Anthropology of Street Children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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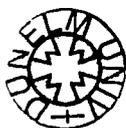
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Abstract

The first part of the dissertation addresses the home life of street children living with their natal families. It is based on empirical data derived from five years' field research. It is an account of such children's experiences of girlhood and boyhood within the family, within the neighbourhood where they live and in the street. It touches on the issues of authority, autonomy and interdependence between parents and children and how the children relate to their parents and unfamiliar adults. In other words, culture, nurture and environment as reflected in the children's street and home lives. This section also touches upon the importance of being aware of the diversity of the life experiences of the various categories of street children found in Addis Ababa, including the lives of those falling within the same category. It focuses on some of the things that home-based street children share in common in spite of their diversity. Street life related common factors include the gendered aspects of the children's career in the street and the different aspects of mother/son and mother/daughter economic interactions take. Home-related common factors are school attendance; the importance of the presence of familial adults in street children's lives and the social role such children play in their parents' lives. Additional features associated with modern urban childhood involving parenting such as socialisation, health and education are also looked into.

The second part of the thesis relates to the life style and social support system of homeless street children and how this differs from that of street children living at home with their parents. In other words, how social relationships integrate or separate the two categories of street children into society at large. This section examines the life style and life choices of homeless boys and girls over a five-year period. It looks into how such groups come into being, how the children function as a group, how they relate to other destitute adults, the police and society at large. Finally, the chapter details the painful process of their disengagement from street life coupled with their search for supportive social alternatives away from the street and gang life as post adolescent boys and young adults.

Acknowledgement

Chapter 1

Introduction

Classical anthropological studies took a unit, a tribe or a community and presented the behaviour of members of such groups in terms of a series of interlocking institutions, structures, norms and values. The usual subjects were small-scale societies or a plurality of individuals bounded by at least a common social organisation or a shared world of meanings and morals. The people under study therefore possessed a social whole that could be conceptually accessible if contextualised in terms of culture, society, ethnicity or community. Beginning in the 1950s a number of ethnographies on the processes of urbanisation in Africa developed an interest in the so-called rural-urban continuum. This involved the examination of the many kinds of changes resulting from the migration of people from rural to urban areas. Intensive field studies on the subject of ethnic migrants and changes in interpersonal ties, tribal identities, social institutions and the role of indigenous associations, were carried out by various anthropologists (Forde 1956; Southhall & Gutkin 1956; Banton 1962; Mitchell 1966)

Much thought went into the methodological questions involving research in the highly diversified setting of cities that are populated by people coming from different ethnic groups and where neighbourhoods are constantly changing in composition. Faced with the heterogeneity of town inhabitants, the more theoretically oriented pioneer writers in urban African studies suggested the use of social surveys and statistics to show variations of behaviour and circumstances. This is because they believed that any kind of generalised assumptions about urban social behaviour are difficult to maintain in African towns and cities (Fortes 1949; Forde 1956; Southhall & Gutkind 1956; Mitchell 1966; Banton 1962). As Fortes put it: "In these societies 'norms' cannot be discovered by inspection and haphazard comparison. More systematic methods are necessary and that means the applications of statistical concepts" (Fortes 1949:59).

There is still controversy over the most appropriate approach for conducting social and cultural studies of urban environments (Scott 1991; Rogers & Vertovec 1995; Wellman 1999). More recent writings on the urban context affirm that: "attempts to establish single-discipline-based, universal definitions of the 'city' and 'urban social

behaviour' are misplaced" (Rogers & Vertovec 1995:1). The trend is to use a multi-disciplinary approach combining ethnographic and mathematical analysis or a family of methodologies and insights involving comparative analysis, case studies, situational analysis and social network (Sanjek 1974; Scott 1991; Nelson and Herrelmann 1994; Rogers & Vertovec 1995). This is in accordance with Mitchell's (1966) conclusion that analysts from various disciplines "are likely to select from the total set of diacritical features of the city those which are theoretically pertinent for analysis in terms of a specific discipline."

There are numerous articles and reports on the street children of Addis Ababa that provide valuable statistical data and generalised information regarding their life circumstances and survival strategies. These studies are commissioned by various aid agencies in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) or private consultants. Just like in most western-based recent published studies on children and childhood (see for example, Woodhead 1990; James 1993; Hernandez 1995; Qvortrup et al. 1994; Nestman & Hurrelmann 1994; Jenks 1994; Brannen & O'Brien 1995:1996) the reports are concerned with social policies addressing family welfare, leisure, health and education. This is also reflected in specific articles found in the Conventions of the Rights of the Child. Among other issues, the Convention cites children's right to adequate shelter (Article 2,7). Children's right to live with their parents and in a family environment (Preamble and Article 9). Their rights to be protected from maltreatment by parents and others (Article 19). Their right to play and to recreational opportunities (Article 31). Their right to the highest attainable standard of health (Article 24); and even their right to a cultural identity (Articles 8, 22, 29, 30).

While International Aid Agencies may try to accommodate some of street children's need for adequate shelter, health and education, it is difficult to imagine how their right to a cultural identity could be upheld. For example, the cultural preferences of rural/urban in-migrant Ethiopian parents regarding their child rearing responsibilities (Articles 5, 18) are undermined by local urban realities in housing, in neighborhood composition and inadequate or non-existent basic social amenities or social support systems. This is because, the child's right to develop physically, mentally, socially and morally to his or her full potential (Articles 27, 28, 29) is ultimately tied up to factors in the

home environment.

The general assumption in social anthropology is that the social selves of children, from birth to the onset of awareness of their origins, is shaped by the places they frequent and the type of adults with whom they have face to face relations. The family provides the setting from which information about kinship concepts and appropriate codes of behaviour is shared and constructed (Shieffellin 1990; Whiting & Edwards 1992). In the so called developed world, this socialising process is increasingly being done outside the home in an adult organised world of schools, social and sports clubs and by the mass media (Boyden 1990; Nestman & Hurrelmann 1994). The ability of parents of street children in Addis Ababa to provide appropriate care for their children are hindered in practical terms as much by poverty as by existing home and street related physical environments. Besides as Boyden (1990:197) rightly points out "international children's rights lawyers ignore the evidence that the conception of rights is intimately tied up with cultural values and the outlook of any given society"

Two reports proved very useful background reading prior to my commencing my fieldwork. These were the December 1988 MOLSA/Radda Barnen Survey of Street Children in Selected Areas of Addis Ababa and the March 1993 proceedings of the National Seminar on the Problem of Begging in Addis Ababa organised by MOLSA and the Italian Co-operation. I later consulted the 1993 follow up study to the MOLSA/Radda Barnen survey carried out by MOLSA in co-operation with the University of Cork Ireland. The researchers carried out a one-year survey on the problem of street children in Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar, Mekele and Nazareth. The authors estimated that there were as many as 100,000 street children in Ethiopia at the time of writing. The aim of the study was to have a systematic and objective understanding of the `who, where and why' of street children across the country in order to identify the different regional priorities for addressing the immediate and long term needs of street children (p.vi). They interviewed 700 male and 300 female street children aged between 5 to 18 years old in the four towns (p.6-9). The writers' aim was to `explore the nature of the lives of working children and street children through the reports of the children themselves' (p.iv). They nevertheless point out that `little is known about the exact nature and extent of involvement of children in street life in Ethiopia' (p.iv)

The MOLSA/University of Cork study estimated that 70 to 90% of street children in Addis Ababa still live and/or have constant contact with their parents or relatives. I found their assertion to be a realistic proposition. However my objective was to understand the nature of the children's involvement in street life in Addis Ababa as well as their links to their families and institutions by incorporating the children, their families and non-kin adults' voices in the discourse. I therefore delved into the categories of childhood, which binds street children to institutions associated with housing, health and education. Although both studies touch upon the economic aspect of parent/child bond, I wanted to look into the gendered aspect this link takes. I wished to analyse the social and emotional benefits such children derive from being part of (or free from) parental domination. I was also particularly interested in the form of domestic and street based violence girls and boys are subjected to.

Over the years I consulted numerous NGO and GO reports and academic papers. I found Kebebew's (1988), CYFWO's (1992), Andargachew's (1992), Poluha's (1992), Winter 's (1992), Negatu's (1992), Emebet's (1994) and MOLSA's (1995) studies on Ethiopian children useful reading material. These reports were meant as background documents or directed at specific projects. The research components sometimes included needs assessment or a brief socio-economic survey of a targeted group of children. These were based on hundreds of interviews that give quantitative responses. In spite of the abundance of information that can be extracted from these studies, as far as my own work was concerned, there were still critical questions about the essential nature of the street children of Addis Ababa that remained unanswered. The reports did not necessarily tell me how street children and their families lived as a family, how they interacted with one another, how they connected to street life and society at large or how they experienced streetism over a period of time. Nor did they indicate, whether the social and cultural milieu, from which the children stemmed, had a preponderant influence on their street-related activities. The findings were therefore less useful to me when it came to extracting information on the role of culture/nurture/environment in explaining streetism or the origin of street children. These were the issues that I expected to constitute the major themes of my dissertation.

Ethiopia domestic legislation are useful as background information to understanding the basic principles underlining the social construction of the Ethiopian child. The Ethiopian National Children's Commission, Proclamation no. 288 (9) defines a 'child' as a person from birth to the age of fourteen years'. A boy or girl aged between the ages of fifteen and eighteen years are called 'young persons' (Poluha 1992). The above manifesto is in accordance with the pronouncements found in the *Feta Negest* (the Law of Kings: fifteenth century text that contains legal provisions on matters regarding social life). The edict proclaims that girls reach majority at ages twelve to fifteen years but boys only on completion of their eighteen or twentieth year. Although they agreed with the *Feta Negest*, adults and children alike said that if a girl has a child or she is no longer a virgin, she should be considered an adult. Conversely, a boy becomes a man when he reaches the age of eighteen or is he is able to support himself and his family financially. The Ethiopian Civil Code proclamation of 1960, Article 581, sets 15 years as the legal age of marriage for girls and eighteen years for boys. Although the accepted age of marriage varies from region to region, early marriage (starting at eight years of age) is still prevalent in rural areas (Polhua 1992; Southern Region Community and Family Survey 1997). City-born mothers and all the children found the very idea of early marriage for girls abhorrent. There are no laws or penal institutions dealing with the problem of the fourteen and under age groups (Kebebew 1988). In the Penal Code, Article 52, a child who is under nine years of age is not responsible for its own actions. There are clearly defined laws making parents and guardians accountable, not only for the moral behaviour of children in their care but also for the consequences of delinquent actions on their part (Tesfaye 1992:81).

Several conventions and UN resolutions address the issue of child labour and the protection of children's rights. Since its inception in 1919 the ILO has made the abolition of child labour one of its major objectives. This is enshrined in Convention 138 and Recommendation 146 of 1973. This convention covers most of the basic principles upon which national and international actions for the total abolition of child labour are based. There is nevertheless still considerable confusion about the definition of working children and street children. The paradox stems from the lack of clarity of what constitutes child labour. Convention 182 and Recommendation 190 of 1999 address this issue in particular. This includes the need to give priority to immediate measures against

the worst forms of child labour, which are likely to jeopardise the health, education, safety and morals of young persons. Among other things, Convention 182 stipulates that the term child applies to all persons under the age of 18. The Organisation recognises that child labour is to a great extent caused by poverty, social factors and underdevelopment and that a child may be defined in national legislation as being under an age that is lower than 18 years. It nevertheless stipulates that certain forms of child labour domestic and industrial cannot be tolerated, regardless of a country's level of development or economic situation. Consequently, the Declaration Committee of the 1998 conference explains what they consider the worst forms of child labour and further clarifications are provided in Articles 2 and 3 of Convention 182. The ILO distinguishes between child work and child labour. According to the Organisation child work is "when work by children is truly a part of the socialisation process and a means of transmitting skills from parents to child". On the other hand, child labour exists in: "situations where children are compelled to work on a regular or continuous basis to earn a living for themselves or for their families, and as a result are disadvantaged educationally and socially. Ethiopia has ratified Conventions 138 and 182.

All UN member states with the exception of USA and Somalia have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ethiopia is one of the poor countries of the world where children's rights remain a low priority. The Ethiopian Labour Proclamation no. 64 of 1975 expressly prohibits the employment of children less than fourteen years of age. Street children and their parents do not consider street work as an ideal solution to their plight. However, due to their life circumstances, they do not agree with the age restriction imposed by the above proclamation. In any case this legislation, like all international children's rights legislation, remains notional because there is little political determination to put it into practice. This may be due to the awareness that, if enforced, such laws would be disastrous for children and their families in especially difficult circumstances, if at the same time nothing is done to ameliorate their living conditions.

My experience in choosing a field site, identifying and making contact with the street children families was far from idyllic. It was exacerbated by the fact that there are no settled, stable reference populations of street children in any one location of the city

allowing the construction of a representative sample of people that could be studied in terms of community, let alone culture. The street children of Addis Ababa and their families do not form a homogenous group where each individual's social position is defined by age, gender or birth position. Apart from living scattered around the city, the children stem from varied types of households. Some have both parents living together. Stepparents, relatives, adult benefactors or older siblings raise others. Female-headed households include widowed mothers, migrant mothers and never married mothers. Many street children combine work in the street with schooling. A minority of homeless boys and girls live in loosely knit social groups detached from any kind of adult care or influence. Consequently, the causes that lead the various categories of children to streetism are not always the same. The sources of their present or future predicament are just as diverse. Furthermore, there are gender and age-based differences to the street children's career in the street and home life.

In order to obtain qualitative responses to my queries, I was obliged to consider the street children and their families I was to work with as a group for all practical purposes. I had to search in their life styles and narratives for common features that might comprise a shared stock of social norms and customs. In other words: to establish `their common culture' without blurring their ethnic essence or diminishing the significance of their diversity. The task of giving an account of a culture, let alone its variations, is a far more complex exercise than at first appears. Social anthropology generally affirms that, when it comes to human behavior everything is culture nothing is left to nature. Our understanding of the symbolic notion of culture is of a human construct, which is based on the most insubstantial and refractory of bases: the inter-subjective and shared world of meaning of a particular population. The implication is that a multitude of diverse cultures exists worldwide.

In his book `Why People Have Cultures', Carrithers (1992) states that anthropologists work on the premise that man is a social animal. Human beings do not gain their livelihood individually but collectively. People are inextricably involved with one another in a world in continual metamorphosis (ibid, p.199). Carrithers proposes a novel way of dealing with the intricacy of culture as well as its variation and mutability. He suggests that, if there is diversity, this must depend on it being a diversity of something.

We must therefore look into traits that all humans share in order to be able to create such diversity (ibid, p.5). He concludes that one set of universals that unifies our species is the interactive character of social life (ibid, p.10). An intense awareness of self and other, of creativity and narrative thought are abilities that are common to all populations. Carrithers designates these capacities 'sociality', which, he says, forms the basis of cultural and social variability. It is this sociality with its incessant mutability, which unites our diversity. He therefore proposes that we shift our emphasis from culture to sociality because human relationships are slightly more important, more real, than those things we designate as culture (ibid, p.30). After all, people react to other people, not to an abstraction called culture (ibid, p. 35).

Carrithers (1992) defines sociality theory as the human capacity for immensely varied and complex social behavior, asserting that we are not just passive animals who are molded by our respective societies and cultures but actively make and remake society into new ways of life. Carrithers does not propose to replace the notion of culture with that of sociality. He aims to give us a theory that allows a metamorphic view of society, a concept that would permit us to see people actually create, manipulate and transform the connections between them (ibid, pp. 35 & 199):

> According to the culture theory, people do things, because of their culture...
> According to the sociality theory, people do things with, to and in respect to each other, using means that we can describe, if we wish to, as culture (ibid, p. 34).

Sociality theory thus provides us with the means to transcend the abstracted nature of culture using the more tangible idea of sociality. It enables us to capture the distinctions between ways of life in an unambiguous manner, without diminishing the vigor of cultural effects. It gives us a methodology that accommodates continuity, change, creation and re-creation in social life and gives us an accessible form of analysis that resides in the concrete. It concentrates not on how culture says people ought to live but on how they actually live.

Street children in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, do not form a homogenous group. Besides the natural transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, their life circumstances do not remain unchanged and show much variety. As a methodological tool, sociality theory is particularly suited to capture the inconstancy of their life

experiences. I used sociality theory to look into aspects of their social life that homogenise the social world of street children and their families. I found that economic and social factors if conceptualised in terms of occupation, habitat, language, and religion, eating habits and how children are socialised create uniformity in their lives and life styles. Instead of choosing a multidisciplinary or a qualitative/quantitative form of analysis, I used a range of theoretical approaches that I felt could be amenable to the analysis of culture, nurture and environment as reflected in the lives of the street children population of Addis Ababa. These are sociality, social network and social support systems, socialisation and reciprocity. The thesis depicts the social world of street children living with their families and that of gangs of homeless children living in loose-knit social groups. It also deals with socio/economic factors that commonly affect home based and homeless street children and their families.

The principal defining criterion for community is what people do for each other. However, the definition of the term community varies from a geographical demarcation to an interest demarcation. Some writers consider people sharing a specific geographical area as a community, others de-emphasise the geographical demarcation and see it as social phenomenon among people sharing a common interest (Chekki 1979; Wahab 1996). If we assume that the people who provide companionship, social support and a sense of belonging live in the vicinity, the street children of Addis Ababa and their families do not form a community. Unlike in Rio de Janeiro or Nairobi there are no favelas or squatter settlements in Addis Ababa where the poor are isolated en masse into a separate section of the town. They live scattered about the city among socially diverse communities. Very few of the children and parents I have worked with know each other. Most, if not all, the street children families I know have relocated at least twice. Some families move houses out of choice, others by force of circumstances. More recently, those who were allocated houses by the previous communist regime are being forced to move out because some of the rightful owners of such houses are able to claim their properties. The above notwithstanding, poverty and the overcrowded living conditions found in Addis Ababa bring about some kind of uniformity to the way the poor live.

Social relationships do not exist in isolation but are embedded in social networks. The kinds of social systems in which urban-based parents operate significantly affect the

nature of their community networks. Among other things the sort of supportive social network poor parents can count on affects their ability to provide a loving, caring and materially beneficial environment for their children. Furthermore, the composition and structure of the personal set of ties with friends, relatives and neighbours that female heads of household, with dissimilar life experiences, take for granted differs. This is because it is related to where such mothers are located in the various networks than it does on who they are as individuals. This last element accounts for the diversity of experience among street children living with their natal families because it is embedded through where their parents, especially their mothers, are located within the existing social network and support systems. It is therefore apt to analyse such children's life circumstances not only in terms of their street related activities, but also in terms of their mothers' social support and social networks.

I have analysed the social circumstances of home-based street children in terms of their mothers' social network and support system. I began by looking into the type of networks available to street children's mothers in order to establish the kind of social resources they provide. I followed this by establishing where such mothers are placed vis-à-vis network systems and how they achieve social connectedness. My data include information about the changes over time in such mothers' relationship to their networks and with their children. This is because of the frequent and fundamental gender and age based changes in mother's need for the resources available in their networks. It is also due to the changing nature of their expectations of home and street related duties and responsibility from their daughters and sons.

I looked into their common culture by analysing the way urban-based poor people raise their children. The congested and overcrowded atmosphere of the Kebeles creates a peculiarly urban type of behaviour. In the highly diversified urban context migrants and city-born people encounter large numbers of principles governing social relationships that they have to adhere to. The customs and values migrants practised in ethnic enclaves are part of a particular social context. These cannot be replicated in an urban-based markedly dissimilar geographical, cultural and economic setting. Migrants are therefore obliged to relate to the sort of social situations that exist in town before their arrival. Ritual practices and relationships with affines used to contain, negotiate or arbitrate conflicts within the

community, including marital disputes, are more often than not taken over by the State machinery in the *Kebele* courts or police stations. One of the primordial concerns of poor parents is to establish and maintain good neighbourly relations and contain enmity. In the highly diversified and overpopulated urban context, the socialisation of children includes inculcating them with the vital art of living with other people thus homogenising the way poor people raise their children.

Religion in the form of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and to a lesser extent Islam, has a significant influence on neighbourly relationships. This is reflected in the numerous *idirs* (burial Associations), *mehaber* (religious associations) and *iqub* (rotating credit schemes) that flourish all around the city. Such neighbourhood associations at times differ in context as well as in the ethnic or religious composition of their members from more homogenous rural institutions. However, urban dwellers have transformed them to meet some of the needs of tribal social systems to create a sense of belonging to a community. Even when they move out of a certain *Kebele*, many poor families continue to be members of associations where they have lived the longest and have established credit and not in the new *Kebele* they live in. Those who do not belong to any such associations are the truly destitute.

Finally, a crucial homogenising factor is common language and dress code. Migrants are obliged to speak Amharic, the lingua franca of Addis Ababa and conform to the dress code of urbanites. Female migrants and children discard their traditional hairstyles and attires within weeks of arriving in town. Children are particularly adept at learning the language. I know several in-migrant children aged seven or under who were able to speak Amharic fluently within months of their arrival in town. Conversely, many migrant children forget their original mother tongue unless they come to town when they are over ten years of age. They usually explain this by saying: "I forgot my mother tongue after I came to town, I had no use for it here". Bilingual parents usually end up speaking to their children in Amharic.

The following is a brief description of the contents of individual chapters.

Chapter 2 – Physical Environment:

This chapter provides an idea of the physical environment the street children and their families live in. A brief history, topology and geography of Ethiopia are given. This is followed by a description of Addis Ababa and a profile of its population over time.

Chapter 3 - Methodology:

This chapter is about the methodology associated with participatory research, gathering field data, analysing, interpreting and writing up. These are thematically organised to give a picture of the different tasks I accomplished in order to provide a metamorphic view of the street children social life.

