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CONVERSATIONS WITH STREET CHILDREN IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

This article reports excerpts from conversations with 30 boys working the streets of Harare. The conversations took place from February to November 1993. The excerpts describe their living arrangements, their relationships and recreation, and their work. Far from presenting themselves as ruffians out to make a quick buck, the boys like to be clean and well dressed. They respect hard work and they believe in the virtue of honesty. Older boys do not like to beg and they teach others how to park cars. Eleven of the boys also had weekly contracts to guard the cars of office workers. Contracts have not been reported in other countries and they may be an important indicator that the Harare public accepts the role of the street boys in the day-to-day life of the central business district.

STREET CHILDREN ARE visible throughout the world in developed and in developing countries. The estimates of their numbers are usually given as 100 million in 1991 (see for example, Barker, 1993, p. 6), with an expected increase to 200 million in 2000 (see for example, Irvine, 1991, p. 1). In Zimbabwe the common estimate is around 7 000 to 10 000 (Beatrice Matsvetu of Zimbabwe Council for the Welfare of Children in the *Southern African Chronicle*, 20 June 1993, p. 10).

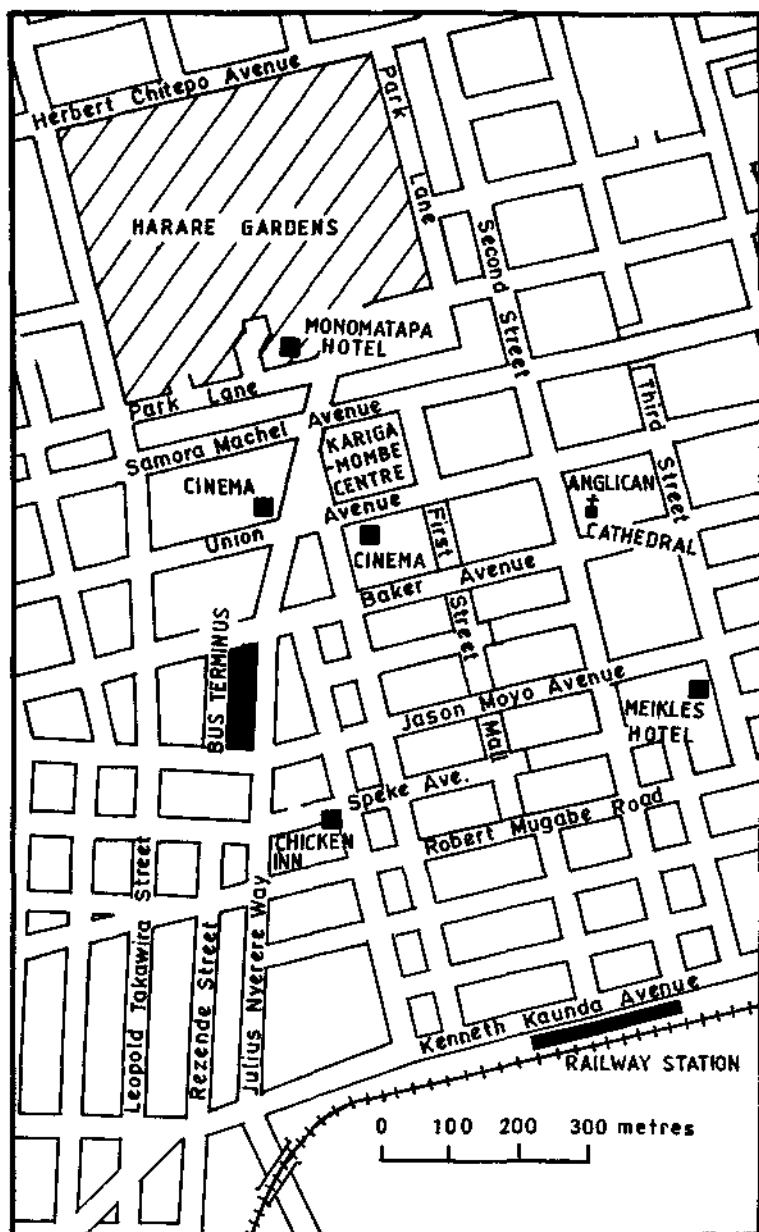
Despite daily contact with the children, many members of the public find their presence intrusive. In a recent letter to *The Sunday Mail*, a Harare citizen wrote:

I am horrified at the total lack of police control of the 'Street Kids' — particularly in George Silundika Avenue. We are being threatened with physical violence if we dare to park our cars without their express permission . . . (2 April 1995, p. 8).

The newspaper reinforced the hostility by captioning the letter 'Street Kid Menace'. The official policy towards street children appears to be a

¹We gratefully acknowledge the 30 boys who participated in the study; Mr J. Dube who interpreted the interview with Washington; John McMaster whom we consulted on the termination of the study; Clive Peter and Alpha Mugudubi who contributed to the design of the study and analysis of the data; the UNICEF Library in Harare; and Professor Michael Bourdillon who reviewed earlier forms of the manuscript.

