Latin cultural conceptions of honor and shame, and this distinction is often very sharply drawn. The result is that only a very small proportion of children living on the streets of Latin America are girls and it is not uncommon for the estimated Latin American percentage of street girls (10 percent) to be globalized. Given the variety of African urban cultural situations, the casa/calle model cannot be so clearly applied. For example, Enid
Schildkrout's study of the roles of children in Muslim Kano shows the street, like other spaces, not only gendered but also a bearer of age relations, society being stratified, as in many African societies, by relative, rather than chronological, age. Whereas male and female spaces are strictly delimited, both inside and outside the home, particularly where women are in purdah, children have greater spatial mobility than all adults and can cross male/female boundaries particularly when they are young. Women could not carry out either their domestic responsibilities or their independent economic activities and still remain in purdah were it not for the roles played by children. Street trading for example is carried out by both girls and boys, on behalf of women (Schildkrout 1978). Detailed ethnography of other urban African situations would undoubtedly reveal other understandings of the ways in which urban space is used and the effects on children who live and work on the street.

**African Childhoods**

Understanding the lives of children who live and work on the street entails finding out about the lives and roles of children in any culture. As discussed earlier, the notion of The African Child is as much of an obstacle in this process as the global construct of The Child. African childhoods are very diverse. They cannot be encompassed by any one ideal, any more than they can be understood through the depiction so often encountered in foreign media of African children as victims of starvation and war, which is sometimes cynically referred to as the "ribs and flies" image.

Nevertheless, there are certain African realities that affect children on the continent whatever their cultural context, geographical situation or socioeconomic status. In the first place, children and young people form more than half the population of most African countries, which has implications for the distribution of resources and for policy. Closely related to this demographic factor are the observations that significant deficits exist in the schooling systems of most countries and that there is a general lack of provision of child care for working mothers in urban settings, both of which are likely to be significant contributory causes of streetism. In the context of the stringencies affected by structural adjustment, neither of these deficits is likely to be addressed substantially in the short or medium term.

In addition, many African countries are affected by large-scale population displacements and/or the presence of significant numbers of refugees, as the result of natural or man-made disasters and armed conflicts (Table 2). This is a further point of contrast with Latin America, as is the fact that there is a greater tendency for refugees in Africa to be in the 5 to 17-year age group (UNCHR 1995).

Archaeological and historical records show that displacement and migration have always been African realities. In themselves, the current population movements are not new phenomena and might not be viewed as producing a crisis situation. Traditional mechanisms within the community and extended family structures should protect children whose biological parents are unable or unwilling to care for them, as well as children who become separated from their families and
communities. Chief among these, and typical of many parts of Africa, are systems of fostering and mechanisms of apprenticeship.

Table 2. Populations of concern to UNHCR in Africa and Latin America, 1994 (UNCHR 1995, Figure 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Africa (thousands)</th>
<th>Latin America (thousands)</th>
<th>World total (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>6,752.2</td>
<td>109.0</td>
<td>14,448.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returnees</td>
<td>3,084.0</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>3,983.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others of concern</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3,524.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internally displaced</td>
<td>1,973.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5,423.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,816.0</td>
<td>184.6</td>
<td>27,418.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fostering and the circulation of children within extended family structures are found in many African societies and have operated as traditional welfare systems to the benefit of young and old alike (cf. Goody 1982). However, the scale of population displacement in the context of environmental degradation, depleted resources and structural adjustment may well be placing these mechanisms under too much strain. Where vulnerable children are concerned, there is a fine line between welfare and exploitation. Thus rural children sent to be fostered in towns so that they can have access to education may find themselves working as unpaid domestic servants. In Ethiopia, for example, traditional forms of fostering such as *Gudifecha*, *Yetut Abat* and *Yetut Inat* have been used to deal with children orphaned or separated from parents by drought, famine and civil unrest (Veale and Adefrisew 1992). But these can also result in children being fostered for their labor value and thrown out when times get too hard to feed an additional mouth.