Chapter 4 – Defining the Street Child:

This chapter is concerned with the problems associated with defining and classifying street children in general and Ethiopian Street children in particular. It discusses the lack of consensus on the definition attached to street children. It points out the controversy surrounding the UNICEF definition of Children ON the street (home-based street children), children OF the street (homeless street children) and Children ON and OF the street (orphans, handicapped and abandoned children or children who abandon their families). It elaborates on the problematic use of the labels street children, working children and street working children when referring to the street children of Addis Ababa. The study explores the reasons behind the conflicting estimates of the number of street children who are said to exist in the major cities of the developing world, including Addis Ababa. Finally, the chapter provides a novel classification of the street children of Addis Ababa. This is done by selecting criteria from existing classifications used internationally to define the various categories of street children worldwide and adding other criteria that fit in with the realities prevailing in the streets of Addis Ababa.

Chapter 5 – Home-Based Street Children:

This chapter provides a long term and comprehensive picture of the home life of street children who work in the street but live at home with their families. It chronicles the life history and life experiences of a single mother, her two daughters and four sons over a period of five years. It also gives a glimpse of the social constraints they endure

or reject both at home and in the street. I have integrated the experiences of other street children and their families in the text. This is in order to describe the particularities of such children's work, play, leisure activities and violence against them as well as amongst themselves at home and in the street.

In order to reveal institutional factors that impact on street children's childhood, I began by looking into the type of networks available to street children's mothers. I then established the kind of social resources these networks provide in terms of housing, education and healthcare. I followed this by establishing where street children's mothers are placed vis-à-vis such network systems and how they achieve connectedness and why. By observing the types of actions that caused conflict between mother and child, I was able to infer implicit expectations from street children's mothers and the children's point of view regarding family life and street work. I used this as part of the analytic model to explore the economic aspects of mother/child relationships in order to give an account of the differing effects of home life and streetism on the lives of girls and boys. My data includes information about the changes over time in such mother's relationships with their children. Among other things, this is related to the frequent and fundamental gender and age based changes in mother's expectations of home and street related duties and responsibilities from their daughters and son.

Chapter 6 – The socialisation of Street Children

This chapter addresses in general terms the various issues involved in urban neighbourhood relations and aspects involved in child rearing among street children families. It is utopian to suppose that one can see, describe and find the theoretical relevance of everything to do with growing up in an urban environment. I have therefore focused on problems that appeared to be of major importance to group life and structure and that I could identify easily. I have consequently put emphasis on child rearing and urban neighbourhood relations. Taking an adult point of view, the chapter delves into the social construction of children in Ethiopia and explores the impact of age and gender in the roles adults play in the socialisation of street children. From the children's point of view it details the ways in which the children assume the adult role of socialising their mothers and siblings.

Chapter 7 – Homeless Street Children:

This chapter consists of multiple biographies of a group of homeless boys living in loose-knit social groups. It depicts the alternative reality lived by such children compared to the life led by street children who live with their families. Each homeless child has her/his personal history and ways of experiencing streetism. The chapter includes a non-chronological narration of the sequence of event as each participant passes though life. It details the children's lives before they entered the street world, street life and life style. It shows how their social identities are derived from the gangs they belong to. It goes into how they develop personal relationships with their peers in the street. It describes how they use membership to the gang to buffer stress in time of ill health and bereavement. Finally, the chapter details the painful process of disengagement from street life coupled with their search for supportive social alternatives away from the street and gang life. In other words a step-by-step redefinition of the world they live in and how they live it over a period of five years.

Chapter 8 - Summary and Conclusion.

Chapter 2

Physical Environment

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is situated in the Northeast corner of the Horn of Africa. It is bordered by Djibouti and Somalia in the east, by Kenya in the south, by the Sudan in the west and by Eritrea in the north. The country is as large as France and Spain combined and covers a total area of some 1,112,000 square kilometres. After the establishment of the newly created State of Eritrea in 1992, Ethiopia lost its 900 kilometres of coastline along the Red Sea and is now a landlocked country.

The Geography of the country is characterised by a variety of reliefs, ranging from 90 metres below sea level in the Afar Depression to the elevated central plateaux varying in height between 2,000 and 4,600 metres above sea level. It is a land of great geographical diversity with high, rugged mountains, flat-topped plateaux, deep gorges, incised river valleys and rolling plains. *Abbay* or the Blue Nile, its most famous river, flows a distance of some 1,450 kilometres from its source in Lake Tana to join the White Nile in Khartoum.

The country's proximity to the Equator and its great altitudinal ranges have combined to form three distinct climatic zones. The *dega* (temperate zone), found mostly in the northern half of the plateaux, is generally cool all year round. At the height of 2,400 metres, this cold area is suitable for stock raising and cereal growing. The *woine dega* (sub tropical) lies mostly in the south and ranges from temperate to subtropical lands. This temperate zone lying within an altitude of between 1,500-2,400 metres and with a mean temperature of 60 to 80 degrees F, is the most densely populated and most agriculturally productive. *Kola* (tropical), or hot zone, includes the desert and semi desert lowland areas of the east and Southeast. It constitutes about 50% of the total land and is predominantly inhabited by pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. It has a low population density and an extensive geographical dispersion of human habitat. Minimal rainfall and the largely alkaline nature of its soil militate against any form of intensive agriculture.

There are three seasons throughout most of the country. These are the *Belg* (small rains) from February to May, the *Keremt* (big rains) from June to September and the *Bega*, the dry period from October to January. The two rainy seasons enable the cool and temperate regions to produce two harvests a year under normal conditions. Some of the south-eastern and most of the lowland areas have much shorter rainy seasons; sometimes no *Belg* rains at all.

The Ethiopian Calendar Year (E.C.) is in many ways different to the Gregorian Calendar Year (G.C.). The Ethiopian Calendar contains twelve months of thirty days each, followed by one month of five days. Every fourth year is Leap Year. An extra day is added at the end of each year preceding a year whose number is divisible by four. The first day of the year is Meskerem first, which falls on September 11th of the Gregorian Calendar. The Ethiopian Calendar Year is eight years behind the year according to the Gregorian Calendar, thus 1997 G.C. is 1989 E.C. Christmas and Easter days are also celebrated during different days. Christmas usually falls on January 8th G.C. Accordingly Easter 1997 was celebrated in Ethiopia on April 27th G.C. and not March 30th 1997 G.C.

The ancient Ethiopians were of Hamitic stock. They later intermingled with Semitic migrants from Southern Arabia. Apart from the brief Fascist Italian occupation of 1935-1941, Ethiopia has maintained its unity and independence by successfully defending herself against a succession of Arab and European foes. Endowed with a rich cultural past, the ethnic composition of Ethiopia is as diverse as its topography. Over seventy languages and 250 dialects are spoken by its 80 ethnic groups. Amharic, with its unique alphabet, is the official language. Followers of the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox and Moslem faiths make up 40% each of the total population with followers of traditional local faiths and beliefs of different persuasions making up the rest.

Ethiopia's principal resource is its land. The economy is basically agrarian, with agriculture providing the major part of national production, exports and employment. It is estimated that over 90% of the population live in the rural areas, mainly as subsistence farmers. The principal exports are coffee (the most important cash and export crop) followed by grains, pulses, fruits, and vegetable, cattle on the hoof and

hides and skins. The country's mineral resources include oil, gold, platinum, copper, potash, iron and natural gas. However, at present, mining contributes less than 1% of GDP.

Drought and famines have been striking Ethiopia for centuries. This is due to a combination of low productivity, absence of developed infrastructure, rapid population growth, and adverse climatic conditions. In the post World War II period, this has been exacerbated by civil strife and economic mismanagement. In more recent times, the world's attention was focused on Ethiopia mainly due to three famines of biblical proportion. The most devastating one was the 1964-66 famine in the northern provinces of Tigray and Wello. This was followed by the 1973-74 famine with about a quarter of a million people dead and fifty percent of the livestock lost in the same region. Another famine occurred in 1984-85, and once again the televised pictures of a starving mass of people in the highlands of Ethiopia triggered an unprecedented response internationally.

In 1974, mounting pressures for a more open political system, coupled with the disclosure of the 1973/74 famine, led to the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam's so called Marxist-Leninist regime (also known as the *Derg*) that followed ruled the country for seventeen years. Ethiopia was proclaimed to be a socialist state on December 20th, 1974. The nationalisation of land, banks, insurance, commercial and industrial companies followed. Civil wars, ethnic conflict, drought, the mismanagement of human and material resources as well as the demise of the USSR put an end to the Soviet backed Military Regime in May 1991. The current Government was elected in 1995. It is the successor of the interim government set up by the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (EPRDF) during the transitional period to the 1995 multiparty elections. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is the leader of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, the largest group within the EPRDF. The new Government aims to decentralise power and has established a market economy although land remains State owned property. Land-locked Ethiopia maintained cordial relation with Eritrea until the later started a border dispute in May 1998.

Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa was founded in 1887. It is the political capital of the Country. In spite of the present Government's decentralizing efforts, it is still its economic and administrative center. Its altitude ranges from 2,500 to 3,000 meters. It has a surface area estimated to cover 21,000 hectares. It lies at the foothills of the Entoto hills and is cut through by numerous fast flowing streams and rivers. The city was not properly planned. Just over a century ago Addis Ababa started out as a garrison town for Emperor Menelik II's army. It then 'grew as an agglomeration of *sefers* (neighborhoods), following the contours of nature rather than the dictates of man' (Proceedings 1986:5). The system of *sefers*, that is military camps and settlements, was established in medieval Ethiopia:

> Chieftains with their retinue used to settle around the Emperor's compound. The imperial quarter was usually located on the highest place in the garrison and the *sefers* were scattered over a large area around it, each chief taking his specific place herein... The area between *sefers* was filled in as more residences got built (Zewde 1986: 43).

Some *sefers* were originally populated by migrants from other parts of Ethiopia and are still known as such, Wello *Sefer*, *Dorze Sefer* and so on. Other neighborhoods are named after past trading or other activities, such as *Serategna Sefer* (workers' neighborhood), *Sega Tera* (meat place), or *Kera* (abattoir). In the course of time the city 'continued to sprawl from a camp into a metropolis. Hence: "the bizarre juxtaposition of luxury and squalor that has been noted by more than one observer" (Zewde 1986:45). It has defied numerous urban planning programs, initially by the Italian Occupation Force during the Second World War and by successive Ethiopian Governments since then. Addis Ababa is now an autonomous chartered city known as Region 14. It is divided into five major administrative zones that include 28 districts referred to as *weredas*. It has over three hundred Government controlled urban dwellers associations, called *kebeles*, which serve as the smallest public service unit.

Unlike rural people, the urban population lives in an entirely money economy. They pursue various occupations and are dependent on their wages and earnings for the satisfaction of all their needs. Most of the street children families I have worked with spent over ninety percent of their earnings on food. After the overthrow of the Imperial Government in 1974, the Marxist Military regime, which took power, nationalised land

and houses. People who had more than one house were told to choose the one in which they wished to live and the rest of their properties were expropriated. The Military Regime established *kebeles* or urban dweller associations. It placed trusted party members in key positions and put them in charge of building more houses and distributing the expropriated houses to the poor. Since there were no significant public funding for such housing projects, the end product was the proliferation of sub-standard houses and make shift shelters as well as the dilapidations of the so called nationalised houses and apartment blocks. Apart from very rare cases, these houses are still owned by the present Government. Approximately seventy five percent of the sub-standard housing and make shift shelters found in Addis Ababa are thus still administered by the State controlled *Kebeles* and owned by the Government (Solomon Gebre 1993; Solomon G. & Aklilu K. 1993; Ministry of Works and Urban Development 1996; Geleto Geltcha 1996).

Many of the *Kebele* run houses are single rooms with an occupancy rate of 6 to 10 people; monthly rent may be as cheap as two *birr* or as high as two hundred *birr* (l£=12 birr). Low-income households, and this includes the majority of street children families, constitute the bulk of Addis Ababa's population. They rent or share such houses and are subject to *Kebele* housing rules (Ottaway 1976:313; Ministry of Works & Urban Development 1996:24). Only twenty-two families out of the fifty-two houses I have visited had secured *Kebele* houses. The rest either sub-rented corners of one-room houses or floor space by the week. Twelve out the twenty-two families were not able to meet the monthly rent and owed considerable amounts of money to the *Kebele*.

The poorer segment of society (this includes street children's parents) need to belong to a *Kebele* to be able to live in rent controlled *Kebele* houses, acquire the necessary address and therefore an identity card in order to be part of the *Sefer* (neighbourhood). A *Kebele* address means access to some kind of free education for their children, rudimentary health services, jobs, citizenship and so on. It is very difficult for jobless (or self-employed) poor people to acquire a new *Kebele* membership when they move residence. *Kebele* officials refuse to register new in-migrants, jobless or self-employed poor people who move into their neighbourhood due to the perennial housing shortage. Even people with secure jobs are obliged to retain their original *Kebele* membership and identity card long after they have left the neighbourhood. This is

because of the difficulty they encounter in having their new address and status entered into the *Kebele* register they subsequently go to live in.

Economic migrants from rural areas and internally displaced people due to civil strife continue to exacerbate the housing crisis in Addis Ababa (Solomon Mulugeta 1985; Ottaway 1976; Ministry of Works and Urban Development 1996; Ephraim Mulugeta 1998). *Kebeles* are unable to accommodate these new comers because they lack the means to build new houses (Ministry or Works & Urban Development 1996; Geleto Geltcha 1996). Some in-migrants are able to use the social network of long urban established kin and kith to find jobs or temporary shelter in town (Ephraim Tessema 1998). However, the overcrowded conditions and the abject poverty most town dwelling kin members live in precludes the proliferation of such social support systems (Solomon Mulugeta 1985:44-58; Geleto Geltcha 1996:14). Sub-letting a corner of a one-room house or renting floor space for the night is a common phenomenon among migrants and non-migrants alike (Ephraim Tessema 1998).

Apart from some isolated housing estates, the substandard type of houses, normally found in shantytowns or squatter settlements, are scattered in a haphazard fashion within the city itself. Plastic, mud or cardboard walled houses are built and extended adjacent to each other or near and behind tall buildings and modern villas. Unlike the metropolis of many other developing countries, Addis Ababa has no marginalized squatter settlements in which the poor are isolated en mass. Hovels, shacks, mud-plastered houses, palaces, churches, superb villas and skyscrapers can be found in the same *sefer*, often in the same street. Very few neighbourhoods are free from such a mixture of rich, poor, middle class and under class housing. This often creates a feeling of several 'villages' dispersed helter-skelter within the precincts of the city. Although some areas are less crowded and are relatively free of extensively built poor housing, there is no social homogeneity. Prostitutes, beggars, street children, day labourers, street vendors, diplomats, civil servants, rich merchants and academics live side by side or rub shoulders as they go about their daily lives. However one chooses to define them, street children can be found in virtually every *sefer*. There are therefore no settled, stable reference populations of slum/squatter children and their families allowing the construction of a representative sample.

Out of the fifty-six houses I have visited, only four did not have leaking roofs or gaping walls. The majority of the street children I know live in mud plastered walled houses, with leaking corrugated iron roofs and beaten earth floors. The rest survive in wind blown hovels crawling with lice, fleas, flies and all sort of house vermin. None of the houses have windows; many have cracks in the roof or walls. The poorer houses are separated by walls through which neighbours can hear each other breath. The only daytime light filters through cracks in the roof, walls or an open door, increasing the lack of privacy. The dwellings consist of a room at most covering an area measuring three by five meters. In this room between four and ten people eat, socialise and sleep.

Very few households have access to a shared or individual outside kitchen. The great majority of those I frequented cook inside their one room home. Furniture typically consists of a bed or straw mattress, a wooden box and kitchen utensils such as a *jebena* (clay pot for brewing coffee), one or two aluminium pots and dishes, some coffee cups and glasses. A few families have a metad (clay pan for baking *injera*, the staple pancake-like bread) and a *messob* (hand-woven grass basket for storing *injera*). Those who can afford it, usually acquire the much-treasured Chinese Kerosene stove. Otherwise, wood, charcoal, dung, leaves and/or waste paper are used as fuel for cooking.

An early morning visit during the rainy season will reveal the beaten earth floor turned into a pool of mud. All human belongings piled up on top of a single bed or box, wet through and through. The inhabitants tell me that they all sit on the available bed/box or corner where the roof leaks least and wait for the rain to stop. If the floor gets too wet, they just sit where they are until morning. Most, if not all, the children I have visited sleep on the floor, fully dressed. They cover themselves with skimpy, tattered and filthy blankets plus whatever they can lay theirs hands on, to ward off the all season cold nights. Many do not have a second outfit. They are obliged to sit naked when their clothes are being washed and dried. Rain often means flooding, inside and outside buildings. During the rainy season homeless adults and children sleep under trees, near church walls or shop verandas, which are better protected from wind, cold and rain.

In spite of their proximity to luxurious houses, many poorer dwellings lack water, electricity or latrine facilities. Some families have piped water in their compounds. When they do not, children are usually sent out to buy water from public water points. Where electricity is available, a group of houses share a meter and pay the bill according to the number of bulbs in each house. Those without electricity supply use a locally made kerosene lamp that emits noxious black fumes. The sanitary conditions are appalling. The alleys separating the houses turn into small rivers during the rainy season. Stagnant pools of human and domestic waste glide into the open sewers surrounding houses and hovels alike. A 1996 study revealed that 3.9% of the housing units in Addis Ababa have flush toilets, 16.7 % had shared pit latrines, 20% had private dry pit latrines and 59.3 % had no facility whatsoever (Ministry of Works & Urban Development 1996). In some places, charitable organisations have built pit latrines that are much appreciated by adults and children alike. Those unlucky enough to be without a latrine either defecate in the vicinity of their dwellings or go far away near riverbanks or woodlands to relieve themselves.

The total population of Ethiopia is estimated to be 53,4 million, out of which half are said to be under the age of 15. The crude birth rate stands at an average 47.3 per 1,000 of population, while total fertility is estimated at 7.7 children per women between the years 1990-2000. Infant mortality rate stands on average at 101/1000 with under 5 mortality reaching 152/1000 (Statistical source TGC/UNICEF; Children and Women in Ethiopia, a Situation Report 1993). Civil strife and famine have inevitably affected Ethiopian children. Throughout the past two decades children and their families have been on the move in large numbers in search of a secure way of life. One result has been that the capital, Addis Ababa, has experienced enormous population growth, though the influx of migrants as well as an increased birth rate.

The population of Addis Ababa has been growing at an average annual rate of 3.8 % during the last ten years. It was said to be 2,112,737 as of October 1994, of which 1,023,452 (48.4%) were males and 1,089,285 (51.6%) were females. Nearly half (47%) of the total population are migrants. Considering the age distribution of the residents of Addis Ababa, the proportion of children under the age of 15 is relatively small amounting to about 32% of the total population. The 1994 census result indicated that there are

410,443 households with an average of 5.1 % persons per household. At the time of the census the rate of unemployment was 35% of the economically active population aged 15-64. (Statistical source: The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia).

Conclusion:

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, there are no settled, stable population of street children families in any one location of Addis Ababa. They live among diverse communities, scattered about the city, in numerous back streets and in similar houses to those depicted above. The areas where such families live are not difficult to find. One has only to step out of the main road and follow any of the many footpaths or side roads to be faced by the glaring misery in which the majority of Addis Ababans live. As far as my research was concerned, it was not geographical location per se (since street children can be found in practically every neighbourhood of Addis Ababa) but where I was able to access my informants, which was of crucial importance to me. The children took me to their homes. I did not pick out a specific neighbourhood for special attention. I did not operate in any one area, but in a multitude of areas. None of the twenty-five street children families I ultimately targeted for intensive study were neighbours. Most of them lived miles apart from each other, in similarly dilapidated houses, which lacked most social amenities. This was mainly for practical reasons. Within six months into my fieldwork, I realized that if I wished to operate freely among the street children families I was working with I had to create the necessary space that would enable me not to offend or upset my informants. If I visited one house, I felt obliged to pay a call to the other house. Some mothers assumed that the other mothers were more concerned in giving me information about them than about their own families. The children who had first taken me to the neighbourhood, would complain that I had talked to their friend's mother and not theirs. I felt pressurized into spending more time trying to appease their sensibility than concentrating on what I was trying to do.

There are a multitude of churches and traffic lights and as many spots in front of commercial premises where the street children operate. It was easier for me to convey to the children that they were all my friends and that I was not there for a particular child. The rare times I was confronted by a particularly persistent child, all I had to do

was avoid the street for a few days, walk away or ignore her or him. The only fixed street based location I frequented intensively for a longer period of time was a church propitiously located near a traffic light where one of the three gangs of homeless boys I worked with had made their home for more than three years. I have given a detailed description of the area in Chapter 7. Street based fieldwork meant roaming from street to street. Location based research entailed going from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. In other words, field site in my case refers to people and multi-sites not areas, neighbourhoods, homes and a specific street or streets.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Taylor and Bogdam (1984) define participant observation as a "research that involves the social interaction between the researcher and informant in the milieu of the latter, during which data are systematically and unobtrusively collected" (in Fine and Stanstrom 1988:12). Participant observation is nevertheless a blanket term for a broad range of ways and means used by a researcher to assemble field data (Spradley 1980; Holy & Stuchlik 1983; Fine & Standstrom 1988; Denzin & Lincoln eds. 1994)

Three issues were of particular concern to my work:

i. The practical and ethical consideration involved in establishing rapport with the street children and their families.

ii. How to physically carry out the task of collecting information in the streets and in their homes.

iii. How to interpret narratives and events as told and experienced by the actors themselves without altering their meanings by using my own interpretation of things.