FIGURE 1: LOCATION OF RESEARCH AREA



social welfare approach, in which children are removed from the streets to a 'place of safety'. On the face of it, this is a worthy objective. In practice, the state has inadequate facilities for street children. Takesure, quoted by Bourdillon (1991, p. 26), described the 'round-ups' of street children in Harare during 1991:

It was very bad. We were arrested for no reason. People were rounded up and sentenced to three years for no offence. At Kadoma we had to live with others who were convicted of robbery and rape.

The street children see probation homes in terms distinctly other than 'places of safety'. Takesure is one of the many who have 'escaped' and returned to the streets.

It is very unlikely that the phenomenon of street children will disappear in the short term. The children choose to go onto the streets to escape violence and poverty in the parental home and the phenomenon is thus more or less a symptom of wider economic and social problems.

Recent work on street children has tried to free our conceptions of street children from the social welfare model and to present the advantages as well as the disadvantages of street life. Intellectually, street children develop skills we would associate with market children. They are numerate from dealing with money and they are street-wise, something we will show later. Their formal skills are no less than those of children with similar socio-economic backgrounds, or children suffering long-term poverty (Aptekar, 1989, p. 427; Ziesemer *et al.*, 1994, p. 658).

Aptekar (1989, p. 427) also found the children he studied to be emotionally intact. It appears that the children's systems of peer support and their relationships with adult benefactors substitute, at least in part, for the family relationships they leave behind.

Aptekar (1989, p. 428) suggests that in Colombia, where he did his work, the 'problem' of street children issues from a clash between the patrifocal upper classes and matrifocal lower classes. Aptekar views the life of street children as an extension of matrifocal society, in which children are encouraged to be independent and resourceful from an early age, thus accelerating their development more quickly than the 'culturally dominant group deemed legitimate'.

This conceptualisation has appeal even in patrifocal societies in that it points us to the phenomenon of street children as an urban sub-culture with its own structure, its own rules and its own dynamics. If we understand the presence of street children as a sociological entity in its own right, we will have a better understanding of how the children relate to other urban sub-cultures, how ideas and innovation enter the streets and spread from child

to child, how the street children culture is likely to develop, and how the street children might coexist harmoniously with other residents of the city.

Work on street children in Harare has been confined to two surveys — one by the Zimbabwe Council for the Welfare of Children in 1989 and one by Muchini and Nyandiya-Bundy in 1991. Recently Bourdillon (1994) has collated the reports of the late Maxwell Rupondo who worked for *Streets Ahead*.

The surveys have been able to confirm that the phenomenon of street children in Harare takes a similar form to the phenomenon in other cities. Most of the children are boys and the boys who work independently are aged from 8 to 18. The boys sell sweets and fruit; mind cars; beg; tout for emergency taxis; and carry goods and luggage. Only about 10 to 15% of the boys sleep on the streets at night (Nyandiya-Bundy and Muchini, 1991, pp. 16, 17, 25; ZCWC, 1989, pp. 15, 18, 19, 20).

The work reported by Bourdillon was conducted under the umbrella of *Streets Ahead*, an outreach programme which aims to provide a drop-in centre which boys can use when they perceive a need. The concept of the outreach programme follows from a perception of street life that differs in many ways from the perception held by authorities.

Life on the streets is not an all or nothing situation. Children usually join the streets gradually. The international pattern is for younger children to work on the streets and to go home at night, and for the children who actually sleep on the streets, to be older than average (Blanc, 1994, p. 331). The incorporation into the street life comes about in time, with a progressive learning of skill and a lessening of boys' dependence on their parents. In this process of assimilation, children are known to go home and not come back, and children are also known to go home and return because the streets have become familiar to them. Bourdillon (1994, p. 526) tells of Dr Edward Antonio, a street child who became a university lecturer, who seriously thought of returning to the life on the streets he knows. Veale, Taylor and Mohommad quote similar sentiments expressed by a more ordinary street boy in Khartoum.

After spending time on streets, meeting other boys, using *silis* [glue], I wanted to live their life . . . No, there were no problems at home. I had become familiar with the streets, know what is in the streets and I decided to return.

A Khartoum street boy quoted in Veale, Taylor and Mohommad [nd].

This study takes up the idea of being familiar with the streets. We spoke to street boys in Harare for six months from February to July, 1993. We used a conversational methodology to see life through their eyes and to see the streets more as they perceive them.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Participants

Boys were recruited for the study directly on the streets and at the Anglican Cathedral where there was a long-standing programme providing meals and crafts training for street boys. The boys were observed at work and at play. Of the 30 children originally contacted and interviewed, five had left the streets by the end of the study.

The ages of the children who participated in this study ranged from 8 to 16 years with an average of 13 years. Fourteen children were aged between 8 and 12 years and 16 children were aged between 13 and 16 years.

Eleven children were from divorced parents or had parents who had remarried. Nineteen had blind parents. Of the 30 boys, 24 had some school background and six had none. One child spoke Ndebele; one child spoke Portuguese. Twenty-nine of the 30 boys spoke Shona and 22 spoke English.

Procedure

All the interviews were conducted by the first author, Marima. On first meeting the boys, Marima introduced herself and explained that she was carrying out a study on how street children lived. She talked to the children about general topics, such as the weather, made jokes, and asked the children for permission to see them again.