Likewise, apprentices may be exploited in sweatshops instead of learning skills that enable them to become independent adults. According to Alain Maurice’s study of apprentices in Kaolack, Senegal, apprenticeship is the "hub of the system of unpaid labor" in which boys circulate among workshops just as other children circulate among families. The form of exploitation, as Maurice notes, is very different to the "anarchic, individualistic" petty commodity production in Latin America because it is characterized by "paternalistic relations in the workplace," depending on interwoven kinship and age-set relationships (Maurice 1982). I would argue that petty commodity production in Latin America is organized and is also a bearer of kinship relations that operate in ways that are not purely capitalistic, so that it is nowhere as individualistic as Maurice claims. Nevertheless, the intensity of the particular mix of kinship and age-set relationships he describes for Senegal, and noted elsewhere in Africa by many other ethnographers, is not to be found in Latin America, which is a further reason for developing models of childhood based in African realities and not imported from elsewhere.

A further specifically African mechanism, now often associated with streetism, is Koranic schools, to which parents may confide children for both educational and
welfare reasons. In urban areas of Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and northern parts of Ghana and Nigeria, the pupils of Koranic schools provide the income for the school by begging. Although begging is an integral part of the social institution of Koranic schools, concern is now being expressed in some quarters that pupils spend more time in begging than in school and are subjected to abuse, neglect and other maltreatment by the marabouts (teachers) (cf. Analyse de la Situation 1991; The Children and Women of The Gambia 1991; Ojanuga 1989). The relationship to widespread migration patterns can be seen in one case study of a Koranic school (or daara) in The Gambia, where the pupils, although all from the same ethnic group, came from Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, Mali and Mauritania as well as The Gambia itself (Hunt 1993).

Perhaps the most significant factor in African childhoods as a whole is the fact that difficult circumstances are so often related to armed conflict. Symptomatic of this, is that part of the Consensus of Dakar devoted to Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances. The Consensus resulted from the OAU International Conference on Assistance to African Children in 1992. In Part 3, instead of introducing the usual mélange of categories, including street children, it concentrates its four paragraphs entirely on children in situations of armed conflict and the need for conflict resolution. Although disabled and orphaned children and child laborers are mentioned briefly elsewhere, and the main thrust of the document is child survival and development, the priority given to children in conflict situations is both justifiable and particular to African countries. In addition to producing child refugees and children orphaned or directly injured, warfare can be considered as a major cause of streetism within some African countries. In Mozambique, for example, Ana Maria Loforte claimed that:

The majority of the children whom we find in the street are, first and foremost, a consequence of the war being waged against this country and the accompanying political, military, economic and social destabilization (Loforte 1994).

African Street Children Literature

Child studies in Africa are fragmented and there is no developed discourse on African childhoods. Traditionally, the main themes in academic research on children in Africa focused not on childhood but on transitions,
through the anthropological interest in initiation and puberty rites, studies of socialization and of intergenerational relationships of power. Childhood is seen as status and process, viewed through the prism of adulthood, a stage of becoming rather than a state of being. In many cases, concentration on family structures has left children appearing as attributes of families. Whereas the discourse on children in Latin America, such as it is, has tended to be a discourse on street children, they do not dominate African literature in the same way. If there are any dominant themes related to difficult circumstances these are related to survival and development issues as well as to the importance of war and civil conflict in child welfare literature.

Currently, major sources of texts on children in Africa are inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, which means that data are collected within the framework of programs rather than theory. Nevertheless there are some interesting indications of new approaches within the literature on street children that indicate the potential for a less limited approach, in which street children or streetism can be integrated into other perspectives that will break with the repetitive tendencies of street children work based on the "on"/"of" the street definitions. The topic of economic and sexual exploitation of children in Africa is part of the overall emphasis on children as victims, fitting within the concerns of a relatively well-developed discourse on child abuse and neglect that is largely the outcome of activities of ANPPCAN, the African regional section of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, which has been active in promoting and publishing research in this area as well as in advocacy for children’s protection rights.

It is significant that the concept of abuse used by ANPPCAN and entering the African literature is not structured in the same way as that used in Northern literature. An account of the presentation given by an African ANPPCAN functionary at a meeting in Nairobi makes this clear (Dallape 1988, 104-108).