- **Source for selecting target group:**

The UNICEF typology for classifying street children as well as international aid agencies reports do not provide a clear insight into the various category of children active in street life. The available literatures on street children in Ethiopia are BA Senior Essays and MA Thesis as well as articles and NGO reports. They provide valuable statistical data and generalised information regarding their life circumstances and survival strategies in the street. These studies are usually directed at unveiling specific issues. Aid agencies and/or the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) commission most of the reports. Their purpose is to devise policies and programmes that are responsive to the felt needs of the people to be served. The research component usually looks into need assessment or includes a brief socio-economic survey of a targeted group of people. The criterion for classifying street children is, more or less: any child who has any kind of remunerative activity in the street on a regular or part time basis. The age structure and

gender based demarcation of the various stages of boyhood and girlhood experiences are seldom taken into consideration. Pre-schoolers, pre-teens, adolescent or even post adolescent children are often considered as a group. Very few studies make a clear separation to differentiate home based street children and homeless children. Those who do, address the subject in general terms (MOLSA/Radda Barnen 1988; MOLSA/UNICEF/Radda Barnen 1993; Habtamu Wondimu ed. 1996). Reports on the plight of the street children of Addis Ababa were therefore of limited use to me as a source for selecting a specific target group.

- Criteria for selecting my target group:

Since my interest was in the culture/nurture/environment aspect of the street children's social world, I originally restricted myself to boys and girls in the latency period of childhood, that is age seven to fifteen. This falls under the category `child' as officially defined in Ethiopia and reflects the age composition of the street children in general. It is also used to describe some `distinctive norms' associated with childhood in the wider Ethiopian culture. Six months into my fieldwork, I realised that I had to include infants and under six years old children. This is because they were present in the streets and in the lives of the other categories of street children. Their destitute mothers brought infants to the street. Those aged four to seven were either operating in the vicinity of their mothers or begging from pedestrians and drivers in small groups with other children.

Research on children cannot be abstracted from an analysis of their age and sex. Dividing the street children into age/sex-based groups can shed some light on cultural and social meanings attached to systems of age ranking. I have consequently divided the children into two age groups: infants (0-6), early childhood (roughly between 7-10) and middle-childhood and early adolescence (between 10-15). Even thought the majority of street children are boys, there are a significant number of female street children (circa 17%). This warrants paying attention to the sharp divide in the social worlds of girls and boys (Thorne & Luria 1986; Fine & Standstrom 1988) and how sex may be used as a principle for social differentiation (La Fontaine 1978). I have therefore addressed the gender aspect of streetism and how this affects the girls' childhood at home and in the street. Finally, because I was able to carry out my field research over a five-year period, I was able to include the life experiences of those who were thirteen, fourteen and fifteen

when I began my field work and who were aged eighteen and older by the time I wrote up my thesis.

Target Group

All in all I have talked to approximately two hundred and fifty street children and sixty-one parents. I have visited fifty-two homes over a five-year period. From among home-based street children, I selected twenty-five families and sixty-six children for special attention. In order to have a better perspective on the connection between streetism and the type of family structure, I conducted an in-depth study of ten female-headed household, sixteen children with parents in long- term relationships or marriages and six children being raised by a stepparent. I also visited twelve boys, all under the age of fifteen working in various garages as well as six boys and six girls living with generous benefactors. The homeless children I worked with consisted of three gangs of adolescent boys and one gang of adolescent and post adolescent boys and girls.

Although I have data on Gurage shoeshine boys, I only mention them briefly in Chapter 4, 'Defining the Street Child'. They form a category apart because of their strong emotional, material and social links with kin and kith both in Addis Ababa and their extended families in Gurageland. Encouraged by their families, many migrate to urban centres at the tender age of five or slightly older to look for employment, initially as shoeshine boys. A balanced outlook of their social world requires background knowledge of their lives in both the urban and the rural setting. I have also given a brief glimpse of children living with generous benefactors in the same chapter. Those I have met in the street were not considered or treated as children belonging to the family. Many changed 'families' or remained fulltime in the street as soon as they committed an infraction or found the relationship untenable.

Apart from four Muslim boys among the gangs of homeless boys I knew, all the children and parents belong to the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox faith. Among the two hundred and more parents and children that I have talked to, I have identified twelve major ethnic groups. I have also encountered numerous intra-ethnic marriages and partnering. I found ethnicity to be less pertinent than family circumstances to understanding the causes for streetism among the street children of Addis Ababa. At the

time I gathered my field data, the children and families under consideration were not receiving any kind of succour from aid, religious or other organisation.

Control Group

My control group consisted of twelve households drawn from the underprivileged class but with children not involved in any kind of remunerative street activity. Neither the adults nor the children were receiving any kind of help from NGOs or charitable organisations.

Excluded categories of street children

I have excluded severely handicapped and chronically ill children as well as parents in similar conditions. This was primarily because I found it hard to get involved in their lives without bringing them some kind of material or other help.

Making contact

All the researchers I knew, and whose work I had consulted, prior to doing my fieldwork had made their initial contact with the street children they worked with though agencies helping such children. Connolly (1990) and Ennew (1994) consider such children as those who have failed to make it in the street and therefore not true representatives of the street children population in general. My original plan was to work with a local non-governmental (NGO) and a major International Governmental Organisation (IGO). Aid agencies reach a very small percentage (about 6%) of children living in difficult circumstances in Addis Ababa (Habtamu Wondimu ed. 1996). I therefore abandoned both plans within days of my arrival back in Addis Ababa and went to the street to recruit my target group.

The first three weeks were the hardest. I was jostled, pestered and harassed in the street by adolescent boys, school children and beggars. School kids often followed and pestered me on my way to or back from visiting the street children or their parents. I have been cursed, insulted and had stones thrown at me my older beggars. They invariably complained that I was paying undue attention to unworthy little vagabonds (*duriyes*) instead of considering their plight. It was an unpleasant experience that I found emotionally difficult to cope with at times. It took me a long time to stop being

intimidated by the children's 'predators'. These are the seventeen to twenty five years old jobless or idle young toughs. They bully, beat up and rob younger homeless boys and street children. They occasionally followed me, demanded that I give them money, made offensive remarks or tried to touch me. I used to get knots in the stomach and walk away at a faster pace. From time to time, my little friends would try to protect me by haranguing the bigger boys or physically surrounding me. I eventually got fed up and started insulting them back or threatening to bring the police. Many relented and became 'my friends' and informants. Ethiopians and foreigners alike have told me stories about violent encounters with street children. On close scrutiny these turned out to be the same young toughs who made my life a misery in the street. In spite of the constant warning by my own family and friends, very few situations were physically dangerous to the children I worked with or to myself.

Street children of all ages are not too difficult to locate since they are very visible in most part of the city. Making contact and gaining their confidence is easy. They are basically very trustful, especially those living with their families. They live from people's charity. They approach people to beg or sell something. They are used to being given food, a few coins or told to go away. It took me weeks of refusing to give alms or buy from them before they began talking to me spontaneously. My initial contact with them lasted a few seconds. They would greet me and politely wait for me to ask them questions. I only managed to get questions and answer sessions: i.e. how are you, what is your name, how old are you, what are you selling and such. If they stayed longer than a few seconds, a crowd of adult onlookers gathered around us. I eventually found several ways of putting off intruders. I would stop talking and stare or ask the person what she/he wanted. Alternatively I would try to embarrass them by looking shocked and exclaiming *INDE*! (An exclamation conveying any of a range of feelings: wonder, distress, dismay, anger and reproval) or walk away followed by the children.

I kept going to the same streets and tried to become part of the scene, so to speak. People got used to my presence. I befriended shop assistants, adult street vendors, beggars and traffic police officers. Since I talked to any child I found, I often mixed up their names. Every other boy seemed to be called Hennock or Theodros and every other girl Martha or Mimi. It took me a long time to realise that many did not know each other,

even though they operated in the same street. Those who played and worked together did not necessarily come from the same neighbourhood or go to the same school. Some would disappear for days or move to a different location. Others would come only in the morning or afternoon because of their school schedule. Those I knew as shoeshine boys would start selling lottery tickets or sweets. Car washers and intermittent street vendors would occasionally beg as well. Girls stuck to one or two trading activities, even though some resorted to begging at opportune moments. Mothers and siblings would appear from nowhere and as quickly disappear from the scene. It was months before I figured out the connections between their trading/begging/working activities and their home life.

I spent enough time with the children to be accepted by them as well as by their families and their neighbours. As our encounters increased so did the quality and length of our verbal exchanges. They would argue and discuss with each other in my presence. I was able to prolong some of these conversations by using the appropriate facial expression, a click of the tongue or the right exclamation. It did not have to feign interest. I was fascinated by all they said and did. I still am.

The most difficult to approach were the gangs of homeless boys and girls. They also attracted the largest crowds because of their wild hairstyles and tattered clothes. Once our friendship was firmly established and they realised that I wanted to be left alone with them, they too found ways of discouraging people from surrounding us. They enjoyed making rude comments, the most offensive words usually reserved for females. At other times, they would pretend to be angry and threaten people with violence. I admit to having occasionally joined them in dealing with persistent meddlers.

My initial contact with parents was accidental. Three weeks into my fieldwork, I began asking the children about their parent's whereabouts. Two children took me to the place where their mothers were either begging or selling things. One day, I met a little boy on his way home and he suggested that I follow him and meet his mother. This created a chain reaction; all the kids operating in that street started clamouring for me to visit their homes. After this incident, I knew that the children did not mind me meeting their families. All the mothers, fathers and siblings that I have met overwhelmed me with their hospitality and generosity.

- Ways and means used for collecting data

I had originally planned to carry out the fieldwork part of my research using a structured questionnaire and a tape recorder. This proved more complex than I thought. There are inevitable drawbacks to using questionnaire research methods in anthropology. Questionnaire derived information is as revealing and as relevant as the questions being asked. In any case the efficiency of structured questionnaire interviews depends not so much on the quantitative or statistical data they provide but on the sample of respondents whose homogeneity may be further rightly or wrongly accentuated by the very structure of the inquiry. Effective participant-observation depends heavily on the degree of understanding of meanings. Little is accomplished in appraising the data if the analyst does not understand the language in which the answers are expressed or at least the point of view they reflect. The writer must therefore have a degree of understanding of meanings as reflected in that society. Not much attention seems to have been paid to this as manifested in the homogeneity of arguments on the street children phenomenon worldwide.

Questionnaire interviews may be invaluable for need assessment or to make a brief socio-economic survey of a targeted group of people. They are less useful when it comes to extracting information on the role of culture/nurture/environment in explaining streetism or the origins of street children. Besides, the bias and error of needs assessments and brief socio-economic surveys and other quantitative procedures are sometimes more subtle and therefore more troublesome to spot because the overall perspective they reflect is often that of a global view. My quest was further complicated by the fact that I did not have a firm idea of what I should look into. My original interest was influenced by what is generally written about street children and non-street children. It was aimed at securing information about what I, at that time, assumed to be important to their way of life in the street: the so called `rule governed cultural world' created by children (Opie & Opie 1959; Stone & Church 1968; Glassner 1976; Spier 1976; Goode 1986; Fine & Standstrom 1988), their secret lore and language (Opie and Opie 1959; Hardman 1973), their social network (Aptekar 1988; Swart 1988; Ennew 1994), and violence against them as well as among them (Hecht 1994).

Soon after starting my fieldwork, I realised that the type of narrative I required could neither be derived from answers to specific questions nor extracted from questionnaire based data. Even an insight into the above mentioned issues called for a thorough understanding of the social meaning behind any sort of account the street children might give about their personal experiences. In order to analyse the problem of streetism; I needed to establish the necessary background knowledge about their social/work/leisure activities at home and in the street. I would also have to delve into the reality behind the contemporary social constructions of childhood within their social environment. In order words, I had to acquire an insight into the activities, attitudes and basic axioms of the street children and their families.

There were several other reasons for not using a questionnaire in the street. One difficulty has to do with the problem of carrying out the task in noisy, crowded city streets and the inevitable crowd of onlookers this would attract and more. Furthermore, interviews carried out in a controlled environment of teahouses or NGO feeding centres have some disadvantages. They cannot reproduce or replace the more complex social reality that exists in the street or in their homes. The children are more than likely to `play to the gallery' besides their understandable expectation of some kind of reward. In addition to the above, there is their well-known propensity to distort information or lie about their age, family background or the causes for their current predicament (Felsman 1989; Rane 1994; Aptekar & Stocklin 1994). Structured interviews aim to capture precise data that can be coded in order to explain behaviour within a pre-established category of people. The predetermined aspect of structured questionnaires is aimed at minimising error. Errors do occur when street children give socially acceptable answers to please the interviewer, anticipate the now ubiquitous informants' fees, and worse still hope to be included in NGO relief programs. It is therefore not enough to understand the mechanics of interviewing; it is just as important to understand the forces behind the street children's social world that might stimulate response.

I was, in any case, soon made aware that street children modify their answers to fit the type of sympathy or reward they hope to receive from the researcher. Shortly after I began loitering in the street with intent, I noticed scores of paid interviewers with long questionnaires and a pocket full of birrs to compensate the children. The fees were a cup

of tea and a cake or sixty cents in cash. The NGO hired researchers were looking for children not living with their biological fathers and/or mothers. Word got around and by the time they had walked a few metres down the road, many a child 'lost' his/her father or mother for the day. They had fun comparing each other's ability to manipulate their interviewers and get away with it. The most outlandish answers were passed on from child to child with great merriment. The children later told me that they did not intend to lie. They admitted to deliberately giving inaccurate information in order to benefit from NGO program intervention. They also said that they did not see the relevance of most of the questions anyway. They get bored and tell anything that comes into their heads. I had nevertheless prepared a questionnaire before starting my fieldwork. Even though 1 did not use it, this turned out to be a most valuable exercise since it eventually helped me formulate my field of enquiry. I was able to discard the questions I had listed in the questionnaire as a result of the ideas of street children I had built up in my mind through reading about them. I was thus able to focus on the things or issues that appeared to be relevant to their lives from personal observations.

Tape Recorder

A month into my fieldwork, my supervisor wrote a letter asking me why I did not use a notebook or a tape recorder. I told him about the crowd of onlookers who gathered around me if I stop to talk to the kids for any length of time. I also explained that recording interviews could raise suspicion even from a person that one knows well. It made my informants self-conscious and me uncomfortable. The children would take a high sounding tone and start declaiming things. Parents sounded theatrical as when an adult tells a fable to a child or when one dictates a letter. The few attempts I have made of recording in the street have proved disastrous. The quality of recording is bad due to the traffic and other noises in the background. A tape recorder has nevertheless been used effectively by Hecht (1994) in Recife, Brazil. He let the street children interview each other. Oscar Lewis (1961) has tape-recorded long interviews with different members of one family in order to give a humanistic account of their life histories.

A year after I had made friends with gangs of homeless boys, one of them asked me to reconcile him with his family. On our way there he opened the glove compartment and found my tape recorder. He told me that he knew what it was and that he did not

mind talking into it. The day he decided to stay with his family, he asked me to convey messages to several of his friends in the street. Since I was to be the go-between, I suggested that he and his friends send each other messages and greetings via my tape recorder. They carried on for ten days until he decided to run away from home again. Soon after going back to the street, he phoned me and asked to meet me. We sat in my car and he suggested that I look away and hand him over the tape recorder. He talked for forty-six minutes. After this incidence, I used the tape with him and other members of the same gang several times.

I told the above story to one of the mothers that I knew very well. She suggested that I tape her family's conversation unbeknown to the others. I would play back the conversation to the entire family and they would laugh at each other and elucidate some points that they had been trying to make. These and other recordings have proved useful for cross checking dates and facts. They have also provided me with a better insight into their feelings for each other, their moral standpoints and motivations. I do not regret not using a tape machine sooner. I doubt that I would have recorded the type and quality of data I now have if I had relied solely on taped interviews.

Field Notes

These started as long letters to my supervisor recounting my trials and tribulations and describing the physical environment. This eventually turned into a detailed diary. After meeting the children and parents I would rush back to my office at the University or home and type out verbatim everything that had been said and what I had witnessed. This was a laborious task, taking up to two or three hours a day. I not only recorded narratives, but also routine events. These included the games the children played, how badly or how well groomed they were, even the moods they were in. I would go over and over the text within the next twenty-four hours and add things that I had omitted. If the direct equivalent in English did not come to mind automatically, I kept Amharic expressions and even entire phrase in the text. If I did not have sufficient time, I would talk into my tape recorder, translate and type out the day's conversation and events. Transcribing from the tape took longer because I had to listen to brief sections several times, mentally translate and type out what had been said. I often went back to the same person to cross check whether the words used conform to the meaning implied in the written text. It was not the

most efficient way to go about recording my field notes. Since I could not find previous examples to guide me, I have ended up with an abundance of spontaneous conversation, written down verbatim after the event. In retrospect, it would have been better for me to stop my fieldwork a few months into the research and re-arrange the notes into specific themes and characters. I eventually stopped writing up and took two months re-arranging my data into life stories and other issues. This involved re-writing some parts and repeating the same things into various sections.

Photography

Although I had wanted to photograph many of the street children that I knew, especially gang members, I never dared to ask them if I could. The collection of photos I have started of accidentally. I met one of the mothers on my way back from collecting pictures. She asked to see them and then beseeched me to take her photograph. I went to her house to give her the pictures a week later. She asked me to come back on a Sunday and photograph her children. This created a chain reaction. All the children and beggars in that street started clamouring to have their photos taken. I do not like photographing them looking bedraggled. I always ask them to tidy themselves up or just take a facial portrait. If they look particularly dishevelled, I make an appointment to come back and photograph them in their Sunday best. This was an appointment none of them ever missed. It was physically safer to photograph them at home and in the teashops where I was known. Any one who tries to photograph beggars or poor people in the street of Addis Ababa is bound to face the ire of passers-by. People rightly object that it is wrong to record poor people's miseries. The homeless boys I befriended and I have had to run for our lives a couple of times. The saddest part is that they have all asked me to keep their pictures for them, until they find a place off their own. They fear that law enforcement officers will confiscate them and use the photographs to hunt for them at a later date. Godje (a homeless boy) occasionally asked me to bring the three pictures I took of him. He would take his time looking at them, smile and hand them back to me for safekeeping. Photographing their houses was also hazardous if the neighbours objected. I always made sure that I was alone or that no one minded before daring to take a picture. I have given a copy of all the pictures I took to the persons concerned.

Drawings

Psychologists in psychological testing have made the most common use of children's drawing. However, the methodological and analytical tools employed do not work well across cultures. Swart (1990) used drawings to explore the moral attitudes of the street children of Hillborow, Johannesburg. Her findings illustrate the difficulty of interpreting such drawings and the many ways in which children's drawing may be misinterpreted. I did not ask any of my little friends to draw pictures because I do not know enough about the subject.

Literature Review

There is an overabundance of textbooks and articles on participant-observation research methods. Many pass on advice and prescriptions on procedures for data collection and text analysis (Clifford & Marcus eds. 1986; Spradley 1979; Agar 1986; Morgan 1988; Atkinson 1992; Riessman 1993; Denzin & Lincoln eds. 1994). Others touch upon the ethical implication of participant-observation with children and provide practical guidance on how to approach the task (Shuman 1986; Fine & Stanstrom 1988; Ennew 1994). Last but not least, much is made about being culturally appropriate when researching among children living in difficult circumstances. The emphasis is on being aware of childhood and community norms and using non-western derived research methods. This is expressed in terms of: starting with `indigenous notions' of childhood and not imposing alien ideas and methods (Boyden 1995:49); avoiding the use of western middle class ideas of childhood and finding a culturally acceptable procedure of research (Reynolds 1995:61); remembering not to impose western values in defining the `family' since `family' means different things in different cultures (Ennew 1994:85).

Most writers agree about the importance of the `three Rs': respect, responsibility and reflection. There is however divergence on the ways to be employed to gain the trust of children and increase access and rapport. Ennew (1994) puts emphasis on the ethical issues involved in working with children. The need to be aware of a normative frame of references set by adults when dealing with children. The importance of acknowledging their right to differ in their social and moral behaviour, even if this seems anathema to the observer. Children, she says, should be allowed to disagree, refuse to co-operate or act

autonomously from adults and parents. In other words, they ought to be able to have greater leeway for action in their relationships with gown-ups.

Fine & Sandstrom (1988) state that the ethical implications of participant observations differ with the age of children. They advise field workers to adopt the behaviour and values of the children, essentially having the adult become a "peer". They approve of the use of social rewards and material gifts to promote acceptance. They also call attention to the importance of negotiating a rapport with parents, adult authorities or guardians who have responsibility for the children. Taylor & Bogdam (1984) recommend that researchers remain passive and non-distracting. Horrowitz (1986) advises researchers to be aware of fundamental differences such as age, class, literacy, gender and ethnic origin between themselves and their informants. There is also the need to account for such differences and the importance of negotiating compatible identities to facilitate the necessary research relations. He considers documenting the process with which these identities are negotiated as a valuable source data with regard to the type and degree of access field workers are able to gain in the setting they study". (ibid, p. 413).

The list of ethical implications and responsibilities for adults dealing with asking intrusive questions and being sensitive to their body language includes more don'ts than do's. Some of these are not to interview them if they show discomfort or any sign of distress; not to put them at a moral or physical risk; not to confront them with inconsistencies or lies in their narratives. In other words, one should empathise and interact in the most trusted way possible with one's subject, without having any explicit authority role.

Personal Experience

It would be a fallacy to state that I was constantly mindful of the need and desirability of sticking to all the above injunctions. I had secured the necessary research permit from the Addis Ababa University and the Ethiopian Government. I recruited the children in the street and they introduced me to their siblings, parents, neighbours and even the police. At the beginning of my research I tried to explain to one and all that I was carrying out research on street children. Children who had already been interviewed or were receiving help from aid agencies found my behaviour strange and commented on

it. I gave no money, asked no question and just hung around. They expected me to produce a questionnaire or at least a notebook. Many understandably also hoped for some kind of reward. Some offered to answer my questions for free and promised to tell the truth. Although I still maintained a degree of friendship with children being helped by aid agencies, I stopped working with them.