After a few meetings, Marima further asked the boys' permission to record their conversations on tape. At first the children did not want to be recorded and talked very little. After a month, the children became accustomed to the tape recorder, and from this time the tapes of the interviews were transcribed into English.

Marima met the children regularly on the streets on Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays between 6 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. At these times, business is low and most of the children who do not sleep on the streets will have gone home.

Marima also met the children at the Anglican Cathedral, where they received free meals on Wednesdays from 8.00 a.m. to 11.00 am. She observed the boys during the afternoons and occasionally participated in their activities.

Acceptance into the subculture

In the first contacts, the children were defensive and distrustful. One child remarked:

Are you from the ZBC or *The Gazette*? They come just like that.

13 April 1993, Angwa Street

Another boy thought Marima was a charity woman from a church.

I saw you today. You gave us a dollar. You were holding a Bible.

1 April 1993, Rezende Bus Terminus

To counteract the boys' distrust, Marima interacted with them as she might with adolescent boys from a local school. She allowed them to carry her bag and appreciated their linguistic skills.

- So you can speak English?

Yes.

- What grade did you go to?

Grade 4.

- So you are really good?

I am not (and smiled shyly).

21 May 1993, Robert Mugabe Way

As the boys became accustomed to her, there were several changes in their attitude. Initially, some children had asked her for money. As they began to know her, they restrained each other.

Lionel! Sometimes you should learn not to beg for money. It is a bad habit. Sisya does not have money. Don't you like her company?

2 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

They became very hospitable. One boy bought her a soft drink on a hot afternoon. Other boys promised to buy her a hamburger if she visited them on a Friday afternoon. The children spontaneously advised her of the times they would be free to see her.

You should come around 4.00 p.m. or in the evening when we have finished our work. Then we can make you laugh.

7 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

By frequently interviewing them at times of their choosing and by not interfering with their work, she was able to observe their activities closely.

Exit from the subculture and ethics of street children research

At the end of the study, it was extremely difficult to tell the children that the study was ending. This was particularly so because the children are acutely aware of what researchers do.

Sarah, no more foreigners around here. Look, our faces are all over the magazine. We don't like it. Foreigners take us pictures and they make money in foreign countries selling the pictures. No more pictures around here.

6 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

I knew it.

- What did you know?

That you wanted something from us . . .

It's the same with everybody.

Were you making money?

- No. It's just a project. Nobody sells it. It just counts if I have to pass at the end of the year.

Are you going to pass then?

12 July 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

The literature is extremely helpful on how to enter the street culture (see for examples, Barker, 1993 and Dallape, 1991). It is reticent however, on our exit, and the effect of studies like this on the participants.

In this study, Marima took some trouble to disengage slowly. She informed the boys a few weeks in advance that she was leaving and provided opportunities such as the one above to talk through the break in their relationship. She also introduced other activities, going with the boys to buy food, for example, explaining where she lived at the University and visiting them without the tape recorder.

It is possible that by telling their stories to somebody who is genuinely interested, that the children develop new self-esteem and a new framework for relating to adults. It is equally likely however, that breaking a bond that they put much effort into creating is seen by them as another betrayal and may heighten their hostility to the adult world.

It would be a most appropriate extension of studies like these to monitor the effect of the study on the boys who take part. Fortuitously, a year after the study ended we received feedback from the organization, *Streets Ahead*. The boys remembered Marima fondly and no resentment was heard after she had withdrawn. Our reservations nevertheless remain, and we recommend that future studies are conducted by people with a long term commitment to the children and involve the boys from the outset in setting the parameters of the work.

Confidentiality

The boys' names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

RESULTS

Participants and the geography of the study

The study took place in the centre of Harare, in an area bounded in the north by Park Lane and in the south by Robert Mugabe Road. Important venues are marked on the map (see Figure 1). Going from north to south, these were the Monomatapa Hotel, the cinemas along Union Avenue, Rezende Bus Station, the Anglican Cathedral, the Chicken Inn, and an area behind the Meikles Hotel.

The boys formed interlinking groups. In the north, the area outside the Monomatapa Hotel was worked by Willard (16), Lionel (15), Crispin (14), Calisto (8) and Welshman (16). They were also met occasionally outside the cinemas on Union Avenue but they did not go to the Cathedral.

Working in the next block south along Julius Nyerere Way, were two smaller boys, Wonder (10) and Pedzisayi (13). They also did not go to the Cathedral.

The corner of Angwa Street and Union Avenue was worked by an older boy, who was a role model to smaller boys and an important early and articulate informant. Mahommed (16) worked alone.

The biggest group worked outside the cinemas on Union Avenue and can be broken into three subgroups. The first group comprised seven older boys, five of whom were central to the study.

Great (16) was one of the first boys to contribute and his friendship was instrumental in gaining acceptance with the other boys. He was arrested before the end of the study. Washington (15) came onto the streets during the study. He was the Ndebele speaker. He learnt Shona but left the streets before the study ended. William (16) was very ill throughout the study and was met once several blocks south towards the Chicken Inn. Danny (16) and Samuel (16) were rather quiet members of the group. The two remaining boys had the same names but the opposite fates. Eddie I (15) was arrested. His story will be told later. Eddie II (15) was a super-street kid. He was the highest earner and had a part-time job by the end of the study. He was seen further south at the Chicken Inn and was said to wash cars at Fife Avenue shops, a suburban shopping mall, north of the central business district. All these boys attended the Cathedral.