The following are the areas where child abuse is commonly evidenced:
Child labor
Children in prison
Handicapped children
Battering of children
Children under psychological stress
Abandoned children
Children in war situations (Dallape 1988, 104)

Child abuse is seen as a feature of other social phenomena or situations, rather than as a phenomenon in its own right. Thus, sexual abuse and exploitation, for example, do not constitute a single category but are mentioned in this account in various places, under the headings of child labor, prisons, psychological stress and abandonment. Likewise, a case study of CEDC in Nairobi includes in a list of indicators, "child abuse, whether physical, sexual or child labor" (Onyango et al. 1991, 48). In another related paper, dealing with street hawking in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, child abuse is defined as anything that has a negative effect on child
development. Thus street hawking is "next to emotional abuse because it subjects the child to long hours of child labor– starvation and deprivation of adequate care" (Fubara 1986). Child street work thus appears as neglect in the sense that it is the result of structural factors such as lack of financial resources, food and shelter, rather than being a personal factor as it is in the CEDC model. This begins to answer Dallape's call for a class analysis and also, interestingly, echoes indigenous Latin American interpretations of abandonados (abandoned children), which are the third category of the UNICEF definition of street children, not as children who have been abandoned by their families and are found on the main thoroughfares, but as the majority of slum or marginalized children who are abandoned by the dominant elites.

What this signifies is that this way of conceptualizing abuse represents a different, and more contextually relevant, approach. In terms of methodology it requires appropriate, locally constructed research techniques rather than the use of imported schedules and other instruments. In terms of children's drawings, such as the boy with the hat, with which I began, the implication is not only that children's own explanations of their pictures should be taken into account but also that considerable work needs to be carried out into different cultural ways of seeing as well as the development of everyday visual cognition among children from different cultures and social groups.\(^8\)

Thus the literature on street children in Africa at this point reveals no overall theoretical models or debates, which it has in common with all writing on street children. Yet, despite the fact that there has been no apparent effort to develop an alternative approach to the Latin American model of street children, there are glimmerings of an implicit African approach that would contextualize the lives of children who live and work in the street in other aspects of African childhoods. This challenge should be taken up in child studies in Africa as a whole, given that it is nearly ten years since the then Director of the Undugu Society program for street children in Nairobi wrote about program-related research with these children:

> First the team has to study the community and must determine which method will be most suited to the particular African situation. Most probably they will have to invent an African approach, based on the people's traditions, religions and superstitions. We are like a musical instrument; the music is produced by touching the cords in a right way. The cords are there everywhere, but the way of touching them to produce a melody is specific to each culture (Dallape 1988, 111).
Endnotes

1. Reprinted with permission from *Africa Insight* vol. 26, no. 3, 1996.
2. Example provided by Konjit Keftew, who carried out a study of street children in Addis Ababa as part of the Local Research Support Project sponsored by Radda Barnen, Ethiopia. For more information about the project see Kefyalew 1996.
3. See, for example, Dodge and Raundalen 1987. For a review and critique of this literature, see Boyden and Gibbs 1996.
4. The Spanish term *gamines* is derived from the French word for street urchins, *gamins*, and was popularized in the work of the French journalist, Jacques Meunier (1977). A reasoned account of the 1980s approach to street children in South America can be found in Myers 1988.
5. This definition arose through the work of the Inter-NGO Programme for Street Children and Street Youth.
6. For the original information, see Taçon 1985. For a discussion of the category, see, for example, Glauser 1990; also see Ennew 1994, 15-17.
7. Two recent bibliographies make this point; see Gueye 1995; and Ross 1988.
   28 An early example of this genre blames juvenile delinquency on the fact of urbanization: Poitou (n.d).
8. The work of Sven Andersson comparing the drawings of children from Tanzania and South Africa is a case in point; see Andersson 1994. See also S Andersson et al. (forthcoming), and Cross-National Research on the use of images in health education, sponsored by the Tropical Disease Research unit of WHO and the Danish Bilharzia project.

References