The question of establishing trust, building up a compatible identity to facilitate rapport or providing a credible and meaningful explanation for my presence among them did not arise. The children I worked with showed total indifference to my excuses and explanations. I was never conscious of the authority dimension between the children and myself since I felt that I was at their mercy most of the time. It is difficult to make complex moral decisions in the rush of events. I usually reacted impulsively. I did not bribe them. I did not ask intrusive questions. I was very sensitive to their body language. If I felt that they did not want to talk to me, I left them alone. Even though I am still deeply troubled by their abject poverty, I was not perturbed by the class difference between me and their families or neighbours.

Neither the parents nor the children I talked to treated me with undue deference. An adult participant observer cannot pass unnoticed as a member of people living in difficult circumstances. It is also no use pretending that the research subjects are of equal status to oneself, even if one should treat them as such. Apart from the class, gender, age dimension, no matter how badly dressed the observer is, he or she will still be better groomed than most of those under study. Poor people may be illiterate and lead brutish lives but they are not gullible. They also do not like being patronised. Children are not innocent little fools. They may pretend to but they will not accept an adult as their peer. They usually set their own terms of reference and stick to them. As far as I am concerned all anthropologists are self-invited intruders. The successful ones are those who manage to make their informants and themselves forget this fact and get accepted as they are: old, young, white, brown, black or whatever.

The identities the children gave me range from a charitable *moja* (bourgeoise), *abesha* (Ethiopian), a teacher, a *ferenj* (foreigner), a researcher, a friend and most probably a weirdo! I would sometimes announce that I was a spy and they would all start

laughing. Some of the beggars, jobless young men and spiteful neighbours have called a *kerkasa ferenj* (bankrupt foreigner), a *kilis* (half cast) and a *Penti* (a derogatory term for members of a North American based Pentecostal missionary sect and their followers). Parents usually introduce me as to others as their friend, their children's friend or a *zemed* (a relative). Since I usually ask shopkeepers, neighbours or the police whether they have seen my little friends (*gwadotche*) or my children (*lidjotche*), they refer to them as such in my presence.

I always told adults that I was carrying out research on street children (*godana tedadari lidjotch*). Some have asked me whether I work for an NGO or some foreign religious sect and were quite willing to accept me as a `friend' when I answered in the negative. All in all, neither the adults nor the children seemed interested in what I was doing. I used to explain to both children and adults that they need not talk to me or answer my questions if they did not want to. The following are some of the answers I got: "I would not answer you if I did not felt like it. "You can ask all the questions you want. You will get the answers I want to give you". "There is nothing to hide or interesting in our lives, it is as you see it" "Do you expect me to throw you out, what sort of a person do you take me for?" "You have been here many times and you never ask questions!"

I have never been refused an interview or felt that I was imposing on them. More often than not, I had to insist on leaving, since they invariably asked me to stay a little longer. The degree of friendship or familiarity varied. Some people were more talkative than others. There were those I found easy to approach and others who were more intimidating. There were mothers that I always addressed in the polite form (*antu*), even if they were younger than I am. There were others whom I automatically gave the familiar form (*anchi*). I did not encourage undue familiarity. This was not premeditated. It was the way I acted with the rest of the community, among my family, my friends and their children. Street children usually address all unfamiliar female adults in English (sic) as `sister', `mother'- (pronounced mozer) and *enatatchen* (our mother in Amharic). I insist that both children and adults call me Paola and they do.

Participant-Observation

This was restricted to following them around, going to visit their homes or helping them out of difficult situations. Interviews were not question and answer sessions. We just carried on mundane conversation about anything: the games they played, money, health, school, the police or family affairs. I would talk up to half an hour or longer with the children when we could find a secluded place behind a big tree, an empty bus stop, in a churchyard or on our way to and from their homes. I have had hours of conversation with the gangs of homeless boys in my car either driving around or parked in a secluded place. The best conversations I have had with home-based street children were in their homes and in the absence of adults. If they are present, parents tend to answer on behalf of their children. Young people are not meant to meddle in the conversations or interrupt when adults speak. The only times they do so, is when there is an argument and they either try to defend themselves or tell their side of the story. The children I worked with usually waited until they were alone with me and explained that all is not as their parents said. There were many impromptu focus group discussions. These usually took place in the presence of the entire household, with at times a neighbour or two joining in. If the talk was about life in general and did not implicate any one personally, I was able to guide or direct the discussion towards issues that were of interest to me.

Material and Social Rewards

I had to tread carefully when it came to the issue of social and material reward to increase rapport and promote acceptance. I have never given money outright as informant's fees, nor have I ever made deals with adults or children that involved any kind of reward in exchange for information. I was very wary about giving money to the children for fear that it could affect or influence my research rapport with them. It took me weeks before I decided to give bread to those I knew and others. This was not as a reward for talking to me, since by then I had already established a good relationship with many. Quite a few street children go to the street early in the morning to earn enough to buy something to eat for breakfast. If they are unsuccessful, they either try to borrow from their friends or buy food on credit. I got into the habit of going to the bakeries the children frequented at about 8 a.m. to buy bread rolls that I distributed bit by bit throughout the morning.

It is difficult to be detached and ignore poor people's plight. About six months into my fieldwork, I started helping out with medical bills. There were instances when I found either a child or the mother ill and I left money for food and fuel. After major national holidays, especially Easter, many mothers get into debt in order to buy meat to celebrate the end of the long fast. They also borrow at the beginning the school year to buy second hand clothes or school equipment for their children. I have helped pay back some of these debts or bought pens, pencils and notebooks.

As my friendship with the gangs of homeless boys and girls developed, I gave them my phone number and told them that they could call me when in trouble. They still call me when one of them is injured, seriously ill or in some kind of trouble. I have taken many to a clinic or hospital and paid all the medical bills and bought prescription medicine from a pharmacy. I often bought them a meal at the restaurant/tea shop they frequented. Many have bought me tea and *samosas*, when they had enough money! They were often robbed by other gangs or tough young men, usually late at night and lost their *duritos* (blankets). This meant that they had to sleep under plastic bags, cardboard boxes or leaves to ward off the all season night cold. I have gone to the main central market with them several times to buy them replacement *duritos*. I have also bought second hand clothes for those who had asked me to reconcile them with their families, in order to make themselves look descent. I have paid off small debts for children who were at risk of a severe beating, never more than fifteen *birr*. I often `loaned' money to girls to help them purchase a bigger quantity of food items to enable them to make a viable profit or to continue trading after the police had confiscated and destroyed their merchandise. I have rented floor space for the homeless boys during the heavy rainy season or when several of them were too ill to sleep in the street.

Culture, Social Norms & Social Meanings

Culture and community norms have become the essential matrix around which the dialectical debate regarding research on street children revolves. This does not involve acknowledging the existence of differing cultures and social norms worldwide. Nor does it downgrade the ramification of the global view of childhood on the legislative, political, social and economic context of such children's lives (Boyden 1990). It merely reflects

the fact that discussions about culture and community norms form an implicit part of the dialogue on the street children phenomena.

Generally speaking, norms usually refer to the knowledge members of a society have of what to do in types of situations. The narrator invokes them as ideas or reasons behind a story or an incidence. Norms are also understood to be congruent with social interaction. The same normative notions that define a person are disseminated within his/her community. They form a large body of knowledge that people are socialised to acquire from early childhood and which they use to communicate with one another. Once learnt, cultural rules become tacit. We hardly think about what we are doing, we just do. A cultural insider takes this fundamental assumption for granted. The anthropologist's task is to pick out elements in people's narratives and social behaviour that provide the basis for establishing this knowledge.

Episode, events and mundane conversations can be used to reveal aspects of a culture. There can however be divergence between norms as abstract cultural rules and the actual patterns of behaviour that occur in everyday life. When answering our questions, a respondent may be

> .... telling us what is proper, ideal or expected behaviour for the type of man he is in all that type of situation. Despite the wording of the questions and the answers, he is not telling us what he will actually do; to be able to ascertain this, we cannot depend on being told, we have to observe the actual situation (Holy & Stuchlik 1983:12)

In other words, an individual's construction of his/her life experiences is more often than not inherently in alignment with the basic values and belief system of his/her society. However, norms, values, attitudes and traditions are not immutable customs. They are dynamic processes in which concrete experiences are integrated and discarded by the people concerned as convenient. Besides, people may adhere to common behavioural norms and/or participate in common social institutions, yet lack the consensus of opinion as to the meaning of their acts. Another related dimension is the fact that meanings are by no means always well defined, nor are they necessarily held in common by all members of a culture.

> Particular meanings are parts of larger ones and these refer ultimately to a whole in which all the available knowledge is related. But the largest whole into which all minor meanings fit can only be a metaphysical scheme. This itself has to be traced to the particular way of life which is realised within it and which generates the meanings. In the end all meanings are social meanings (Douglas 1975:8)

Briefly stated, reality (i.e. norms and meanings) is socially constructed and how people live this reality is how things are. This underscores the importance of distinguishing between people's verbal statements and their observed behaviour.

The researcher's grasp of local norms and of culturally appropriate actions will be insecure, unless the analyser is able to specify what kind of belief systems used in what kind of social situations, constitute common social practice. This is not as straightforward a task as it seems when dealing with street children, even for a `cultural insider'. Such examples need to rely on implicit inferences, which are based on a substantial amount of background knowledge about the culture in question, and such children's childhood. There is little or no secondary data about Ethiopia on which to base an understanding of the cultural norms affecting street children's social lives. Formulating a hypothesis based on previous ethnographic research on the wider Ethiopian culture would have been tantamount to resorting to cultural reductionism. I therefore had to find ways of locating contemporary (urban-based) social norms, affecting their girlhood and boyhood. Some of these were: the way urban based poor parents socialised their children, the gendered aspect of the children's home-based and street related activities, street children's mothers' networks, and the imperfect form of reciprocity that existed among the gang of homeless boys and girls I worked with.

The realisation of the things I now identify as crucial to the street children's social world have come about accidentally. Participatory research meant an `engaged re-learning' of my own culture. I gradually learnt to pick out important elements about their childhood experiences from mundane conversation, by following them around in the street or going to their homes. I searched in their social behaviour and narratives for common features from which to draw a shared stock of beliefs and customs. Although I began my research with a minimum amount of assumptions about the street children, these often proved difficult to shed. I stopped reading NGO reports and articles about street children for one year. I had no connection with organisations helping children and

adults living in difficult circumstances.

I also had to overcome other bias in cultural interpretation due to the difference in age and education between my informants and myself. I tended to transfer adult attitudes to custom and tradition during my own childhood into the present. It took me a long time to realise the reversal, or rather the sharing of gender roles in the domestic arena between pre-adolescent girls and boys, grasp the meaning and significance of child labour and so on. Such initial discrepancies and the identification of things that deviated from what I found socially acceptable, have enabled me to record an ongoing process of the changing role structures between women/men as well as children and adults. I only accepted a social practice to be a natural reflection of the way things are when I had it reconfirmed by doing research among control group poor families.

Appropriate Themes and Questions

Appropriateness is primarily a social matter. It is more than how the question is phrased or the informant questioned. Since I approached interviews as spontaneous conversations or impromptu focus group discussions, there was hardly time to reflect or to make complex moral decisions about the appropriateness of the subjects being discussed. In any case, begging, stealing, child abuse, the corporal punishment of children, female genital mutilation, illegitimacy or prostitution and drug abuse cannot be said to be culturally appropriate themes of discussion. This is especially true when the subject of discussion implicates the respondents personally. Participatory research often meant listening to a child accusing his/her mother of lying, giving a detailed account of his/her mother's intimate life secrets and sex life. This usually happened when they accompanied me to the main road after a visit to their parents and without any prompting from my part. Nothing in my upbringing justifies or excuses the fact that I, as an adult and a mother, silently heard, day in and day out, minors chronicling their families' most private business. It would have been 'culturally appropriate' on my part to tell the child to hush its sinning mouth unless I am a close relative, a godmother or the mother's best friend. In that case I would be expected to go to the mother and confer with her about what to do regarding her child telling tales. If the matter is affecting the child I am supposed to help the parent find a way of comforting it. As for working with the gangs of homeless boys, it meant impassively listening to them report on each other's part and present misdeeds

and more, much more.

If it is difficult to conceptualise a concept, a theme or a word in a language, it is just as difficult to devise methodological or analytical tools to facilitate inquiry. But this is not impossible. It is just as important that the researcher knows what the people understand by them and whether the notions are relevant to their way of life. The biggest hurdle I had to overcome was not the problem of broaching culturally taboo subjects of discussion, since these were ever-present realities of their day-to-day existence. Rather, it was finding a way to get people to talk abstractedly about the social construction of childhood; notions related to the human rights of children, and so on. In other words, I had to stop them discussing personal experiences and delve into societal attitudes instead. I sometimes achieved my goal by making outlandish statements about child rearing practices, the sexual division of labour and so on. During impromptu focus group discussions, this would invariably generate the desired heated debate where community norms were disclosed, condemned and affirmed.

Research with street children and their parents will necessarily involve tackling universally reprehensible cultural practices, taboo subjects and themes. It is at times difficult to draw a borderline between what is perceived as common social practice by some and child abuse by others, even within the same society. It is therefore neither the instrument of research nor the themes but how issues and questions are broached during research that ought to be culturally appropriate. It would be a fallacy to state that I had devised the least offensive or most culturally appropriate way of asking intrusive questions. Although I have many times acted impulsively, I usually comported myself in the same manner as I do when I am among my own friends and family and hoped for the best. In this I was helped by my knowledge of the language and by being so to speak a `cultural insider'.

Narrative Analysis

Accumulating facts is not enough to deploy an interpretative strategy of people's mind set or personal history. As already mentioned, since I approached interviews as spontaneous conversations or impromptu focus group discussions, most verbal interactions generated a type of narrative. I have gone over these narratives for clues that

provide an insight into normative frames of references. There are several ways to 'operationalise' narratives; that is, to take abstract ideas, general comments and oral histories from research data and make them concrete in my text. I have accordingly re-ordered tales of everyday life into the following categories:

(a) Interpreting field data narratives into texts of cultural representations

Interpreting street children's lives and compiling a collective narrative that articulates their common culture is not a straightforward task. Clues into normative references often proved deceptive. I had to set my own when dealing with both children and adults as I went along and acquired a deeper understanding of their social world. I began my research with a minimum amount of predetermined hypothesis and assumptions about street children and their childhood. Even these proved obstacles to readily accepting on-going social changes in mores and new values my informants gave weight to. I attributed poverty, lack of adult help or servants to the amount of tasks and responsibilities expected of pre-adolescent boys and girls. My research with a control group helped put such issues and other baffling aspects related to child rearing among the poor in Addis Ababa into perspective.

(b) Oral first person accounts of personal experiences

Oral fist person accounts of personal experiences are normally interwoven with normative frames of references (Labov & Walestsky 1967; Sachs:1983; Linde 1993). These accounts can generate a substantial amount of background knowledge about the normative view of contemporary childhood. They also facilitate the understanding of the street children's social world within the context of their own social environment.

Narratives of everyday occurrences at home and in the street can inform concrete situations. However, the relation between social fact and the actions of an individual are not always intrinsic or logical. The task then is to pick out elements in the discourse that provide the basis for this understanding. Parents and children often gave me conflicting reasons behind certain actions. I looked into these to help me identify recurring outcomes and the types of social actions taken by both a child and a parent in similar situations. This was pertinent to my understanding of the gender aspect of the economic relationships between mothers and daughters and mothers and sons.

(c)   The narrators presentation of their sense of self within their family or their community and how they negotiate this with others

By virtue of being part of the family, every member complies with all familial obligations and is afforded all his/her rights in return. It is in the actual discharge of obligations and enjoyment of rights, combined with conditions imposed by the children's street related activities that contemporary aspects of child rearing practices were revealed to me. The challenge was to discern the vital hints that threw some light upon the cultural pressures, which determined the patterns that demarcated them as such (Rosenwald & Ochberg 1992; Linde 1993).

At the community level, I used informal focus group discussions to crosscheck whether an individual household's values and attitudes were also found in the collective consciousness of the community. As long as the subject of discussion did not implicate the speakers personally, they felt free to talk about things in general terms. Once I had a hint about what I should investigate, I would try again and again to bring up the issue in all conversations. I pursued this until I had a confirmation that it was pertinent to their way of life or that I had once again been misled by my own assumptions. I learnt by and by how to draw information without asking explicit questions. One way was to relate what one group had said to the next group and either looked convinced or amazed, and then waited for their reaction. Another way was to act completely shocked by what is generally being said about such and such and affirm that this did not conform to the way I was brought up and let each individual comment on it

(d)   Life histories and experiences in the street

No story or problem ever captures the whole of a person's experience. A life story is not a fixed, objective entity. It is a fluid social construct, which is subject to revision (Linde 1993). As speakers forge their identities, they inevitably give some pattern of experiences more weight than others. Narrated insights into family dynamics are full of cultural concepts on family systems and relationships. The family structures of the street children I worked with were too numerous to be typical of anything. I also had to take account of the unstable relationships between members of the same family over time and the changeable aspect of the children's career in the street. The life stories I have

included in this thesis were derived from perspectives I gained through everyday conversation during a five-year research period. Since my initial contact and continued presence in their midst was linked to my association with their children, parent's life stories were articulated in terms of parenting and life before or after becoming a parent. Children were prone to focus on immediate worries and needs. I have tried to show how street children created, manipulated and transformed the connections between them and their parents, as well as with other street children and unfamiliar adults. I have attempted to convey the social conditions they met at home and in the street, and what effects these had on their schooling and street related activities. I have consequently written the life histories giving a chronology of events that avoids imparting a fixed imagery of the street children's personal history and life experiences.

Emotional Baggage

Nothing I have read captures the difficulties and complexity of carrying out an anthropological investigation among street children and their families. Nothing had prepared me with the emotional baggage that goes with the fieldwork, or with the degree of social involvement I have ended up with. The heat, the cold, the dirt and the sickening smell related to trudging around the streets of Addis Ababa. The alarming prospects of feeling all sorts of house vermin crawling up my legs while being overwhelmed by people's kindness and hospitality. The irritation I felt at being constantly accosted by beggars, rude men and even the street children themselves. The boredom I had to endure while waiting for a child, a parent or something to happen. There have been times when I felt that I ought to stop my research and do something about helping them. I have had to stop going anywhere near the children or their parents for a week or two several times in order to be able to continue helplessly witnessing their plight. I often found it impossible to remain impassive and not get involved in the children's quarrels. It was emotionally easier for me to work with boys than with girls. Most of the fights I have had with parents have been in defence of daughters. The girls I liked most seemed to have an uncanny ability to transfer on to me their dislikes of other people and involve me in their squabbles. Although I am supposed to have stopped the fieldwork part of my research, I am still in constant touch with many children and parents.

Conclusion:

Most of the how to and step-by-step handbooks on participant observations (e.g.: Spradley 1980; Werner and Schoeple 1987; Russell 1988) state that the observational research process evolves through a series of different activities as it progresses from start to finish. They have identified three major types of observation, namely descriptive observation, focused observation, selective observation and discussed their sequences in fieldwork. They have also gone through each observational sequence and identified types of interview methods and note taking that go with it.

Although I did not follow the exact pattern suggested by the handbooks, since I read them two years after I had been in the field, I now realise that I have unwittingly used several methods in different combination. This may be due to the fact that I went into the field without knowing how to go about coping with the situation, what and who to look for or the appropriate questions to ask. This was in spite of the fact that I was born and raised in Addis Ababa and I speak the language.

As already stated, I gave up the idea of choosing my target group from among those who where being helped by NGO's soon after starting my fieldwork. At the 'descriptive observational' stage and for a long time after I counted and kept a record of all the street children I talked to in the streets, however briefly. This proved a futile exercise in the end, since the only use I put the list to, is to fix the number of houses I have visited, children and parents I had talked to.

At the 'focused observation stage', I began keeping a careful record of those I met frequently. This was because I kept mixing up the children's names and getting confused about who is related to whom or which child lived near or with another child. I also started following any child who was willing to take me to her or his home. I avoided places where my relatives or close friends had commercial premises. Many did not approve of or understood what I was doing. Those who did not mind wanted to help by telling me 'all there was to know about the street children'. Many were convinced that children and their families would tell me a pack of lies about their life circumstances or worse still rob me. Besides, I would have been obliged to pay a social call every time I was in the area and this took time off from my research work.

The 'selective observation' stage began when I started avoiding children and mothers who either overwhelmed with excessive hospitality, pressurised me with excessive begging and/or their expectations of some kind of reward at a later date. Excessive hospitality occurred when they offered me sodas and other treats they could ill afford every time I visited, no matter how many time I pleaded with them to stop doing so. Some mothers would beg me to stay a little longer every time I got up to go, or started preparing coffee and tea and insisted that I stay. Excessive begging was relentlessly asking me to lend them money, buy them this and that, give them any item of clothing I had on me or even hand over my pen and watch.

I found it impractical to work freely among street children family who were close neighbours. As mentioned in Chapter 2, even when I tried to pay equal attention to all around, a child or an adult would complain that I was neglecting her or him. I also had to discard neighbourhoods where I could not pay a surprise call to a mother without the whole neighbourhood or several children standing outside the door listening to what I was saying or watching what I was doing. I avoided mothers who picked and chose who among their neighbours I could talk to because they were or were not on friendly terms with them.

I discarded areas where the neighbours felt that they had to tell me about the street children family I wanted to study rather than talking to me about themselves. Some neighbours would go as far as saying spiteful things about the street children and mothers I had befriended in order to discredit them in my eyes. Worse still, many wanted me to concentrate on their plight and help them find jobs their children, relatives or themselves, be godmother to their daughters, lend them money, write them fictitious job certificates or even employ them myself.