Three small boys, Blessings (9), Clever (10) and Tendai (10) worked in the same area and also went to the Cathedral. Blessings was openly identified as a thief, and prompted an informative discussion on the morality and consequences of stealing.

Two other young boys, Paul (10) and Steve (11), also worked in this area. Paul was often high on glue, but they otherwise figure little in the events of the six months early in 1993.

The remaining boys comprised three groups. One group of 12-year olds were met originally at the Rezende bus terminus: Amos (12), George (12) and Lameck (12). Amos and George also attended the Cathedral. George left the streets during the study and went home.

Jacob (11) and Mathew (8) worked in Robert Mugabe Road behind Meikles Hotel. They did not go to the Cathedral.

David (8), Alpha (16), Memory (15), Tauya (12) and Patrick (16) were met at the Cathedral only. On one occasion, David was beaten by older boys and provided a situation in which to discuss the bullying of small boys. Patrick was arrested for shop-lifting.

Living conditions

Sleeping arrangements

The boys were reticent about their sleeping arrangements. From their rare comments, it seems that at least half of them were sleeping rough even in June.

- So how do you keep the cold out of your bodies?

We have blankets.

- Blankets?

Yes.

- Where do you keep them?

We told you about our base.

7 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Willard is not here. He's gone to stay where we are going to sleep tonight. It's warm there and he is keeping the other guys off.

7 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

- So where are you sleeping?

At Market Square.

- What? Isn't it too cold there? . . . Can't you find some place enclosed?

There is always a fire burning.

11 June 1993, Robert Mugabe Road

- Where is your best friend?

He's keeping a place for me where I sleep. I'll pay him though.

11 June 1993, Robert Mugabe Road

Health

Throughout the study, William was in poor health. The other boys said he had AIDS. William said he had been kicked in the stomach by someone. We had no resources to monitor the boys' health, but none of the others were obviously ill.

Food

Not surprisingly, the boys were often thinking about food. They were either about to have a meal or they had missed one or they were about to buy food.

I'll buy buns.

- Where?

In Mr T.

1 April 1993, Rezende Bus Terminus

When custom is poor, they are forced to scavenge in bins.

On Saturdays and Sundays, we'll be looking for food in bins and from people.

17 April 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Eating from bins however, is considered a last resort.

That *sadza* from the bin is not healthy.

19 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Yes, I do that [go home]. Sometimes I don't. If I see that I'm hungry, I borrow money, a \$1.00 from somebody, and board an E.T. [Emergency Taxi].

19 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Why didn't you give him a kick in the buttocks?

19 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral,

in reference to a boy seen eating *sadza* from a bin

Clothes and appearance

Half the boys in the sample were adolescents and like any other teenagers, they took some trouble over their appearance and clothes. In an early conversation:

- Are you always this smart?

I bought these at the OK's.

8 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Haircuts were also important.

I went to the barber's.

- Who do you want to look like?

Like M. C. Hammer.

1 April 1993, Rezende Bus Terminus

Hygiene

Though the boys are frequently dirty and scruffy, they are conscious of hygiene and value cleanliness.

- Why won't you shake my hand?

They are dirty.

We are dirty.

- But I don't mind. I want to talk to you and not to the people looking at us.

14 April 1994, Anglican Cathedral

They buy soap to wash their clothes.

I want to wash my clothes . . . I came from home clean and thus I want to go back clean.

14 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

The easiest place is Mukuvisi River. Everybody goes there sometimes to wash clothes.

18 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Shoes

Shoes were a recurrent topic of the conversations, possibly because of the onset of winter.

- Did everyone buy their ProSports?

We are about to buy them now. It is very cold these days and we have to buy them but the prices are rising.

18 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Their interest extended to the first author's apparel.

What kind of tennis are you wearing? Are they imported?

- No, they are from Bata.

(A long and involved argument about what Bata stocks.)

12 July 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Relationships and recreation*Hierarchies*

We did not find the *monyas* described by Bourdillon (1994), though reminiscently of a school playground, the older boys did send the younger boys on errands.

Fighting is important and boys resort to threats if they are losing a verbal duel. One boy, Clever, had obtained traditional medication to help him fight better. A potion had been rubbed into an incision in his neck. Unfortunately for him, Eddie I doubted that the potion worked, challenged him, and beat him, melodramatically hitting Clever's head to show that the special claims of the potion were untrue.

Boys who are unable to fight well team up with boys who can.

- Can you fight well?

Not very well.

- So how do you protect yourself?

I hang around Danny and Eddie II.

5 July 1993, Karigamombe Centre

The older boys also bully the small boys. On one occasion, with apparently little provocation, Danny and Washington chased and assaulted David. When the smaller boy surrendered and lay down on the Cathedral lawn crying, the two older boys lit cigarettes. Eddie II implied later that these two boys often beat up the little ones. In a later quotation, it will become clear that Eddie I, the conqueror of Clever and his *muti*, had a similar reputation. None of the bigger boys, however, were accused of collecting tithes.