I also avoided mothers who regularly sent their children looking for me, forcing me to visit them on the pretence that they were ill or something bad had befallen them as soon as they felt that I had stayed away too long. I stopped visiting mothers who kept contradicting themselves or lying to me about their life history and life circumstances because I felt that I had not won their trust. Some street children, especially girls, liked following me around on my tour others grabbed my hand as soon as they saw me, and

insulted and even assaulted children who wanted to get close to me. I found this unpleasant. It also discouraged other children from talking to me. I avoided such children or refused to talk to them or visit their homes. I also stopped visiting families, who were receiving help from NGOs, or had a regular income, however meagre. Sadly, there were enough families living from hand to mouth for me to choose from. I felt completely accepted by the twenty-five families I ultimately selected for special attention. I could come and go as I pleased without being mobbed, insulted or pressurised by their neighbours or neighbourhood children. I used some of these neighbours as my control group.

Chapter 4
Defining the Street Child

Many writers on the issue of street children and streetism have been preoccupied with the problem of classifying and defining the street child (Swart 1990; Cosgrove:1990; Barker & Knaul 1991; Rosa et al. 1992; Oritz et al. 1992; Lucchini 1993; Tyler 1997). There is nevertheless still a lack of consensus about the definition and classification of street children. The phenomenon has in fact become one of those controversial issues where everyone's argument seems to be valid. Aptekar, for example, contends that there are no street children in the USA or in the Developed World. This is because the degree to which children, particularly school age children, are let to fend for themselves is greatly restricted by the State interceding to care for them. He writes: "What the developed world has, is a large delinquent population most commonly found in the poor urban slums" (Aptekar 1993:3).

Ennew (1996) explains that the term "streetism" is often used by NGO programme workers in Ethiopia to denote ways of life associated with living on the street, instead of the terms "on" and "of" the street. The word streetism was first used in relation to the street children of Ethiopia in the December 1988 MOLSA/Radda Barnen report. The authors define the term as follows:

> "Streetism to mean children who for various reasons work and/or live in the street. This is also intended to indicate the way of life of the children who consider the street in its widest sense, with its own esoteric rules, customs and vocabulary as their world" (page 4)

The terms "on" the street, "of" the street and "on and off" the street are commonly used to classify street children in Ethiopia (MOLSA/Radda Barnen 1988; Molsa/UNICEF/Univerisy of Cork, Ireland 1992; UNICEF/TGE 1993; Heinonen 1996). The main criterion for children "on" and "of" the street is the children's sleeping place. Children "on" the street refers to those engaged in the street but with regular contacts with their families. Children "of" the street denotes those who live, work and sleep in the street. Orphans, handicapped and abandoned children or children who abandon their families fall under the "on and of" category (Heinonen 1996:87). In the above-

mentioned reports, the typology is usually referred to as a `UNICEF' definition without further comment (Ennew 1996:206). In the 1992 MOLSA/Radda Barnen/University of Cork report it is used as "a behavioural indicator" or to indicate "the level of the children's engagement in street life" (ibid, p.206).

The above classification is too rigid and does not correspond to the realities found in most big cities. This is because street children do not form a homogenous group, nor do their life circumstances remain unchanged. Besides the natural transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, the degree of the children's involvement in street life and family contact varies. Furthermore, some children may be represented into one or more of the three categories listed above at different times of their lives and careers in the streets. As mentioned above, many alternate between home and street life. UNICEF has become aware of the difficulties with its own definition of children ON versus children OF the street. Since the 1990s the Organisation has been grouping all working children, whether working on city streets or elsewhere, as `working children'. It uses the term `street children' to refer to the smaller number of largely abandoned children and youths for whom the city streets are home (Barker & Knaul 1991:2). Cosgrove *(1990)* and Lusk *(1992)* have added the magnitude of a street child's deviant behaviour in terms of drug abuse, thieving, violent conduct towards other people to the UNICEF classification.

The origin of street children has been correlated with civil strife and social change in South America, Kenya, Ireland and Sudan (Swart 1988; Noworojee 1990; Veal & Taylor:1991). Cultural and racial factors were explored by Aptekar (1994) and found to be inconclusive. In Ethiopia, it is associated with the onset of urbanisation, urban poverty, family abuse and rural/urban migration (Andarkatchew 1976; Zenebe Mamo 1996; Tedla Deressie 1999). However, the underlying cause for the proliferation of the street children population in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, is said to be the emergence of female-headed households due to the disintegration of traditional family structures (Wainaina 1981; Brown 1987; MOLSA/Radda Barnen 1988; CYFW0:1992; Rane ed. 1994; Tedla Diressie 1999).

In the Ethiopian context, I found that family circumstances (rather than culture, religion or ethnicity) to be the major cause that spurs many a child to streetism. As in most capital cities the world over, the population of Addis Ababa, as opposed to its rural counterpart, is heterogeneous. As mentioned in chapter 1, the street children of Addis Ababa and their families live in socially diverse communities, scattered about the city. They can be found in practically every neighborhood. They come from different backgrounds, with differences in race, norms, social values and languages. Far from creating social tension, urbanization has encouraged the intermingling between the various nationalities and religious groups. Intermarriage across ethnic and even religious lines is common. Some street children's mothers have several offspring from different fathers coming from the various regions of Ethiopia. Furthermore, there are numerous types of household arrangements for the 'family' to be typical of anything. Some children have both parents living together, married or in long or short term partnerships. Others have live-in stepmothers or stepfathers. Many more have dissimilar life experiences because they live in various types of female-headed households. That latter includes city-born mothers, in-migrant mothers, divorced, widowed and never married mothers. The nature and structure of such lone mothers' social and support networks differs. This has a differential impact on their income generation power and therefore their ability to care for their children and consequently the degree of involvement that their children have with street life.

The universal picture emerging from the literature is that street children are more entrepreneurial than squatter/slum children, that they have more egotistic parents or that they come from dysfunctional families (Aptekar 1988; Swart 1988; Boyden 1991; Ennew & Milne 1989; James & Sprout eds. 1990; Ennew 1994; Hecht 1995). The general concept of the street is as a morally dangerous place for children but street children are also commonly considered to be a danger to the community (Swart 1988; Glauser 1990). Most of the discourse on street children is consequently centred on them living an uncontrolled life. Cussianovich (1992) claims that urban societies generally consider street and working children as children out of place and that 'this does symbolic violence to such children'. Writing on the same theme, Tyler (1997) contends that throughout their lives, 'culture defining groups' largely define such children's possibilities while their perspectives, and at times, their very humanity is questioned. 'Culture defining groups'

are mainstream people, including professionals whose perspectives on life and society are supported or shaped by the media or designated leaders. Tyler considers street children, 'people of colour', those from the lower classes or ethnic minorities as part of 'non culture defining people'. The attribution of a signifier to a social group creates that social group. In Ethiopia, street children are generally assumed to be more or less outside the direct guidance, moral inculcation and economic dependence of their parents or adult organised institutions. Worse still, homeless street boys and girls are usually perceived to be juvenile delinquents, drug abusers, petty thieves, destitute vagrants, dropouts or deviants.

Even though NGOs and the local media often portray them as innocent victims of society's ills, the prevailing stereotypes of street children in Ethiopia seldom have positive connotations. Their public image is reflected in the ambivalent picture their presence in city streets conjures up in popular imagination and people's reaction to them. Addis Ababa is not a tourist town. Street children and their families live off the charity of Ethiopian people. Nevertheless, the general public does not approve of children roaming around the streets apparently free from parental control and adult supervision. Pedestrians and motorists alike find being constantly accosted by such children irritating. Shop owners hire guards to keep them away from their doorsteps, even though many end up patronising a chosen few. The police harass them constantly in order to get them out of the streets. Even street children's mothers hold contradictory or ambiguous perceptions of the street. Some maintain that streetisim makes their children unmanageable and unprincipled. Others claim that children left at home to fend for themselves get bored and cause mischief with neighbours. A few are convinced that idle children pick up baneful principles from neighbourhood children but learn to be useful from street work.

Street children are recognised by different terminology in different countries. They are gamines and chupagruesos in Colombia, pivets and vermin in Brazil, parking boys in Kenya, pogey boys in the Philippines, young rascals in New Guinea, and Mutibumu in Zimbabwe. They are the Strollers in Cape Town (Sharf et al. 1986) or the Ibanda and Malunde in Johannesburg (Swart 1988). Some definitions of street children can refer to the type of socio-economic network established by the children themselves. The most quoted examples are the Gallada (economic support group) and Gamada

(affective support group) in Colombia. Street children used to be called *duriyotch* (vagabonds). The modern, politically correct, equivalent to street children in Amharic is *Godana Tedadari.* Roughly translated it means street dwellers or those who live off the street. The word child is not included: *godana=*street and *tedadari=*living off. They are also known as *Berenda* Adari. Here again the word child is not included: *Berenda=*veranda and *adari=*sleeping at night. Although *Godana Adari* usually refers to street children, *Berenda Adari* can be used to refer to homeless adults. The children themselves usually refer to their street related activities as "work" even when they are begging. Those living at home and attending school invariably call themselves students.

One of the criteria distinguishing homeless children from home-based children in Addis Ababa is their lack of family ties, but not necessarily a family. All those I have met knew the whereabouts of their parents and siblings or close relatives but had chosen to abandon them. Even though there are other destitute young people eking out a living in the streets of Addis Ababa, a clear distinction is made when it comes to homeless street children. They are collectively referred to as Borco (an adulteration of the Italian words: *sporco=*filty/dirty or *porco=*pig). An Ethiopian anthropologist has translated Borco to mean: "One who lives in the streets and is unable to return to a normal way of life. A person who falls victim to addiction and other deviant behaviour (Ephraim Tessema 1998:v) ". This interpretation sums up how they are generally viewed by most people. Even the street children with homes and families who socialise and gamble with them share the community's perceptions of such boys as being a bad lot. Ephraim Tessema uses Borco to refer to both adults and homeless children. Homeless boys and girls seldom use this term to refer to themselves because they considered it to be derogatory and offensive. They use the words *Godana* (an abbreviation of *Godana Tedadari=*street children) or *Dura* (which is short for *Duriye=*vagabond). They consider themselves victims of parental neglect and abuse as well as society's inhumanity towards children.

Two decades of research indicates that the great majority of street children from the developing world are not homeless. As many as ninety percent work in the street but live at home (Wainaina 1981; Richter 1991; Lusk 1992; Rane ed. 1994). There are no national figures on the number of street children in Ethiopia. NGO reports and newspaper articles give conflicting numbers ranging from one hundred thousand to half a million

street children. This is hardly surprising. Given their diversity and wandering life styles, it is difficult to carry out a survey that would provide an accurate estimate of the street children of Addis Ababa. In 1991, Peter Tacon (a UNICEF consultant) guess-estimated that there were 120,000 street children in Ethiopia. He claimed that out of these 20,000 were children OF the street while the remaining 100,000 were Children ON the street. In 1993, Thomas (1993:48) assumed that half a million to a million urban poor children were at extremely high risk of becoming street children. Among those living in Addis Ababa at least ninety five percent are said to have regular contacts with their families. The remaining five percent represents the numerous gangs of homeless boys and a few girls sleeping rough in roadside ditches, pavements, shop verandas or outside church walls (MOLSA/Radda Barnen 1988; CYFWO:1992; Habtamu Wondimu ed. 1996).

Although street children are of both genders, studies indicate the predominance of boys among the street children population worldwide (Lusk et al. 1989; Onyango & Kariuki 1991; Swart:1988). Such disparity between the number of girls and boys has been attributed to the proliferation of female-headed poor households where boys are socialised into leaving home at an early age (Aptekar 1994) or the presence of an abusive stepfather (Felsam 1985:1989). UNICEF reports that there are fewer girls in the street because they are lured or forced into prostitution (UNICEF 1985:1986:1990). Cultural intolerance to a high outdoors profile for girls in some societies as well as their crucial roles in the domestic arena are other factors cited (MOLSA/Radda Barnen 1988; Swart:1988; Rane ed.:1994). The ratio for Ethiopia is said to be approximately four boys to one girl, especially among those nine years and over (Habtamu Wondimu ed. 1996).

My findings indicate that in Addis Ababa, the disparity between girls and boys could be attributed to the fact that boys have more opportunity for work and leisure in the street. There is a gendered division of labour that demarcates the types of activities and job opportunities available to either sex. Acting as parking attendants, helping carry small parcels for shoppers and begging from well-dressed pedestrians are mainly boys' activities. Offloading trucks, carrying heavy parcels for people coming out of buses and minicabs, fetching and throwing garbage out for supermarkets and people living in apartments are chiefly but not exclusively available jobs for adolescent street boys. This is because they have to compete with numerous jobless youths and male adults

looking for an opportunity to earn an income. Changing coins for mini cab drivers, shoe shining, selling newspapers are more or less the monopoly of street boys. Both girls and boys sell sweets, cigarettes and various small items. However, girls are on the whole engaged in petty trading, selling mostly fruits or home processed foodstuff, like peanuts and such. Thus, girls have fewer choices and opportunities than boys do when it comes to earning a living from street trading or street work.

Studies carried out in India, Nepal and Ethiopia found street children to be better fed and in better physical condition than is generally assumed (Rane ed. 1994; Panter-Brick, Todd & Baker 1995; Yemane & Yemane 1998). The streets of Addis Ababa provide street children with the means and opportunity to feed themselves. They are able to purchase a great variety of very nutritious foods like peanuts, bread, and bananas, boiled eggs or potatoes for as cheap as ten to twenty-five cents. They are considered creditworthy by most street vendors and cheap teahouse owners. However, the gendered aspect of their career in the street has a dissimilar impact on girls' and boys' abilities to dispose of their time and money. Boys have more money and opportunity at their disposal to feed themselves outside the home environment than girls. All the street boys I worked with had relatively independent financial arrangements with their parents. Furthermore, the type of work opportunities available to them meant that they were more or less able to operate independently from their parents. Their mothers had no way of knowing how much money they earned or how they spent it. Those living at home often lied about the amount of money they earned or whom they associated with in the street in order to dispose of their money on food and leisure.

Much like the boys interviewed by Yemane and Yemane in 1998, male street children could afford to have two or three meals a day. Those under ten years of age spent most of their money on food and gambling. Although they contributed to family income and towards school related expenses, older boys spent a considerable amount of their money on food and leisure activities such as watching video or gambling. Apart from very rare cases, the girl's financial arrangements were inextricably tied up with that of their mothers. Since mothers knew the worth and profit of the merchandise, they expected their daughters to hand over the entire proceeds of the day. More often that not, this was considered household income and mothers disposed of it as they saw fit.

Unlike boys, girls were unable to spend the money they earned on food or leisure activities. They were also inhibited by the fear of receiving a beating if they 'lost' money or spent it on food.

In Nairobi, the age of entry into street life is said to be as young as five years (Onyango & Kariuki 1991). Those five years and younger that I was able to observe in the streets of Addis Ababa usually begged in the vicinity of their mothers or siblings before flying solo age six or seven. Exit from street life takes many forms. As they grow older the success of street children's career in the street is cut short by age. Soon after reaching puberty, boys cease to be seen as vulnerable little kids and start being perceived as thugs and treated accordingly. People's generosity is tempered by their fear or discomfort in coping with a young person. Girls aged thirteen and older are often sexually harassed by older street children, jobless youths and various street vendors. Both girls and boys are thus forced to look for alternatives to street life from age sixteen onwards.

Psychology tests carried out by Aptekar and others indicate that, generally speaking, street children function with adequate mental health (Aptekar 1988). Among those I worked with, the ability to cope satisfactorily in the street varied from child to child. Constraints were forever being imposed on the children, both at home and in the streets. They deployed varying adaptive survival strategies to adjust or to cope with all sorts of problems. This did not imply success. It simply allowed individual children to develop a plan of action in order to face the symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships they had at home or in the street. They were expected to be obedient, voiceless, dependent children at home while assuming the adult like responsibility of home providers. On the other hand, they were expected to show an adult like behaviour and assume full responsibility and face the consequences for any misdeed they committed in the street. This may be repayment of debts, not fulfilling paid contractual work; causing physical injury to others; breaking, losing or stealing other people's property; insulting people or other offensive acts. The contradictory signals they received at home and in the street meant that many of them were often sad or depressed for several days at a time.

Violence is an ever-present factor in street children's home and street lives. On the home front, the strength of parental power over children is not moderated by the fact that they have a role in the economic survival of the family. The fear of yet another beating for fighting with neighbourhood children, damaging property, losing or misappropriating money leads many children to run away from home (Heinonen 1996). Boys are at a disadvantage when it comes to violence against them in the streets. The children themselves perpetuate the most common and frequent type of violence, against one another. They fight over lucrative patches for begging, shoe shining, car watching and so on. Newcomers and intruders are regularly beaten up, robbed or harassed. Smaller and homeless boys are robbed or forced to gamble or pay protection money to the numerous jobless youths and men hanging around in the street. The police are invariably harsher on boys than girls. Those over fifteen years of age are sometimes verbally abused or physically assaulted by adult males who perceive them as potential pickpockets. Motorists are prone to insult or even assault those who importune them with persistent or aggressive begging. There is relatively little violence among or against female street children. Unlike boys, they seldom fight over territory or gambling and related leisure activities. However, bigger boys or young toughs frequently sexually harass older girls. Those selling roasted peanuts or chickpeas are robbed by school children or have a rough time getting credit customers to pay their debts. Law enforcement officers sometimes hound them if they try to sit in a street corner to sell their goods instead of circulating by either confiscating or destroying their merchandise.

There is extensive literature indicating that children have a sub-culture of their own, a culture of childhood with its tradition, games, values and rules (Opie & Opie 1959; Stone & Church 1968; Hardman 1973:1973a:1974; Glassner 1976; Fine & Kleineman 1979; Goode 1986). This theory assumes that social meanings remain constant, are disseminated throughout the nation in both urban and rural settings and can be transmitted through generations. It also presupposes that children have a group culture that diverges in part from a dominant adult culture. Swart (1988) argues that street children do not fit any categorisation associated with a sub-culture. This is because the term may be used to describe the 'distinctive norms' of virtually any group within a society. It can refer to ethnic enclaves or occupational groups, religious sects, or regional class variations of mainstream culture. Another obstacle is to determine which norms street children's sub-

culture is supposed to deviate from: the African or Western, the rural or the urban. Swart asserts that far from excluding themselves from society, adolescent Malunde street children's view of the future included the hope of returning `home' one day to undergo traditional initiations into manhood (Swart 1988:3-6).

Similar to the Malunde of Johannesburg, the street children of Addis Ababa cannot be said to be a sub-culture, if by this we mean that they form a rule governed, static social entity that functions separately from the rest of the community. Besides childhood being but a transitory phase to adulthood, they do not form a homogenous group. They work and live scattered about the city with little or no connection with one another. As a matter of fact, I found that home-based as well as homeless street children's morality did not differ from that of mainstream society. They were adept at using their knowledge of the socio-cultural environment to their own advantage. Many were able to name and date all the Saints Days in the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Calendar. I have seen both girls and boys change their attire during the holy Moslem month of Ramadan and accord their words and body language with socially prescribed attitudes when soliciting alms from Moslems. They knew and respected food taboos and fasted when possible. They had a basic knowledge or practical experience of spirit possession and traditional herbal medicines. Many attended church regularly and had strong Christian beliefs. Like other Ethiopians, they often resorted to taking holy water (*tebel*) in church when they were ill. They also invoked their favourite Saint to intercede for them in adversity and made a vow to do penance or to give alms to the poor when their troubles were over.

Home-based street children in Addis Ababa are not marginalized from the broader culture of the rest of the community. Those I worked with and their families were part and parcel of the neighbourhood they lived in. Their parents belonged to a burial association (*idir*) and/or to a religious association (*mehaber*). Children and parents alike were members of one or more rotating credit scheme (*iqub*). Those who could not afford to become members of any of these community based voluntary associations were the really destitute ones. Home-based street children associated freely with non-street children in the neighbourhood they lived in and were considered *yesefer lijotch* (neighbourhood kids). They walked to school and socialised with children with no

connection to street life. They played football with neighbourhood kids on Sundays. There was no stigma attached to their street related activities. As a matter of fact, neighbours praised such children for helping their mothers.

Due to their life style, the homeless gangs of street children I knew had little contact with neighbourhood or voluntary associations. They nevertheless shared an inventory of values and attitudes found in the collective consciousness of the community. This may be due to the fact that they were all socialised into the wider Ethiopian culture before abandoning their families and entering gang life aged twelve and older. What differentiated them from home-based street children was the absence of adults and adult organised institutions and support systems in their lives. The three gangs of homeless boys I followed over a five-year period did not form a cohesive social group. They had little or no contact to other gangs. Membership in the group changed constantly since they were more often than not at odds with each other. They were prone to leave the group as soon as they committed an infraction or found their relationships with the others untenable. Many began looking for an alternative to gang life by trying to re-integrate themselves into the adult world by working as porters or doing odd jobs age seventeen or as soon as they were unable to successfully beg from the street. The unstable society they created for themselves was not conducive to generating a culture of its own, let alone a subculture.

- ## Working children versus street children

The 'otherness' of street children is not centred on them being poor children but on their engagement with street life. Their adult-like behaviour, their resilience, hard work, self-reliance and the material help they bring to their families is often rightly glorified in NGO reports and in the literature on working children. It is therefore not that they are obliged to work for their living but the fact that this occupation takes place in the street that is condemned or pitied. Children working/begging to subsidise their schooling expenses or working at home 'as substitute servants' was not anathema to the wider Ethiopian culture (Pankhurst R. 1990). However, poor and rich alike universally condemn street work and streetism. Although the streets of Addis Ababa are filled with beggars, most Ethiopians do not look upon begging by able-bodied persons and children

favourably. Begging is acceptable if practiced by the old, the sick, the handicapped and mothers with infants. Very few families in Addis Ababa are able to feed and clothe their children adequately, let alone provide them with the necessary funds for school and leisure activities. Both working children and home-based street children work to feed themselves, to help their families or supplement their parents/guardians/benefactor's inability or unwillingness to cater for all their everyday needs. The street children of Addis Ababa, including the homeless ones, generally refer to their own street related activities, including begging, as work. Although the streets of Addis Ababa are filled with beggars, most Ethiopians do not look upon begging by able-bodied persons and street children favourably. The reluctance to accept street children's working, trading and begging activities as child labour may be due to the fact that the services they render are not valorised because this takes place in the street.

The social problems associated with the two categories of children converge somehow. Street children's work is not considered appropriate work for children because they *are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults'*. Working children's work is not commensurate with childhood occupation even though they are *adequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults'*. The issue of working children versus street children has become thus trapped in the binary perception of work and street in association with children. This may be the reason why the term "street working children" is increasingly being used to refer to those children who make a living by begging or deriving an income from street work or trade.

In the Western world, the employment of children in factories and sweatshops is generally viewed negatively. This is because it 'robs' working children of their childhood. It also makes them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by an unfeeling adult world. In Addis Ababa, most people including street children's parents see the employment of children in garages, workshops, restaurants and such, in a more pragmatic way. Out of the twelve boys working in garages that I have interviewed, two were attending school part time. One had dropped out of school for fear of losing his job. The others had given up the idea of formal education and were looking forward to becoming full-fledged mechanics. All were under fifteen years old, lived with their natal families and had a better self-image than any of the homeless boys I knew. Apart from domestic service, there is little

alternative employment for girls. Everyone has a tale about domestic servants being overworked, underpaid and often mistreated. Many girls of thirteen and older who are unfortunate enough to be employed in bars and restaurants end up by being lured into prostitution or fired because they are pregnant. These girls are obliged to work in such establishments due to poverty. Some are migrants from rural areas who come to the city hoping to find a job and helping their families back home. Many are poor city born girls lured by bar owners or adult prostitutes with the promise of money and job security.

In spite of the suffering many working children are subjected to, I was often told that they were lucky to have a regular income and people willing to employ them in this day and age. I was constantly asked by poor parents to find employment for their children. This was not in expectation of sharing or appropriating the income earned by their children, but because they felt that their children would be better off out of the street and its nefarious effects. Considering the abject poverty most people live in, child work is still construed as a form of apprenticeship, a way for a child to learn a trade while being self-supporting. This is regardless of the type of work, the amount of hours and days the child has to work or its consequences to its health, schooling or well-being.

The following redefinition of children ON and OF the street in Addis Ababa may appear artificial. It nevertheless has a tremendous significance for a better understanding of the causes for streetism among the various groups of children found in Addis Ababa.

A.   Children ON the street:

The approximately ninety five percent of the street children population of Addis Ababa who have regular contact with their families fit into this category. Such children could be further subdivided among those who *attend school part time and those who do not go to school.* I have used the UNICEF criteria for children ON the street (home based street children) and included their school enrolment as well as the degree to their economic engagement in the street to reclassify them as follows:

1.   Working Children:

I would define as *working children* those children ON the street *who do NOT beg, do NOT attend school,* and *work full time in the street.* Many of those who work as

shoeshine boys, parking boys, newspaper and lottery ticket vendors, moneychangers and unlicensed street hawkers fit into this category. Some work for their own subsistence; many more help contribute to the survival of their families. They usually live with their biological parents, close relatives, older siblings or adult benefactors.

The causes behind their initial entry into street life are directly linked to family circumstances. Many girls start working in the street to help out their mothers in their trading activities. Adult street traders initiate a small number of children into street life by paying them a small fee for helping out for a few hours or a day. Older siblings or school friends encourage some children to join them in the street. Their mothers or close relatives initiate many boys into street work. The children are given a shoeshine box or the initial capital to buy lottery tickets or newspapers in order to earn money during school vacations and subsidise their school-related expenses. Most of them continue operating in the streets long after school has started. A significant number drop out of school or attend class irregularly because they are unable to reconcile their street related activities with schoolwork. Some fail their exams and lack the will and the means to repeat a class or they are expelled from school for non-attendance. The latter two categories end up working full time in the street. This is because those who discontinue school for any length of time are reluctant to resume formal education. Verbal and physical abuse by teachers is often quoted as reasons for wanting to quit school. Teachers are known to beat and humiliate their students for coming to school late, having unkempt or lice ridden hair, dirty cloth, not doing homework or not having the required school equipment. The homeless boys and girls, shopkeepers and taxi drivers I talked to have told me that such children opted to remain in the streets because they 'get hooked' on the idea of having their own money for food and leisure activities. It also enabled them to be free from parental authority and the poverty cycles surrounding their home environment.

The category of working children also includes the many children who survive with the help of various adult benefactors because they are orphaned, abandoned or runaways. The six boys and six girls aged twelve to fifteen whom I observed for several years were not considered part of a family and were generally treated like unpaid servants. Priority was not given to their health or education. They were expected to help with housework and be grateful for the board and food they received. Two boys still live with

their 'adoptive' family. Two others disappeared without a trace and the other two rebelled and joined the ranks of homeless children as soon as they reached puberty. Two girls entered into sexual relationship at an early age to find an alternative home life, the others found paid domestic employment away from their adoptive families.

2.   Street Working Children:

These are children ON the street, *who do not beg*; *attend school part time*, live with their families and *who participate in a multitude of jobs and selling activities*. This includes all those over nine years and under eighteen years olds in my sample. The boys work as porters, cleaners, parking boys, car washers, shoeshine boys, and moneychangers for mini cabs, errand boys or unlicensed street vendors. The girls sell small items or cooked food. The children hand over all, or part, of their earning to their parents or use it to feed/cloth themselves, defray the costs of schooling and leisure activities.

The size and household composition, from which the *street working children* I worked with stemmed, were as varied as the children themselves. A few had both parents living together as man and wife or in long-term partnership. There were also those who lived with handicapped or chronically ill parents or siblings. Many lived with widowed or divorced mothers, others with never married mothers or mothers whom their husbands had deserted. Out of the thirty-six families I visited thirty were female-headed households. Twelve mothers were born and brought up in Addis Ababa. Twelve others were long established in-migrants. They had come to the city either to escape poverty or oppressive marital and familial situations. The rest were recent economic migrants or internally displaced women from war zones or famine areas and were the worst off. This was because unlike the other two categories of mothers, they had no access to social resources such as cheap kebele housing, a modicum of education and health care for their children or secure incomes from jobs or petty trading. However, much like city born and long established mothers, the less they earned the more they depended on their children's ability to earn an income from street working or trading activities.

B.   Children OF the street:

I have classified such children by the fact that they *do not attend school* and the *lack* or *degree of contact* they have with their parents and non-familial adults:

1.   Under Ten Years Old Street Children:

There are numerous girls and boys under the age of ten roaming around city streets begging in small groups. Many start operating in the street from age five onwards. They have *regular contact with their natal families, do not attend school and beg full time in the streets.* Many alternate between sleeping in the street and at home. They often pretend to be homeless or motherless in order to elicit sympathy from drivers, pedestrians and people working in shops, restaurants and offices. They do not form a cohesive group. Since they often quarrel with one another, both boys and girls frequently leave their companions and join other groups. Most drop out of the group at age eight or ten. The boys either join bigger gangs of homeless boys or try to become street vendors. All the girls I knew joined the street trading fraternity more or less successfully.

2.   The Borcos (ten years and older homeless street children):

These are predominantly represented by gangs of homeless children who live together in loosely knit social groups. They consist of boys and girls, who value their independence from parents and adults. In contrast to home based street children, homeless boys and girls depend less on the presence of adults in their lives and more on their relationships with other children or on their own resources for their survival in the street. They have most of the essential characteristics associated with streetism. They occupy a well-defined territory in street life. They do not live with adults. They are not members of neighbourhood or community based voluntary (iqub, idir, mehaber). They have their own code of behaviour. They work, beg or hustle for themselves or share the proceeds of their street activities with the community of children they live with. While a few may accept the occasional temporary job offer, most are engaged in full time begging and hustling.

The street is not only their work place; it is their home as well as their playground. They are the runaways from dysfunctional families, the abused, the abandoned, the destitute, the petty thieves, the drug abusers, the gamblers, the juvenile delinquents, the dropouts and vagrants. They are the most in danger of street violence since they lack the patronage and protection of family members or other generous adults. Law enforcement officers and ordinary citizens do not look upon their way of life or personal appearances

with tolerance. The police are harsher with them because they are unkempt and generally disruptive because they beg from motorists and occupy verandas and street pavements. Many end up in police custody for vagrancy because they do not have identity cards or home addresses. They are often arrested because of minor criminal activities like begging from traffic lights, gambling, being drunk or smoking hashish. They are jailed or beaten by the police for fighting among themselves, robbing other street children or pick-pocketing in order to subsidise their life styles.

Their life circumstance is conducive to a brutish existence. Their leisure activities include watching videos, drinking, smoking, chewing tchat and gambling. The violence amongst them is amplified by the fact that they are constantly at odds with one another. Since they have money and time to dispose, their leisure activities often lead to fistfights because of non-payment of gambling debts and such. They fight over sleeping arrangements, lucrative traffic light locations or as one of them put it: "when we are unhappy or hungry, every little gesture causes a fight". They have more opportunity to engage in criminal and problem behaviour. Both boys and girls are more than likely to initiate sexual activity at a very early age, some as young as twelve. In addition street based girls often enter into premature and exploitative sexual relationships with adolescent street boys or unemployed young men or other adults.

3.   Yekoshe lijotch (children of garbage dumps)

These are children from the leper communities and others who scavenge from the major solid waste disposal sites around Addis Ababa. They *do not attend school.* Although they have regular contacts with their families, their life styles and general appearances are similar to that of homeless gangs of boys usually referred to as Borcos by most people. They hang around back streets in the vicinity of shops and restaurants looking for any kind of temporary employment, such as portaging, running errands or carrying garbage to municipal deposit sites.

4.   Gurgue shoeshine boys

The only street children were ethnicity can have a bearing on children with regular contact with their families are the Gurague. The Guragues are a singular example where migrations and continuity between the rural area and the urban centres is maintained.

They are a prime example of a community of people bound by a common interest. Many Guragues living in Addis Ababa are merchants, peddlers, shoeshine boys and labourers. The urban-rural link is kept alive by migrant urbanites avoiding making a complete break with their rural socio-economic roots (Seifu Ruga 1976:203). The Christian Guragues return to their villages for *Meskal* (Feast of the finding the True Cross) every year. The Moslem's go during *Arefa* after the Ramadan ceremony.

I have met many Gurague shoeshine boys who live communally with older siblings or relatives. They draw lots in order to decide who will be going home that year, if they cannot all afford to go back. Those unable to visit their families due to financial constraints make all sorts of sacrifices to send presents to their relatives. The Gurague have transplanted and moulded several traditional social self-help schemes to meet 'modern' urban demands (ibid. pp.204-217). This is done though membership to several kinds of associations at tribal, agnatic or village level in Addis Ababa and back in their homeland (ibid. p.205). They all aspire to own or maintain a small farm of *Ensete* (false banana plant). "This is reinforced by the Gurage attitude that a person who does not maintain his farm (back in his village) is usually considered by his neighbours as rootless and "hopeless" even though he may have no use for the farm." (Ibid. p.209). As mentioned above the Guragues are a singular example of rural/urban continuity. Most town dwellers migrants and non-migrants alike have, as they put it, "to learn to live with each other" and therefore conform to an urban way of behaviour.

Conclusion:

I have elaborated on UNICEF's and other definitions and classifications of street children in order to provide a meaningful picture of the street children population of Addis Ababa. This is because the reason behind the initial entry of the various categories of street children into street life varies and the causes that lead children to streetism are not always the same. The sources of their existing or future predicament are just as diverse. Many of the homeless boys I have classified as street children could have fitted into working children, and street working children depending on which stage of their careers in the street one is describing. I have personally observed several homeless boys pass through all the classifications, including becoming 'non-street children' during brief

periods they were temporarily reunited with their natal families before joining the homeless, jobless youths known locally as Bozene.

Many of the girls I knew stopped their street related activities at age fourteen partly due to the sexual harassment they faced from older street boys and male adults alike. Furthermore, in spite of the apparently common sense assumption that street children stem from dysfunctional households, home-based street children often come from fairly cohesive families (Heinonen:1996). They also form part and parcel of the communities they live in. Conversely, the great majority of homeless children I met are runaways from dysfunctional families and or the oppression of a stepmother, older stepsisters and stepbrothers. They were not abandoned; they had abandoned their families. Abuse more than poverty was the root cause that led them to homelessness and street life.

More often than not, family circumstances rather than ethnicity or religion have a direct bearing on home-based street children's career in the street. It also influences their continued presence or absence from the street. The street children of Addis Ababa and their families do not form a homogenous group where each individual's social position is defined by age, gender or birth position. Besides the natural transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, their life circumstances do not remain unchanged and show much variety. I have tried to demonstrate the diversity that exists among the street children population, even among those falling under the same category. For example, the diversity among female heads of households is exacerbated by the different access such mothers have to social support in terms of government subsidized cheap housing, a modicum of free healthcare and education for their children and a means of securing an income to feed their families.

I have discussed the lack of consensus on the definition attached to street children. I have also elaborated on the problematic use of the labels street children, working children and street working children when referring to the street children of Addis Ababa. I have pointed out the controversy surrounding the UNICEF definition of Children ON the street (home-based street children), children OF the street (homeless street children) and Children ON and OF the street (those who alternate between home

and street life). I have mentioned the conflicting estimates of the number of street children who are said to exist in the major cities of the developing world. I have explained that given their diversity and their wandering life style, it is difficult to carry out a survey that would provide an accurate estimate of the street children of Addis Ababa. I stated that not all street children are homeless, since as many as ninety-five percent work in the street, but live at home. In Addis Ababa at least ninety-five percent are said to have regular contacts with their families and over sixty-five percent attend school regularly. In spite of the shortcomings of the UNICEF classification, I have divided the empirical part of my research to fit into two broad categories, namely Children ON the street (home-based street children) and Children OF the street (homeless street children). This is in order to demonstrate the diversity that exists in the life circumstances of street children falling within the two categories of street children.

Chapter 5

Home Based Street Children

This chapter provides detailed empirical findings on the daily lives of home-based street children and their families over a five-year period. It reveals how the social network and support systems of their parents, especially their mothers, differentiates home-based street children falling under the category children ON the street. I propose to achieve this by analysing the children's life circumstances in terms of their mothers' access to social resources from available social support and social network systems. I shall try to elucidate the process involved in accessing social resources by looking into the different ways street children's mothers develop personal relationships into social network systems and how these come to be supportive.

Studies of social network and support systems are primarily focussed on homeless street children and centred on peer group relationships and friendships (Aptekar 1988; Swart 1990; Ennew 1994). Those concerned with the subject of home-based street children concentrate their inquiry on such children's ability to cope with the hardship they face at home and in the street and/or their survival strategies. The emphasis is on child/child encounter, with minimal information about the influence of the presence of adults in their lives (Lucchini 1988; Baker & Knaul 1991; Lusk 1992; Richter 1992; Campos et al. 1994; Rosa et al. 1994; Hecht 1995). I shall try to demonstrate the importance of the presence of adults, especially mothers, in the lives of home-based street children in Addis Ababa by delving into entire families' life experiences and by providing generalised clarification of network and support systems.

Two factors determined my choice for analysing children ON the street in terms of their mothers' networks. Firstly, socialising children and taking care of helping them cope with the here and now in the urban environment of Addis Ababa is basically a mother's job (Heinonen 1996). This is exemplified by the fact that there was virtually no difference between the single and two parent street children families with whom I worked: mothers were invariably in charge of raising and socialising children. Furthermore, the type of shelter, nutrition, leisure, education and healthcare home-based street children received essentially depended on the type of social and material

resources their parents, especially mothers, were able to access. The above notwithstanding, street children have a corresponding role in their own upbringing. This is because they are obliged to work, beg or hustle in the street in order to subsidise part of their educational, nutritional and leisure requirements. This is due to the inadequacy of available social services and the abject poverty in which their parents live.

Secondly, I found that home based street children depended more on the presence of adults in their lives than on their relationships with other children or on their own resources for their survival at home and in the street. As a matter of fact, my own data shows that even though homeless street children may operate outside the adult organised social world and the influence of their immediate families, they too are not entirely cut off from the adult social world. Such children are inextricably linked to mainstream society through the adults they beg from for their survival. They also interact with shopkeepers, jobless adults, older beggars, waiters, pharmacist and the police on a daily basis. Peers are said to be important socialising agents in the lives of street and non-street adolescent children (Harstrup 1983; Whiting & Edwards eds. 1988; James & Prout eds. 1990; Nestmann & Hurrelmann eds. 1994; Qvortrup et.al. 1994). However, among children ON the street in Addis Ababa, peer influence is balanced by the influence provided by adults. Such children have extensive emotional and economic ties with their mothers as well as with adults outside the range of direct family (Heinonen 1996). The latter include patrons, shopkeepers, food sellers, pharmacists, teachers and various adults who help them in different ways. Homeless children do not necessarily lack families since all those I knew had deliberately abandoned their families. They however lacked the type of socio-economic ties home-based street children had with their immediate families and non-kin adults. Therein lies the crucial factor that integrates or separates the two categories of children from the adult organised social world.

- Social Network and Social Support:

Gutkind (1969, 1974) considered the concept of social network to be the most useful and comprehensive tool for the study of urban social relationships. In line with Epstein's (1961) and Mitchell's (1966) pioneering work on urban based personal network

relations in Africa, he suggested that the various aspects of social network systems, how they are built up and the specific purposes they serve, reveal the degree of a person's social mobility. The same factors shed light on the where and how ethnic, occupational and class sub-systems overlap and where they do not and why (Gutkind 1974:157-161). More specifically he wrote that:

> "..the reconstruction of these personal and group networks (or the use of participant observation to observe their construction and use at any moment in time) combine, in rather subtle ways, micro and macro techniques. At the micro level, the network is constricted as it involves primarily kin and close friends (the effective network), and at the macro level, the extended level, the network can range (ecologically) over the whole urban area (ibid. p.160).

There is an extensive literature on the embeddedness of social network and social support systems in various cultural environments. The usual approach to the study of network and support systems is to describe their composition and structure. These may be divided into people one knows and those one can count on in times of need (Barnes 1954:1972; Mitchel 1966; Sanjek 1974; Duck 1988; Scott 1991; Nestmann & Hurrelmann eds. 1994). One form of enquiry into network formation and their mobilisation into support systems involves establishing the collection of relationships that connect people (Barnes 1954; Gutkind 1974; Sanjek 1974; Morgan 1990). Another way is to study a person's networking strategies in terms of how the individual expands and makes strategic use of the stock of contacts she/he has (Whitten & Wolfe 1974; Duck 1988; Nestmann and Hurrelmann 1994). The way in which different types of social networks provide different kinds of social support are often analysed in terms of a person's set of ties with parents, peers, friends, relatives, neighbours or work mates (Barnes 1954; Epstein 1969; Sanjek 1974; Duck 1988; Scott 1991; Nestmann & Hurrelmann eds. 1994).

The terms support structures and network systems are nevertheless frequently used together or interchangeably. This is because social networks can only be fully understood by taking into account the social, cultural and interpersonal context of support interaction. Some authors link network and support by demonstrating the importance of networks in creating social embeddedness or a sense of attachment to others as important elements of social support (Whitten & Wolfe 1974; Duck 1988; Hobfoll & Stokes 1988; Morgan 1990). Others interpret the exchange of emotional and

material resources between at least two individuals who are perceived as providers or recipients as one way of forming a social network. This type of dyadic exchange is intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient and often occurs between mother and child (Shumaker & Brownell 1984). Furthermore, social network and support systems are marked over time by changes and continuities. The variations in time and space in the types of social support and social network people need are essentially related to age, class, gender and ethnicity. This metamorphic aspect of support interaction ultimately enables individuals to construct and confirm their self-identity (Vaux 1985, 1990; Youniss 1994).

All the above definitions of network and support systems have people at their centre and they exist apart from specific social institutions. However, people centred networks may also coincide with, cross cut or even be a part of defined groups, social institutions or organisations (Whitten and Wolfe 1974; Hobfoll and Stokes 1988; Scott 1991). Accordingly, I have treated the social networks of street children's mothers in two ways. Firstly, I have analysed the networks relating to formal organisations or institutions in terms of network types and their resource composition as well as how poor mothers access these resources. Secondly, I have looked into those related to people centred networks in terms of the structural aspects of social relationships.

The types of material, social and emotional support street children's mothers require merge and form a continuum but their central nature changes over time. This is because street children's needs for nurturing and material support alters from complete dependency in infancy to the children taking on the adult role of home providers in childhood, middle childhood and adolescence. These variations generate consequential shifts over time in the meaning of emotional, material and social support when applied to street children and their mothers. I have therefore considered social network and support systems among street children families to consist of mutable family and non-family social relationships. Social support refers to the content of these relationships: e.g. mother/child interaction, membership of voluntary associations, information flow, kin and non-kin derived emotional or material support and so on.

- Street children's mothers' networks:

There is a limited range of social networks with vital social resources available to street children's mothers. The most readily identifiable social resources are linked to networks related to housing, childcare, healthcare, education, information about jobs, loans and credit facilities, and membership of voluntary associations such as *iqub* (rotating credit schemes), *idir* (burial associations) and *mehabers* (religious associations). As far as street children's mothers are concerned, many of these networks are non-kin based and are not necessarily spatially restricted within the *kebeles* (urban dwellers associations) they live in or by neighbourhood community ties. Information about credit schemes, jobs, and membership in voluntary associations can be derived from the street trading fraternity, close or distant relatives, friends, lovers, partners and others.