Induction

The boys' rivalry and their attempts to establish dominance are offset by supportive peer relationships which are characteristically strong in this age group. As Washington joined the streets during the study, we were able to take down his story while it was reasonably fresh in his mind. Washington was the boy who spoke Ndebele.

One night I was sleeping in a corridor and Danny and others were passing by around midnight. I had a blanket and so the boys came and took my blanket. Another one beat me and they were talking in Shona and laughing. I wanted to cry but I saw Danny looking at me and laughing like he wanted to beat me. I was so frightened.

- That was terrible.

Yes, it was. They all started off with my blanket and I was left behind. I wished I had stayed home where I have a place to sleep though I was beaten every day.

- What did you do?

I sat down and didn't know what to do. Suddenly I saw Danny coming back. I nearly ran away. But when he was near, he offered me a cigarette. I refused it because I did not smoke. He tried to talk to me but I was too frightened and anyway I didn't understand the language.

- So how did you communicate?

I just did what he would be doing at the moment.

- Didn't you feel silly?

No, I didn't. He actually liked it when I imitated what he was doing.

- So you started smoking?

Yes, I did and he provided the cigarettes.

- How did you get money?

I begged but he told me that I was too old to be begging. So he helped me in learning this gambling.

5 July 1993, Karigamombe Centre

Eddie II, the super-street kid who was a high earner and very articulate, described his entry to the streets in much the same way.

When I arrived [alone from Masvingo], I was very dirty and hungry. I saw Harare as very strange and big and I got very confused. What would I do in this strange place, I wondered. I had no clothes and I was starving. Then I met up with Patrick. He was older than me and soon he gave me some food. He taught me to scavenge for food and introduced me to his friends. The friends didn't like me but I survived. They would beat me everytime. I would get angry but do nothing. Then I met this guy who invited me to the Cathedral. He told me that they gave free food there and some clothes if you were a good boy. So I went there and found it to be true. Now I look presentable. I can buy food. I'm going to look for a place to stay in Mbare. I'll rent it. I'm even looking smart because I can afford to buy my own clothes.

Both stories ring familiarly of joining a boarding school in the middle of a term.

Relationships with their parents

Street children have varying degrees of contact with their families. Two of the boys had mothers who exercised parental authority while they were on the streets. Their relationships with their mothers were not amicable.

- Let's go, Calisto. Are you afraid?

Yes.

- Afraid of what?

Afraid of my mother.

3 April 1993, Union Avenue.

On being teased by other boys because his mother was looking for him:

I won't do like what George did. Beating his mother with a beating stick.

14 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Some boys visited home periodically and thought it sensible.

[Eddie] was caught on Friday . . . It was a pitiful sight. I just don't know how the other guys could do that kind of thing. I used to tell Eddie to go back home to his parents but he scolded me and I just looked at him. I told him that life on the streets is not good. I know his mother. They stay in Mufakose. She can get angry but one has to go home. I go home for a month and then come back.

12 May 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Boys from far afield dream of a triumphant return to their homes.

The only thing that is left is to go and see my father. I don't think that he knows me now.

- He will recognise you.

He wouldn't.

- I know he would.

I want to buy all the groceries I can. And then I buy nice clothes and shoes. Then I visit them.

- They will be shocked.

Sometimes I think I'm doing better than my father who is bullied by his wife.

25 June 1993, Chicken Inn

Relationships with the police

The boys' comments about the police were not complimentary.

There is this policeman who comes every night with roses. He gives them to him and Great sells them. He then comes early in the morning to collect his money.

- How much is Great paid?

Very little. I don't know how much but we fear the police and they can do with

us whatever they like. This other day, we saw four policemen stealing a car but we can't really do anything.

24 May 1993, Union Avenue

Other stories were about the police cancelling parking tickets, being bribed to let suspects go and substituting street children as suspects.

Drugs

It is common for street children to suppress their hunger pangs by sniffing glue (Rialp, 1991, p. 9; Bourdillon, 1994, p. 522). Bourdillon (1994) reported that the boys bought glue in jars. The boys in this study found glue in rubbish bins in the sanitary lanes and sniffed it from old milk packets which are made from white plastic sheeting.

- What's inside [the milk packet]?

Glue.

- Why do you have to take it?

I want to get drugged.

Give him back the paper.

- Why?

He will be in trouble with the owner of the glue.

- Paul, why do you sniff it?

I sniff it when I'm hungry. When I haven't got the money for food.

12 May 1993, Karigamombe Centre

It is also common for the boys to smoke *mbanje*.

- How much is it?

One dollar.

- How much of it?

One twist.

Just like a cigar. If a small piece like this beats you, you will hear Rhumba where there is no radio. Have you ever observed those people at [Rezende] Bus Terminus. They will just be dancing because they will have smoked it . . .

- If you smoke it, you'll just be wanting to laugh and be free.

Yes. You don't give a damn who is around or not. If you look at someone's head, it will be upside down . . .

It's bad in one thing. Banyas in the stomach.

You eat food like nobody's business. And its shameful . . .

You don't get shy.

And that's when you can speak English which you won't even understand on your own.

19 May 1993, Anglican Cathedral

In Bourdillon (1994), Maxwell Rupondo had felt like an intruder when he refused to smoke *mbanje* with street-boys (p. 522). The boys did not put pressure on Marima to smoke with them. On the contrary, they warned her off it.