I have long-term data on thirty-six street children families covering all the types of households. I choose to focus on that of Gudaye and her children, because they personify all the hardships and constraints home-based street children have to endure at home, within the neighbourhood, and on the street. Like many destitute single parents, Gudaye's life history is inextricably linked to how and why her children came to be involved in streetism. I shall therefore begin by giving a brief summary of her life and the many ways she tried to socialise her children to be upright and respected citizens. I shall follow this by analysing the various network systems available to her in order to investigate how she achieved social connectedness by transforming her status from complete outsider into a bona fide network member. I shall draw examples from the data I have on other street children families to illustrate the different structural and functional aspects of social support and social network systems in the lives of home based children and their families.

- Gudaye's story:

Gudaye was twenty-nine years old when I met her in May 1995. She was born in Harrer. Her father was an Amhara soldier and her mother an Oromo. Her parents divorced when she was six years old. Her mother re-married and moved to Addis Ababa. Her father also remarried but Gudaye did not get along with her stepmother. She went to live with her childless godmother. Gudaye never learnt to read and write

either in childhood or during the 1970s adult education campaign set up by the Derg Government. She spent her younger years helping her godmother in her trading activities and acquiring domestic skills. She eloped with the father of her first child when she was fourteen and went to live with him in Assab. The man died less than a year after Isaac's birth.

Gudaye:

> I was very happy with Isaac's father. I went out of my mind with grief when he died. We never even had time to get married. His best friend was an officer in the army. He helped me financially. I moved into his house. He is Bereket's father. That is why my two first-born sons look physically different. I did not know that the man was very violent and jealous. I was scared to leave him because I had two children by then. The only time I had any peace was when he was ordered to go somewhere to fight against the Eritrean rebels.
>
> On one of these occasions, my older brother sent words that he was in Asmara on business. I picked up the kids and went to see him. I told him about the man's violence. My brother was going back home the next day. He suggested that I go with him. I did not even collect my belongings. That same year Bereket's father died on the battlefield. Since we were not married, I was not able to claim a widow's pension or anything from the Government.

Isaac and Bereket were both born in Asseb, Isaac in 1981 and Bereket two years later in 1983. Gudaye returned to Harrer in 1984 and stayed less than six months. Since her godmother refused to have anything to do with her, she moved in with her father and his new third wife. She did not get along with her second stepmother. Her father told her to live peacefully with his new wife or move out. Gudaye had no money or anywhere else to go. She met a married man who helped her financially but she got pregnant again. The man gave her enough money to go to Addis Ababa in search of her mother, before anyone noticed her condition.

According to my calculations, Gudaye arrived in Addis Ababa towards the end of 1984. She stayed with her mother for less than a month because her stepfather did not approve of her or her children. Her mother asked relatives living not far from where Gudaye now lives to give her daughter and grand children temporary shelter. Gudaye says her relatives resented sheltering and feeding her and her two illegitimate sons. She accidentally met Lemlem, a woman she knew in Asseb. Lemlem had been assigned a *Kebele* house because she was a soldier's widow with two daughters to raise. She

suggested that Gudaye move in with her until she gave birth and found her way in town. Lemlem had a lodger named Fikru, a civil servant working as a clerk in a military barrack. Soon after she moved in, Fikru and Gudaye became lovers.

Lemlem was at that time expecting a child from a married *Kebele* official. The man used his influence to help Lemlem acquire a bigger *Kebele* house (council house) and transferred the registration of the existing house to Fikru. In spite of the fact that Fikru was legally married and had two sons in Mekele his birthplace, Gudaye and him set up house. Abuye was born in 1985 in the same house where they all still live. Even though she was the daughter of the married man Gudaye left in Harrer, Fikru claimed Abuye as his own. Three boys and one daughter came out of this union. Abraham was born in 1987, Tutu in 1991 and Dodjo in 1993. When I met her in 1995, Dodjo was two years old and Fikru was not living with them. Gudaye gave birth to Hennock in September 1997, almost three years after I met her.

The story goes that Fikru lost his Government job in 1991 soon after the present Government overthrew the previous Marxist military regime. He was unable to find another job. Gudaye was expecting Tutu. He decided to go to Mekele where he hoped to find employment and send money to help her and the children. After his departure, Gudaye fed her children by working as a day labourer on various building sites until she gave birth to Tutu. Since she had incurred a lot of debts and there was no food at home, she and Isaac (age 10) joined Lemlem and her daughter Mimi (age 13) gathering fuel wood less than two weeks after Tutu was born. Mimi and Isaac attended school irregularly. They spent most of their time gathering fuel wood with their mothers or roaming around town selling peanuts, boiled eggs or anything else their mothers gave them. Both families made barely enough to make ends meet.

Gudaye's health deteriorated mainly due to the fact that she had very little to eat and had had no medical attention before, during or after giving birth. She told me that she had had a very difficult pregnancy and had tried to abort the child unsuccessfully several times. Rather than beg in the streets, she went back to work on building sites during the day. She prepared two bottles of milk for the baby and left her and Abraham (then three) in the care of Abuye (aged five). After two weeks, Gudaye realised that

Abuye was drinking all the milk and feeding water to the baby. A trip to the hospital, confirmed Gudaye's fears. Tutu was not only mentally retarded but was half the size she should have been at her age. During the next four weeks, Gudaye tried everything, from soothsayers to holy water to secure a cure for the baby leaving Isaac (then ten) in charge of feeding the family. As soon as she realised there was nothing more she could do for the child, she joined him full time in the street and started hawking peanuts, oranges and anything she could make a profit from.

Fikru came back to Addis Ababa sometime toward the end of 1992. He was unable to find work and became a burden to Gudaye. He left for Mekele a few months later hoping to sell part of the land he owned in order raise cash and start a business leaving a yet again pregnant Gudaye behind. She gave birth to Dodjo in 1993. Fikru returned empty handed to Addis Ababa in December 1996. His family had prevented him from selling any property. Gudaye fell pregnant again and the atmosphere in the house changed for the worse. This is how Gudaye explained the situation:

> The last six years have been the worst. Every time the man comes to stay with us, he becomes a burden. Isaac and Bereket do not hate me. They hate the man. That is why they have started quarrelling with me and finding faults with him. They are angry with me for getting pregnant again. They are scared that I might die giving birth. They want the man out of here. How can I throw him out? What will the neighbours say? They will say that I have chased him out because he has no job and is too poor! He has fathered the others after all. The whole neighbourhood thinks that he is Abuye's father as well. If it were not for him, I would not even have the right to live in the house we live in.

By the time I met them in May 1995, Gudaye and Isaac were operating full time in the street. Depending on how much capital they could raise, they changed coins with taxi drivers, sold peanuts, oranges, bananas, cigarettes, pens, matches and sweets. Dodjo went everywhere Gudaye went. She constantly bought him bread and all sorts of food to keep him quite. She breastfed him until he was three years old. At the age of two he looked strong, happy and healthy. Five years old Tutu was half his size. There was a happy, carefree atmosphere in the house. Twelve years old Bereket took care of Tutu and household chores when he was not attending school half day. Isaac and Gudaye worked all day in the streets. Abuye and Abraham went to school in the morning and ran errands and did small jobs for Bereket or Gudaye the rest of the time.

By December 1999, Bereket (age 16) and Isaac (age 18) had quit school and left home. They both worked as taxi boys and occasionally contributed to family income. Abuye (age 14) had also stopped going to school and was helping her mother full time in her street trading activities. Abraham (age 12) attended school part time and spent the rest of the day helping his mother in the street. Dodjo (age 6) and Hennock (age 3) followed their mother everywhere she went. Tutu ran wild around the neighbourhood they lived in. Fikru was living full time with them. He tried to earn some money by accepting odd jobs on building sites or whatever work he could find. He earned very little money and drank most of it. Gudaye had by then managed to expand her social network and support systems and was able to feed the entire family with the help of Abuye's and Abraham's street trading earnings.

- ## Gudaye's Networks:

Gudaye's support system incorporated two types of networks. Her institution-based networks were linked to the *Kebele* in which she lived in and to membership of voluntary associations. The most important was the *Kebele's* housing network. Admission to this network linked her to membership of voluntary associations like *idirs* (burial associations), *iqubs* (rotating credit schemes) and *mehabers* (religious associations). Apart from their socially integrating experience, membership to voluntary associations created a better self-image and a sense of self worth among people living in difficult circumstance. Those who did not belong to any such association were the truly destitute. The socialisation function of her housing network was reflected in the way she raised her children and accessed other resources such as health care and education as well as receiving a modicum of emotional support from neighbours in time of adversity.

Gudaye's people-centred network consisted of her relationships with friends and a dispersed set of persons linked to her through her street-related activities. Her activities were devoted to establishing, strengthening and expanding the entire family's relationships with a coterie of street children and various individuals who mattered to their street trading activities. This network cross-cut and was part of formal and non-formal organisations and thus facilitated her acceptance into street organised rotating credit schemes (*iqubs*) as well as giving her an entry into credit and loan facilities usually available only to better-established traders. The issues of housing, street life and

socialising children were thus inextricably linked together. I have consequently chosen to explain Gudaye's family street and home life in terms of housing and its ramification on her children's schooling, health and her membership to indigenous associations.

1.   Housing:

Recent research indicate that mothers' social network can have an important effect on parenting in terms of their access to emotional and social support (for a review, see Hirsh et al. 1994). Similarly, in Addis Ababa, the sort of supportive social networks poor mothers can count on affects their ability to provide a loving, caring and materially supportive environment for their children. This is because their coping mechanisms are dependent on the social resources they can access and this is determined by the type of personal ties they have with *Kebele* officials, teachers, the police, health care workers, friends, relatives and neighbours. In other words, it is the mothers' relationships with those who are in a position to facilitate their entry into various social network systems that accounts for the most consequential diversity of experience among children ON the street. This relationship is embedded through where such mothers are located within the existing social network and support systems rather than on whom they are as individuals.

The best way to explain what I mean by where mothers are located vis-à-vis existing network systems is housing. Apart from its socially integrating experience, housing is one of the best indicators of whether a social network is supportive. The poorer segment of society need to belong to a *Kebele* to be able to live in rent-controlled, Government owned cheap houses, acquire the necessary address and therefore an identity card in order to be part of the neighbourhood. As far as poor mothers are concerned, being on a *Kebele* residents' registration list means access to housing, some kind of free education for their children, rudimentary health services, childcare, information about jobs and a much valued *Kebele* identity card.

There is a perennial housing shortage in Addis Ababa. Low-income households, and this includes the majority of street children families, constitute the bulk of Addis Ababa's population. Approximately seventy five percent of the sub-standard housing and make shift shelters are administered by the State controlled Kebeles and owned by the

Government (Solomon Gebre 1993; Solomon G. & Aklilu K. 1993; Ministry of Works and Urban Development 1996; Geleto Geltcha 1996). Many of these houses are single rooms with an occupancy rate of 6 to 10 people; monthly rent may be as cheap as two *birr* or as high as two hundred *birr* (12 *birr*= approximately1 £S). Those lucky enough to be eligible for *kebele* housing either rent or share such houses (Ottaway 1976; Ministry of Works & Urban Development 1996). The unlucky ones sub-rent a corner of a one-room house or floor space by the week at inflated prices.

Gudaye originally paid six *birr* per month for the squalid, three metres by four, one-room house in which she lived. Sometime in 1997 the rent was raised to sixteen *birr* per month. In 1999, mainly due to its central location, the same house could fetch at least one hundred *birr* a month on the open market. It had no water or electricity. The family shared an unimaginably filthy pit latrine with six other households. They preferred to cook in the house rather than in the windblown hovel they called the communal kitchen. In spite of its limitation, Gudaye and her children felt very privileged to have a home of their own.

City-born and long time *Kebele* resident poor mothers are in a better position to have or be allocated a house and thus have access to social resources lacking among in-migrant mothers or mothers who have had to geographically relocate their families several times. This is regardless of their age, educational background or of whether they are divorced, separated, abandoned, widowed or never married. The only exceptions are females living with their parents since they are not eligible for *Kebele* housing, even if they have several children. My own findings show that such women and in-migrant mothers may at times achieve connectedness by cohabiting with or marrying men who are already connected to the housing network. Moreover, network relationships are not necessarily restricted to local neighbourhood environments. Some in-migrant mothers are able to use the social network of urban established kin and kith to find schools for their children, jobs or temporary and at times permanent shelter in town. Two fairly recent studies among homeless adults and children have shown that those who do not have access to such networks and support systems end up homeless and begging in the streets (Fitsum Resome 1994; Ephrem Tessema 1998).

Briefly summarised, housing is an important social resource. Some women are automatically linked to the housing network because they have a Government job that entitles them to *Kebele* housing. Others either owned the property before the 1975 Housing Act which dispossessed people owning more than one house or were assigned nationalised houses as part of the then housing program. City-born or in-migrant mothers who marry into the system are once removed from the housing network system provided they have children from their new spouse. If the union is dissolved, their entitlement to either remain in the house or be assigned alternative accommodation is strengthened if they had a *Kebele* identity card before getting married or had managed to acquire one under the aegis of their husband.

Women cohabiting with men who had been assigned a *Kebele* house are twice removed from the network for accessing housing facilities. Such women's eligibility to *Kebele* housing in their own right depends on whether they are on the *Kebele* residents' registration list where they are domiciled. If not, they may be able to secure tenure on the house if the man dies or leaves the *Kebele* permanently. That is, as long as they have good rapport with *Kebele* officials and they can prove that at least some of their children are his.

In-migrant mothers using their relatives' network are thrice removed from the network system. I have not met in-migrant mothers who were assigned a house in their own right after 1988. The few successful pre 1988 cases I encountered had managed to enter the housing network due to the ability of their close relatives to influence *Kebele* officials. Poor mothers who do not have the means to access the system are completely removed from the housing network. Many such women are either homeless or rent floor space by the week.

As shown above some in-migrants or city-born unattached mothers can marry into the housing network system or use the expanded city based networks of their kin and kith in order to gain entry into the system. A few rare cases achieve connectedness with the help of lovers, friends, work associates or members of their own ethnic group. Consequently, even mothers who are connected to the housing network find themselves located differently within it. Accordingly, apart from where they are placed vis-à-vis

networks systems, how they become connected gives an insight into the various ways poor mothers are able to develop personal relationships into social support and social network systems. In other words, where they are located within the housing network and how they achieve connectedness imposes limits on the options available to them as mothers for accessing housing as well as other social resources like healthcare and education. Gudaye's and Lemlem's cases illustrate how the above processes work.

i.   Gudaye's case:

As already indicated, Gudaye entered the housing network in 1984 via Fikru, her partner and eventually the father of four of her seven children. After the change of Government in 1991, many *Kebele* officials were removed from their power positions and replaced by entirely new people. Gudaye's house was originally registered in Fikru's name. She grabbed every opportunity, including Fikru's long absences from the city, to assert her right to live in the house. Sometime in mid-1996, *Kebele* residents were asked to re-register themselves and their children. She claimed that Fikru was her legal husband and that all her children were his. She told the new *Kebele* officials that he had abandoned her when she was pregnant with her sixth child. She did not know where he was and feared that he might be dead.

In 1997, all those owing rent money to the *Kebele* were asked to settle their accounts or face eviction. Gudaye was told that she owed two hundred and fifty-two birr rent arrears. She joined an *iqub* worth 200 *birr*, borrowed the rest and paid the bill. This time around she managed to have the house registered in her name. She also acquired a *Kebele* identity card without securing an official clearance letter from the *Kebele* in Harrer her last place of residence or having any identity card from any of the places where she had lived previously. This is an almost insurmountable feat to accomplish without a lot of money or the help of influential people.

In May 1998, after one of their quarrels over money and the behaviour of her two oldest sons towards him, Fikru threatened to take away his children or have her thrown out of the house. The following sums up her reaction and the vital importance of housing to social connectedness and city-based poor women's empowerment:

Gudaye:

> Let him talk! He does not know anyone at the *Kebele* office. The house is now in my name. The *Kebele* officials know who has been paying rent and living here for the last fourteen years. Besides, *Abbay maderia selelew, gend yezo yizoral*: (since the Blue Nile does not have a home, it roams around carrying tree trunks). Where will he take them? He has nothing of any worth that he can call his own. His other children and family do not want him. He does not even belong to a burial association. If he dies, he will have a decent burial thanks to me. He cannot even enter a rotating credit scheme because he does not know whether he will still have a job from one day to the next.

As long time residents of the neighbourhood they lived in, Gudaye and her children had achieved a sense of belonging, continuity and even permanence. This was not always the case with many of the other households with whom I worked. Only twenty-two street children families out of the fifty-two I visited had secured *Kebele* houses. Twelve out these twenty-two were not able to meet the monthly rent and owed considerable amounts of money to the *Kebele*. The others rented corners of one-room houses or floor space by the week. Besides, most, if not all, the street children families I knew had relocated at least twice. Some families moved houses out of choice, others by force of circumstances.

ii. Lemlem's case:

Unlike Gudaye, Lemlem entered the housing network in her own right sometime in 1982, by virtue of her status as a soldier's widow with two children to raise. Her subsequent affair with a high ranking *Kebele* official had enabled her to acquire a two room house with a kitchen and latrine the family had to share with only one other household. They had access to a communal water tap and electricity. The house was located very near the main road and was surrounded by better-off households. Lemlem was able to earn a small income by taking in washing from bachelors lodging in the surrounding area as well as helping prepare spices for richer families. Just before she was evicted from the house, she had been selected by an NGO and was receiving food aid and financial help towards her son's education.

In 1997, Lemlem and many other families who were allocated *kebele* houses by the previous communist regime were forced to move out because the rightful owners were able to claim their properties back. Unlike Gudaye, Lemlem had never been

obliged to network among *Kebele* officials to legitimise her right to government housing or acquire a *Kebele* identify card. The fact that she was already on the *Kebele* residents' registration list, had been allocated a *Kebele* house and had a *Kebele* identity card legitimised her right to be allocated alternative accommodations. Lemlem's lover and father of her illegitimate son had repudiated his responsibilities towards the child and herself long before he lost his job and left the *Kebele*. Since her ex-lover was her only link to the *Kebele* housing network, she had no other recourse but to accept whatever was on offer. Mimi, her daughter, spoke for many others when she summed up the effect of the forced geographical relocations on her family:

> You can see how bad this new place is. We do not have access to water or electricity. We have to live in a room with a couple and their four-year-old son and share a latrine and kitchen with four other families. These people do not want us here. I do not blame them. We are too far out of the main road. This is a poor neighbourhood. There are no street lights or lights from rich households to light the side roads at night. We must get back home before dark because we cannot see our way home.

> We have lost more than our beautiful house. We have lost our friends, our customers and our credit facilities with shop owners. My little brother has stopped going to school. It is too far for him to walk there and back. He is now twelve years old. He has started selling things in the street like the rest of us. He does not mind. He hated school. The teacher often beat him for being unruly, having dirty clothes or just about everything. Besides, we all prefer to be out of the house all day because the other people are always in.

2.   Schooling:

Mass education is linked to the ideals of equality of opportunity for poor and rich alike. In practice, education in Addis Ababa reinforces existing inequalities rather than overcomes them. Most, if not all, Government-run schools in Addis Ababa have poor facilities and overcrowded classrooms, with at times 60 to 90 pupils to a class. The teachers are underpaid and overworked. Even though they are receiving `free education', many destitute children and their families have difficulties buying uniforms and school supplies. The majority of street children I have met entered street life in order to earn money to buy school uniforms and/or school supplies during the long summer vacation and ended up permanent members of the street begging or trading fraternity (Heinonen 1996). Some such children appreciate the relevance of a good

education to their future life prospects. Many more are discouraged by the fact that many of the jobless youths they see eking out a meagre existence though their street trading activities had completed grades eight, ten or twelve before dropping out.

Due to the perennial ill treatment of school children by schoolteachers in Government schools, many poor children come to see the school as a hostile environment. Throughout the years I carried out my fieldwork, time and again I was given graphic descriptions of the many ways teachers physically and verbally abuse their pupils and get away with it. I also witnessed umpteen instances of six, seven and eight year olds being dragged screaming and crying to school. They invariably dreaded the ire of their teachers more than the physical punishment that awaited them if their parents found out that they had been skipping school. Mimi, like many other street children I know, still claims that her teachers' tyranny more than anything else precipitated her entry into street life and led her to quit school. This is how she explained it:

> I must have been nine or ten years old when I finally decided I had enough of teachers' cruel behaviour towards me. I used to attend school half day. I had a nasty teacher who used to beat me up. One day it was because I was late, another because I was dirty or else because I did not have the proper school equipment. If I knew that he was going to beat me, I would hide my school equipment and join other children in the street. They were all neighbourhood girls and boys. We played together and sometimes they shared their sweets or food with me.

> Mother beat me regularly for skipping school. I preferred that to being beaten by the teacher. She now oppresses my little sister and brother by forcing them to go to school. She does not know what it is like; she has never been to school. She believes that all the beatings and insults are worth it, as long as we can acquire a good education.

Similarly Issac gave up school due a combination of to his teachers' inhuman behaviour towards him and his school friends, financial constraints and the demands made on his time by his street-related activities. He summed this up as follows:

> I failed every year. The teachers beat all the poor children who did not have all their school equipment. The last teacher I had used to pull my hair and hit me on the head for non-attendance, for coming in late or for being dirty. I could not help it. I had to help mother in the morning. I often had to skip school if we did not manage to change enough money with taxi drivers for the day.

After I was thrown out of a school for non-attendance, mother enrolled me in an evening class. I was too tired in the evening to pay any attention to the teacher. I preferred to rest and play with other boys rather than do my homework during the day. I often felt ashamed in class because I could not follow the lessons and the teacher made fun of me.