That is *mbanje*. Don't touch it, Ritah. The police can smell it from afar. And if they smell it on you then know that you are going straight to jail.

2 July 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Paul, as we indicated before, was a prodigious glue user. Great appeared to be a heavy *mbanje* smoker. He was often doped. He forgot his friends' names and had major mood swings. Sometimes he was very quiet.

- ♦ How many friends have you got?

Only two.

- ♦ What are their names?

Tom and I've forgotten the other name.

3 April 1994, Union Avenue.

The boys know the debilitating effects of both drugs. As in Bourdillon (1994, p. 522), we came across no instance of hard drugs.

Recreation

The boys had a much wider range of recreation than those described by Bourdillon (1994). They are intrepid travellers ranging throughout the city and readily taking advantage of events such as the Trade Fair in Bulawayo and visits to Mazvikadei Dam in Banket and Cleveland Dam on the Mutare Road which were organized by *Streets Ahead* and other philanthropists. On one day, the group outside the Monomatapa Hotel 'blew' their money at Greenwood Park, an amusement park with trampolines, a model train and canoes. The children knew which films were on at cinemas and their age limits. They played football in teams and practised at St George's College, a well-to-do school in the inner suburbs.

Queen's Hotel was their favourite venue. They also went to midnight movies at the Liberty Cinema, particularly in winter, as it is warm inside the cinema. As Bourdillon (1994) indicated, gambling is a favourite occupation (p. 522). The boys play a game called *chabuta* and seemed to lose a lot of money.

A favourite pasttime is telling jokes around the fire at night. The jokes were not particularly original, however. We passed the jokes around the male students in the Department of Psychology. Apart from one which was particularly obscure, the jokes seemed to be standard high school humour.

Sex

Sex is frequently discussed by the boys in typically adolescent ways. They tease each other, boast, and mercilessly mock anyone who is seen to be infatuated or controlled by his girlfriend.

• What about Crispen?

I'll marry and have kids.

Of course. We knew that you would say that. All the women at the Queen's Garden would be yours.

Don't lie! I don't do that.

12 July 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Today Ritah, I'll tell you a story about this man who always cried when he was given something by his wife.

That one is deadly. Don't say it.

12 July 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

We only came across evidence of homosexuality with one boy. During general repartee in which one boy was called a beggar, and another a 'smart guy', a victim retorted:

Eddie, we all know you are somebody's wife.

So what?

14 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

People's wives should shut up.

14 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Relationship with the first author

There is plenty of literature on how a researcher can establish a relationship with the street boys (e.g., Barker, 1993; Dallape, 1991). In this study, the interaction of the boys with the first author dispelled any of our *a priori* notions that they are different from other boys.

They were very curious about Marima. They discussed her university career, her [non-existent] car, which they claimed to have seen often, her clothes, her church and her boyfriend. Inevitably, one of the boys developed a 'crush' and wrote her a love letter which was intercepted by his friends.

I once saw you driving a car.

2 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

I saw you driving a metallic make.

• Me?

Yes. It was a Benz.

7 June 1993, Monomatapa Hotel

Is this a foreign bag?

Did you buy it in South Africa?

This is not Zimbabwean material [The bag was from South Africa].

14 April 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Where is your boyfriend?

2 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

We indicated earlier that the boys were hospitable and offered to buy Marima cokes and hamburgers. On seeing a sheet for a sponsored walk in her handbag, they asked to sponsor her with endearing eagerness.

Can we sponsor you too?

• Yes. Anybody can do it.

I'll give you fifty cents.

• You mean it?

Yes. Do I have to write anything down?

• You just have to shade where it is written 50c.

Sisy, you're very unlucky. I don't have any money on me. It's still too early and I haven't made any money.

7 June 1993, Monomatapa Hotel.

Work and income

Work activities, age and income

One of our objectives was to describe in greater detail how the boys earned their livelihoods. The children in Harare do much the same work as children in other cities: they beg, carry luggage, mind cars, hawk sweets and fruit, wash cars and sell roses. They rarely sell newspapers.

Begging is the little boys' preserve. Ten of the 14 boys under the age of 13 begged. Only four of the 16 boys who were 13 or older admitted to doing so. Nine of the boys who were not seen begging during the study, told us they had done so when they joined the streets. Seven boys had never begged. Five were aged 16; one was aged ten; and the other was aged 15.

Car minding is the ubiquitous occupation. Twenty-seven of our 30 participants looked after cars. The three who did not do so had done so in the past. Because car minding is so common, none of the boys depended on begging only.

An important extension of car minding is a system of contracts in which regular customers pay weekly, usually on a Friday — hamburger day.

Those are regular customers. They park there every day and so they pay us at the end of the week.

2 June 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Eleven boys had contracts. Three of these boys were only eight years old; the other boys were much older: one was 14, two were 15 and five were 16. The eight-year olds were Calisto who 'hung out' with older boys and David and Mathew who were also luggage carriers at the railway station.

The less common occupations were luggage carrying, vending, car washing and selling roses. Three boys carried luggage at the railway station. Between train arrival times, they begged or minded cars. Two of these boys were eight years old and one was 11. These boys had limited contacts with older boys. They were sometimes seen in the company of twelve-year olds and as we related above, David was beaten by Danny and Washington. Luggage carrying seems to be a marginal activity associated with younger boys.

In contrast, vending, car washing and selling roses are associated with progressively older boys. There were four vendors in our network (aged 10, 11, 12 and 16), five car washers (aged 8, 14, 15, 15 and 16) and two rose sellers (aged 16 and 16). The average ages of boys in different enterprises are luggage carrying — 9,3; vending — 12,3; washing cars — 13,6; and selling roses — 16,0. Comparative figures for begging and car minding are 11,5 and 13,2.

Street life is surprisingly lucrative. The boys earn between \$5 and \$100 a day. The median earnings were \$27,50. The average earnings compared favourably with the wages of manual labourers in blue chip companies.

Earnings were associated with age. Two of the 14 boys under the age of 13 earned more than the median. Only three of the 16 boys aged 13 or more earned less than the median.

The child who earned \$5 was still dependent on begging. Washing cars is the most lucrative enterprise. Eddie II charged \$20 per car. The median earning for children with contracts was \$30 a day, slightly above the median for the whole group.

Scripts

Several of the boys were very articulate. Their descriptions of their work indicate an extremely good understanding of the expectations of car owners. The first informant quoted here was intent on teaching Marima to park cars.

Let me just tell you the basics. You stand in the street when you see a car approaching. You indicate on to an empty parking space. After the car has been parked, go and ask the driver whether to keep any eye on his car. Be persuasive. That's how you do it . . . Do bring an empty coke bottle . . . At lunchtime you will need it.

3 April 1993, Angwa Street.

. . . you keep an eye on a car. You have to see that no car is given a ticket. It means me paying for the expired metres. Sometimes when the owner comes he gives you 50 cents for all your pains in an effort to save him being given a ticket.

3 April 1993, Angwa Street.

- Don't you get customers who give you \$5?

I'll throw the money back at the person.

- Why?

That's peanuts. I'll have worked very hard. Imagine washing the whole car and putting polish on the wheels and somebody gives you \$5 only. I'll get mad.

- You'll get beaten.

That is if you look silly and afraid. White men want to be handled roughly. If they tell you to f . . . off, you also tell them to f . . . off. There was this White man who told me to look after his car. I did that but when he came, he told me off his car. I went and stood behind the car. He couldn't move. If he did he would have to run over me. So he came out and pushed me off. I told him I wanted my money but he refused. So he took a Sunsplash container and threw it at me. I dodged it. He said, 'F . . . you nigger'. I said 'F . . . you too' and scratched his car. I got pissed off.

- I know.

So he drove away very angry and I was left very angry also.

- I'm sorry.

Sometimes you just have to be rude because some people think that they control everybody. I hate that.

- How do you get to wash somebody's car?

I've got regular customers.

25 June 1993, Chicken Inn

- You're looking really smart.

That's how you have to do it so that people won't think you are a thief.

3 April 1993, Angwa Street

Smaller boys, when pressed, were also able to recount the scripts.

Stealing and scams

Some of the scripts recounted to us were for stealing and scamming. People intent on dishonesty themselves, as well as tourists, were the targets. There was always an element of incoherency in these scripts, however, suggesting that the boys had never been involved in the tricks they were describing. When they weren't evidently bragging about their ability to steal, they might assert that stealing was bad. These assertions might be within minutes of one of the bragging stories below.

- So how do you look after cars?

It is very easy.

- How?

Most foreigners are very silly. Whilst he's looking at a side you take his purse. Those big ones.

19 May 1993, Anglican Cathedral

One takes newspapers and cuts them into the size of \$20 notes. He puts one \$20 on top, then another in the middle, and the other at the bottom, and then he puts perhaps a foreign note on top. He sells it as foreign currency.

19 May 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Other scams were to do with selling fake gold and ivory.

Stealing is good because you can't get a job.

• Stealing is one way. What's another alternative?

Looking after cars.

I've always told him not to steal but to do something worthwhile like working hard for your money. But he has always said that I'm jealous. But now he has seen it on his own. I'll never steal because it's very unprofessional.

16 June 1993, Anglican Cathedral

The children's reservations about stealing were sometimes tied up with beliefs about evil spirits.

If you steal the victim will be very angry and you will end up being visited by evil spirits. And for the whole of your life, you will be the unluckiest person on earth.

16 June 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Let's say you steal from William. He will be angry and bad spirits will come upon you.

19 May 1993, Anglican Cathedral

Scripts with marginal morality

We were also told of two scripts, which fall between scripts of work and scripts for scamming. The first script was related to us in the early stages of the study, before the conversations were recorded on tape. It describes the procedure for begging. First the child must present a pitiful sight; second, the child engages eye contact with the prospect; thirdly, the child persistently follows the prospect down the street. Finally, the child accepts whatever money is given, however small.

At the time of the study, the Zimbabwean national football team was making heady progress towards the World Cup. The boys supported the 'Dream Team' and would attend the World Cup matches. Before the match they would make contracts to look after cars, they would then enter the grounds illicitly, returning to their cars at the end of the match to collect their payments. They were contemptuous of the police who never caught them entering the grounds without paying.

Arrests

During the study, three boys were arrested. The arrests of two of the boys

— Great and Eddie I — were very much talked about. Great was arrested in Mbare.

Your friend was picked up by the police.

• My friend! Which one?

Great.

• Oh, shame! When?

On Saturday.

• Where?

In Mbare.

• What was he doing in Mbare?

Saturdays people go to Mbare because there are a lot of fish.

• How do you mean?

He stole from a certain woman.

• What did he steal?

A purse.

• But couldn't he run away?

It was a set up.

• Shame.

Actually, we told him that it was a set up. He told me that we were jealous of his competency and thus went for the real hook. He couldn't run away because the boys were everywhere.

16 June 1993, Anglican Cathedral

• Great was picked up. What happened?

He is silly.

• How so?

Because he trusted someone that he shouldn't have trusted.

• They betrayed him?

Yes. He was betrayed. That's the problem with friends. You never know who really likes you.

• What had Great done?

They broke into a warehouse and stole gas stoves. So when they were going to hire an E.T. to come and collect the goods, they were caught.

• Were the goods recovered?

No, they were not because I know Great won't say a thing.

9 July 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

There were several accounts of Eddie's arrest similar in essentials but varying in detail; there was an element of 'set up' which included unnamed boys, and the teller of the story had previously given advice which had been ignored.

After tea we were going out where we do our work [at the Cathedral] and all of a sudden, Alpha and Daniel came and grabbed Eddie. Eddie struggled to be free but he couldn't. I've never seen the Probation Officer but I saw him that day. I was scared. Everybody was scared and everybody was shaking like see-through material. He was taken by the Probation Officer and was dragged towards the car. By this time Eddie was crying out very loudly. It was a sad

sight. Everybody was very quiet. Do you know that Eddie was once in Probation?

• No, I didn't. Was he?

Yes, but he ran away with seven others. Now four have been caught. But he was sold out by Ziana.

• You mean other boys?

Yes, I mean other boys and some other people.

• Who are these people?

How could people do this to him. I get very angry.

12 May 1993, Julius Nyerere Way

Eddie was smoking glue around Chicken Inn. And the police caught him there.

• Oh, I'm sorry. How did the police know about Eddie?

Ziana.

• Who's Ziana.

It's Ziana.

12 May 1993, Union Avenue

• I heard that Eddie was taken. Where?

Behind this building. That is where we took him.

• Why was he taken?

He had run away from probation.

• So did he cry?

He cried and he beat us all. He was just too much on the streets. He used to beat every small guy in town.

19 May 1993, Anglican Cathedral

We were not able to establish whether Ziana referred to the Zimbabwe Inter-African News Agency (ZIANA) or whether the name was being used generally to apply to unidentified people who might intentionally or unintentionally bring harm to street people.

DISCUSSION

The boys present an image of themselves that runs counter to our general preconceptions and our day-to-day observations. They like to be clean, they like to wear smart clothes and they don't like eating from rubbish bins. They think ahead about where to sleep and they aim to rent accommodation eventually.

A great concern about the streets is that they will be taken over by *Fagin's* or *mafia* type characters. We found some evidence of this, particularly with respect to the boys' accusations about some policemen. We did not find Bourdillon's *monyas* however, nor other characters who exact taxes. Our notorious fighters and bullies were of the ordinary school-boy variety. Characters whom the boys fear are unseen and thus possibly more insidious — ZIANA and friends who betray you to the authorities.

Harare streets are not a hot-bed of crime and the children in this study have been exposed to a minimal level of criminal activity: underage drinking and smoking glue and marihuana, commercial sex and getting into the football free. Two of our informants were arrested for theft during the study — one for shoplifting and one for pickpocketing or breaking and entering, it wasn't clear. Harare motorists will be pleased that neither was in connection with guarding cars. The children are religious in this respect. They regard thieving from their customers variously, as unprofessional or unwise, as retribution might arrive in the form of evil spirits.

The notion of professionalism was one of our main interests and we pursued it specifically. We have already seen that the children have weekly contracts with office workers. This is interesting. A contract implies a mutual understanding of the work to be done.

While a contract is between two people, the office worker and the street boy, the daily or hourly contracts with casual motorists indicate that the community at large has developed an understanding of the services the boys offer. The community may not yet realize the extent to which the roles have been formalised, but the boys themselves appear to be aware of the structure of their work and the experienced boys teach their skills to newcomers.

The assimilation of boys into the street culture was partially evident in our conversations. Older boys perform the more lucrative tasks and earn more money. It is also not acceptable for them to beg. What we did not have evidence for, was a gradual entry to the streets. Both boys who told us about their arrivals, entered abruptly. Their experiences were frightening and they had to make friends and learn to find food and work quickly. The Anglican Cathedral plays an important role here in ameliorating the terrors of being without food, shelter or social support.

This study has changed our attitude to street children in two important ways. Like many people, we expected the children to have a very simple knowledge set, e.g. where to find food, and exploitative attitudes, how to get a tip without really working. The children's knowledge set goes beyond physical things. They are playful, and they are astute observers of adult society. We might be threatened by both these attributes if the children were dishonest. But they are not, at least not generally. They value hard work and they understand what they do well enough for it to be considered a service.

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