Mother found out that I was skipping class most evenings and spending time playing with homeless boys. She beat me several times. In the end I threw all my school equipment and told her that if she forced me to go back to school I would leave her and I meant it. There is no hope for me, that is why I do not mind working hard to help Bereket finish school and lead a better life than I shall ever have.

Due to the good relationships she has with *Kebele* officials, Gudaye had access to networks that made it possible for her children to access health care and educational institutions. She seldom had difficulties in securing letters from *Kebele* officials enabling her to have her children admitted into government schools or transferred to other schools. She even managed to have Abuye reinstated after she was expelled for absenteeism while looking after her after she gave birth to Hennock in 1997. However, she loathed getting up early in the morning and spending a day or longer at the *Kebele* securing such letters. She gave up as soon as it interfered with her ability to trade and feed her children.

Gudaye had a hard time enrolling Tutu in any kind of kindergarten because of her erratic behaviour and mood swings. In 1996 she managed to enrol her in an NGO financed school with the help of *Kebele* officials and the influence of a female neighbour who had a job at the school. Her sister and brothers took it in turns to take Tutu to school and back. Tutu was eventually thrown out of the school. The teachers said that she was too violent and was hurting the other children. Even though Gudaye was told of institutions and NGOs that were interested in helping mentally handicapped children, she refused to do anything about it. If asked, she replied that that she was not going to waste her time doing the rounds of *Kebele* and NGO offices getting this permit and that letter and letting her children starve. As is the case of many physically or mentally handicapped destitute children, the whole family assumed that they would either have to look after Tutu for the rest of her life or let her beg in the streets for her living.

Apart from health care and education housing also touched on issues related to physical space and comfort. Bereket, Abuye and Abraham had difficulties keeping their school equipment clean or out of the reach of the curious hands of their younger siblings. Abraham was often in tears because Tutu or Dojo had managed to find his school exercise books from under the bed and had been playing with them. Abuye had a filthy old cloth sack where she kept her school equipment. She beat the smaller ones mercilessly if they dared go near it and in return was regularly slapped by her mother for beating them. Since the room was too dark and they had no place where they could do their homework, they often sat outside or near the door in order to read or write.

3. Health:

Gudaye did not expend much energy securing *Kebele* letters giving her or her children access to health care. It was cheaper and more expedient for her to use soothsayers, faith healers, traditional herbal remedies and *tebel* (holy water) than modern medicine. The reason was that even when poor people were able to attend a clinic or be admitted to a hospital with the help of the *Kebele*, for the majority most prescription drugs were prohibitively expensive. Gudaye's children, like many other street children, frequently suffered from skin, throat, ears and eye infections. More often than not, these ailments were left untreated due to lack of money. If a child had fever or had any kind of stomach upset, she or he would be told to stay home until they felt better. More than anything else, Gudaye despaired of the time consuming bureaucratic mechanism she had to go through to access any form of health care, even if it meant endangering her own health. Her last pregnancy was a case in point.

Gudaye had yet another difficult pregnancy when she was expecting her last child in 1997. Her legs were permanently swollen, her gums were bleeding and she often felt so tired during the day that she fell asleep in the street while trying to sell her goods. The following narrative explains her dilemma:

Gudaye:

> I must have a letter from the *Kebele* to get a place at the hospital. This means that I have to go there early in the morning and stay there all day. If the *Kebele* official who writes such letters or the one who has the stamp are not there, I have to try the next day or the next. Once I have the letter, I have to stay outside

the hospital all night queuing in order to get a registration card and an appointment to see a doctor. Otherwise, I have to queue all day to get the registration card only.

Why should I waste my time? I know exactly what they are going to tell me in the end. Buy and swallow these very expensive vitamins, eat nutritious food, drink a lot of milk, stop work and rest until the baby comes. They will not tell where I shall find the money to eat meat and drink milk or better still who will feed my children while I sleep and rest all day? That is what they told me the last time I went near them while I was pregnant!

The above shows that although admittance into the *Kebele* housing network system enabled poor families to access a modicum of healthcare and education for their children, the bureaucratic and economic disincentives they had to overcome discouraged many of them from taking full advantage of it. The private clinics and hospitals that have been flourishing since the demise of the Deg in 1990 are prohibitively expensive, even for university lecturers unless they have private means.

4.   Idir (burial associations)

The majority of street children mothers I have met responded to the diversity of demands and conditions of urban life by participating or striving to belong to at least one community based voluntary association. They attached considerable value to their memberships to *idirs* and did everything to pay their dues. Those who did not belong to any association were either homeless or the truly destitute. The following are two examples of the significance of *idir* in the social world of poor women and its effect on their self-esteem. The first example is based on Gudaye's experience and the second on that of a homeless mother.

a.   Gudaye's case:

Gudaye belonged to two *idirs*. The one she referred to as her big idir had men and women members. The fees were four *birr* fifty a month and it was worth one thousand seven hundred *birr*. This money was used for funeral and related expenses in case of bereavement. She also belonged to a female only *idir* for which she paid one *birr* fifty per month and contributed cooked food for the funeral repast. The female *idir* was worth two hundred *birr*.

Gudaye:

> Lemlem helped me join the women's *idir* soon after I arrived in Addis Ababa. Fikru belonged to the other *idir* before I did. Since he was often away and had ceased to pay his dues, they removed him from the list. As soon as I could afford it, I begged them to put me on the big *idir* list as well. They asked me to pay eighty *birr* joiner's fee and they wrote my name where his used to be.

> I pay one *birr* fifty a month for the women's *idir*. I sometimes have to additionally contribute *injera* or other foodstuff towards the after burial repast. I never fail to contribute my share of food or money, even if it means depriving my children. At the worst time of my life, when I did not know where our next meal was coming from and when I thought that Tutu was going to die any day, it made me feel that we were still human beings.

Even though Gudaye's women's *idir* was very small, it was very practical and affordable. Bereaved members were given ninety *birr* for the death of a man in the family, eighty *birr* for a woman and sixty *birr* for a child towards funeral and related expenses. The remaining money was used to pay for the church service. The money was used to buy coffee and other things for the funeral party during the customary three days mourning period. If the bereaved was extremely destitute, members tried to find out from her best friend or a neighbour how the person wished to use the money and made the necessary arrangements. If like Gudaye, the woman was a member of two *idirs*, i.e. mixed sex *idir* and female only *idir*, she could dispose of the money as she saw fit. Most women bought mourning attires with it: a black scarf, shawl and dress.

b.   A homeless mother:

The best example I have of the integrating experience of *idir* is the story of a homeless in-migrant mother and her four-year-old child. The woman had run away from an abusive husband with her then one-year-old daughter. The little girl had suffered most of her life from some kind of skin ailment. Mother and child slept on the pavement outside a Church wall. They both begged not far from where Gudaye sold her goods and had gradually become part of her entourage. The child died suddenly early one morning. Since the woman was homeless and was too destitute to belong to a burial association, Gudaye asked her female *idir* group to help. Lelem agreed to let the woman use her house as a temporary home to mourn the death of her child and receive visitors.

Lemlem and Gudaye secured the money from the *idir* to buy a coffin and pay for the church service. The child was buried the same day she died. This was in accordance

with Ethiopian Christian Orthodox rites. Members of the female *idir* and those of the street begging fraternity contributed food and money towards the after burial ceremonies. Even though the woman went back to sleep in the street four days later, she was grateful to Gudaye and Lemlem for as she put it "making her feel like a human being and giving her daughter a Christian burial".

5. Iqub (rotating saving scheme)

In all the years I have known Gudaye and all the other street children mothers, I have never known anyone who did not belong to at least one *iqub*. There have been times when Gudaye simultaneously belonged to two or three *iqubs*. The smallest was worth seven *birr* and took seven days to complete. The highest amounted to two hundred and forty *birr* and lasted a year. The organising principle behind all the *iqubs* was the same. Gudaye's seven *birr iqub* had seven members: Gudaye, a twenty-year-old street trader and five shoeshine boys all under the age of fourteen. Each member paid in one *birr* per day. Whoever needed the money most that day asked and was given the seven *birr* collected from the entire membership. If no one was in urgent need of the money, the names of those who had not yet received their *iqubs* that week would be written on pieces of paper and a non-member asked to pick out a name. As soon as every one had received his/her entitlement, another *iqub* would begin. No one defaulted, and no one found it amiss that adults and children belonged to the same *iqub*. Gudaye liked to receive her *iqub* on Saturdays because she used the money to pay for another mainly adult *iqub* she belonged to and for which she paid out fifteen *birr* every Sunday.

Many of the street children I knew had their own *iqubs*; some were as low as fifty cents per day and worth not more than five to ten *birr*. In addition, some children belonged to adult organised *iqubs* in their own right or had joint membership with their mothers or friends. Mimi and other street children often started an *iqub*, unbeknownst to their mothers, in order to buy themselves clothes or other treats. Boys usually got away with it since most worked independently of their parents. Their mothers had thus no way of knowing how much money they earned per day or how they disposed of it. Since Mimi, like many other girls, worked for her mother, any acquisitions that were not sanctioned by Lemlem created friction between the two. Mimi invariably tried to

assert her right to spend some of he money she earned on herself. Her mother maintained that the money was sorely needed for household expenses and at times physically chastised Mimi to make her point.

The following narratives encapsulate the gendered essence of street child/mother economic interaction as reflected in *iqubs*. I asked Gudaye why it was that she said `our' money or `our joint' *iqub* when she talked about the money she made with Isaac and `my' money when she referred to the money earned with the help of Abuye.

Goudaye:
> Does Isaac say `our' money?

Me:
> No, he says `my' money because he considers that he is entitled to half the *iqub* for example.

Gudaye:
> You have finally noticed that he is a male child. I have to go along with what he says even though I dispose of most of the money. It makes him feel good. Abuye is a girl. She can be ordered around. She does not need to be cajoled like her brothers.

As he grew older and his relationship with his mother's partner soured, Isaac became resentful of the way the money they earned together, especially their joint *iqub* was disposed off. In 1998, Fikru's oldest son came to visit his father. Gudaye felt obliged to give the man the two hundred *birr* she received from an *iqub* in order to enable him to buy his son new cloth and send presents for the rest of his other family. Isaac found out about it and for the first time in his life left his mother to lodge with other people.

Isaac:
> We had a joint *iqub* worth two hundred *birr*. She has spent the money on the man and his family. I am going around with torn trousers and no shoes. She does not care about me; she cares about someone else's sons. Even if I work with her money, half of the profit is mine. I worked for it. I do not want to live with her anymore. I will not work for her until she hands over the one hundred *birr* she owes me.

After this episode, Isaac and his mother bickered constantly about money until he

eventually left home for good taking his brother Bereket with him. He used his years of contact with mini-cab drivers and therefore his mother's network to find jobs for himself and his brother as taxi boys. As the trusted son of Gudaye, he had no problem entering an *iqub* in his own right or getting credit from the street trading fraternity or finding rented accommodation within the neighbourhood they lived in.

6. Mehaber (religious association)

Mehabers are religious associations. Members meet every month on particular saints' days. Individual members are expected to prepare a feast to celebrate their chosen saint at home and invite fellow members. Long before he met Gudaye, Fikru used to belong to a *mehaber* devoted to the Archangel Gabriel. Since his legal wife was not domiciled in Addis Ababa, he used to pay Lemlem or other ladies to prepare a meal when his turn came to celebrate his *mehaber*. His relationship with Gudaye started when he paid her to prepare food and officiate at his *mehaber*.

Due to financial constraints and his frequent and long absences from the city, Fikru was not able to keep up with his *mehaber* obligations. Since many of his fellow *mehaber* members lived in the neighbourhood and were his personal friends, he was regularly invited to partake of the festivities. He sought and was given information about job opportunities on building sites and other such temporary jobs at *mehaber* gatherings. Members collected money in order to help him out when Gudaye gave birth to Hennock in 1997. In 1999, they used *mehaber* money to buy him a second hand suit and shoes before he went for a job interview as a security guard. Even though he did not get the job, he was not expected to reimburse the money to his *mehaber*. Fellow members considered their contribution to be a free gift normally extended to a member facing difficult circumstances.

Gudaye did not belong to a *mehaber*. She nevertheless helped other women prepare *mehaber* celebrations and readily accepted invitation to partake of the festivities. She also gratefully accepted any financial help her partner's fellow *mehaber* members extended to her family. She considered many of them her friends and occasionally asked the better off ones for short-term loans. However, she refused to

contribute to Fikru's *mehaber* because she considered it a luxury the family could ill afford. She also resented the fact that he invariably came home drunk after attending a *mehaber* gathering and bemoaned the loss of his ability to afford holding his own ceremony.

Conclusion:

Social support systems do not exist in isolation but are embedded in social networks. If applied to home-based street children and their families, network and support systems can be linked together much like the two faces of a coin. I have tried to demonstrate the why and when, the two systems work in concert among street children's families. By elucidating how Gudaye entered the housing network system as an in-migrant mother of two illegitimate sons, I have shown how she developed her personal relationships through enlarging her social network into support systems. In other words, the manner in which she transformed her status from complete outsider into a legally certified *Kebele* resident as well as becoming a bona fide member of the street trading fraternity. I have also tried to demonstrate the effect of Gudaye's entire social network on her sons and daughters in terms of their health and education as well as the gendered aspect of her children's street related activities. Finally, I have related how Gudaye's two oldest sons used their mother's network to create their own social support and network system and entered the adult social world in their own right.

I concentrated on the home and street life of home based street children, i.e. children ON the street in order to give an account of such children's experiences of girlhood and boyhood within the family and in the street. I demonstrated how the social network and support systems their mothers were able to access differentiated street children's life experiences. This was especially true of those coming from female-headed households because of the different ways in-migrant, long established or city-born lone mothers were able to access social resources. I also showed how family circumstances affected poor children's home life, career in the street, health and education. Additionally, this chapter demonstrates the crucial role of support and network systems play in differentiating people who might otherwise be homogenous in their abject poverty. I have shown how poor parents' support systems and networks cross cut and impact on each other in terms of housing, education, health care and

membership to community based voluntary associations. The manner in which Gudaye's sons availed themselves of their mother's network to create their own and extricate themselves from the economic bonds that attached them to her, shows that there is a generational continuum in network formation. I have tried to demonstrate the crucial role of support and network systems in differentiating people who might otherwise be homogenous in their abject poverty. I showed how street children's mothers' entire social network impacted on their sons and daughters well being in terms of their access to shelter, health and education. I have related how over time home-based street children entered the adult world by using their mothers' network to create their own and to extricate themselves from the economic bonds that attached them to their families.

Chapter 6

The Socialisation of Street Children

There is general agreement that religion as well as race, class, gender, birth position and culture differentiate children's childhood. This diversity is further accentuated by children's physical environment (i.e. urban versus rural, pastoralist versus sedentary agriculturist societies and so on). In other words, cultural and ecological context influence how children are socialised into acquiring social roles considered appropriate within the societies they belong to. Family setting also has a preponderant influence on how children are socialised in terms of their family circumstances therefore their access to modern education and healthcare. In the present chapter, I shall try to show how the squalid and overcrowded urban environment homogenised and impacted the manner in which destitute mothers socialised their children. I shall examine childhood cultures in terms of the gendered aspect of child rearing among street children's families and how many such children end up by socialising their mothers, thus revealing an adult on child as well as a child on adult aspect to socialisation.

Broadly defined socialisation, also called enculturation in US anthropology, is the process in which the culture of a society is transmitted to children. While acknowledging their interconnectedness, Poole (1994) claims that the two concepts are distinguishable in emphasis. He quotes Mead (1963) on socialisation as having to do with 'the set of species-wide requirements and exactions made on human beings by human societies' whereas enculturation refers to 'the process of learning a culture in all its uniqueness and particularity' (p.185). However, in much of the literature on the subject both refer to two aspects of the single process of learning to participate in a socio-cultural system (Mayer 1970, Fortes 1970; Hartman 1973: 1974; Le Vine & Williams 1974; Whitting & Whiting 1975; James 1979; Super & Harkness 1986; Whiting & Edwards 1988; James & Sprout eds. 1990; Shieffelin 1990; Mandel 1991). The term enculturation was preferred to socialisation in US anthropology due to the predominant emphasis on the concept of culture rather than that of society among American anthropologists during the 1960s and early 1970s (Jahoda and Lewis ed.
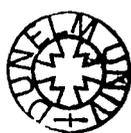
1987). Since the term commonly embraces both concepts, I shall use socialisation to mean both enculturation and socialisation.

Anthropologists and feminists typically approach the subject of socialisation from a cultural and environmental perspective. Mead (1949) defines socialisation as the acquisition of self-perception as male or female and hence one's social identity. Firth (1957) claims that socialisation involves the modification from infancy of an individual's behaviour to conform with the ideals and behaviour proper to kinship values. Mitchell (1966) examines the earliest context in which cultures are produced and reproduced in a person's life in order to give an insight into how gendered values are inculcated into children from birth. Fortes (1973) analyses socialisation in terms of the interactive process of learning to observe established social behaviour. Rabain (1979) concentrates her research on the socialising force of ritual. Schieffelin (1990) delves into the symbolic systems of language emphasising the social context in which socialisation takes place. She demonstrates how Kaluli children learn to be in relation to others through the process of learning to speak their native language.

The above definitions of socialisation indicate that the concept is more or less analysed in terms of the modes of transmission of a culture or of the learning of a system already in existence. It assumes that what is learned are values, moral rules and social conventions found in adult behaviour. This learning process does not entail any transformation of the ideas encountered. By implication, existing ideas and practices of senior generations are presumed to be transmitted unchanged to junior generations. Socialisation thus describes an essentially passive process on the children's side that takes for granted the active role of adults in the socialisation process.

Briggs (1992) and Poole (1994) challenge this emphasis on child training by adults without any reference to children's perspectives on the matter. Briggs affirms that the active involvement of children in the socialisation process and meaning making is indispensable to their acquisition of culture. Poole points out that numerous studies indicate that children engage in reciprocities of interaction and express emotions and perhaps intentions even in infancy (p.184). Furthermore, children construct their own

experience and create a socio-cultural world of their own and put these experimental understandings to personal and social use (p.139).

Enquiries about the socialisation of street children are predominantly directed at child to child rather than on adult to child training and nurturing. They give an insight into such children's economic networks, their recreational activities, emotional support in times of illness and protection from physical danger (Aptekar 1988; Swart 1988; Sharf et al. 19886; Connolley 1990). More recent findings indicate that group life among gangs of homeless street children, provides an adequate socialising environment, often replacing the families such children may lack (Visano 1990; Ennew 1994; Tedla Diressie 1999). Visano views socialisation as 'an important clue to determining how children construct their identities, interpretation and social relations (p.139)'. She uses this analytic concept of socialisation in order to investigate street children's career in the street and how they develop their street based identities and social relations. Ennew examines the networks of homeless street children and concludes that among such children older ones often socialise younger ones. With reference to homeless street children in Ethiopia, Tedla Diressie (1999) writes that contact with their peers has a positive effect and "is a substitute for the adult care, protection and affection that this group of children lack"(p.7)

Children ON the street in Addis Ababa come from heterogeneous, multi-ethnic and/or mixed backgrounds. Besides childhood being but a transitory phase to adulthood and apart from the above-mentioned differentiating elements, three additional factors account for the diversity in home based children's life experiences. The first concerns household composition. This is because the children come from varied types of households. As I have pointed out in Chapter 4 'Defining the Street Child' some have both parents living together. Many more are raised in female-headed households by widowed, divorced, migrant or never-married mothers. A few live with older siblings, close relatives, stepparents, adult benefactors, and so on. The second factor is linked to family income and this is closely related to the third and key factor, which has to do with parents', especially, mothers' ability to access available social resources. The above-mentioned diversity notwithstanding, poverty and the overcrowded living conditions

found in Addis Ababa bring about some kind of uniformity to the way the poor live and the way they socialise their children.

In this section on socialisation, I shall attempt to show that individuals, including children, are not passive actors moulded by immutable cultures. I have taken two alternative perspectives that give a more complex understanding of street children as active agents engaged in constituting their relations with their mothers and others. Firstly, my contention is that in so doing such children subtly transform the concepts that denote socialisation as well as challenging the taken for granted comportment appropriate to parent/child interaction found in the wider Ethiopian context. Secondly, even though the theory of socialisation is commonly associated with child development, the process of becoming a cultural and social being continues beyond childhood and endures throughout adult life as one incorporates new roles and statuses (Jahoda and Lewis ed. 1987; Giddens 1994). Without diminishing the primary role of mothers in the socialising process, I shall try to demonstrate that street children play a corresponding part in their own, and at times their mothers' and siblings' socialisation. It is utopian to suppose that one can see, describe and find the theoretical relevance of everything to do with growing up in an urban environment. The following analysis and descriptions of the socialising process of street children and their mother therefore focuses on problems that appeared to me to be of major importance to group life and structure.

- ### The Social Construction of Childhood

Apart from the age restriction in the Ethiopian Labour Proclamation no. 64 of 1975, which expressly prohibits the employment of children under fourteen years of age, all the parents and the majority of children I have talked to were aware of, and more or less, in agreement with the meaning of the concepts child and childhood implicit in existing legislation. Street children and their parents pointed to the absurdity of the age restriction of this legislation by referring to the abject poverty they lived in. The children said that the alternative to them not working or begging in the street was starvation or crime.

My own findings show that for all practical purposes peers and adults alike held street children responsible for their actions in the street. In other words, street children

were considered as 'adults' and as accountable as any other adult operating in the streets. Conversely, their mothers were considered answerable for their misbehaviour within the neighbourhood they lived in. There is only one remand home housing about 100 boys in Ethiopia. The courts are unable to cope with the influx of street-related crimes committed by children and young adults. The police usually dealt with petty crimes by street children on the spot or in the overflowing police stations. Unfortunately, one of their solutions included administering severe beatings in order to 'teach the children a lesson' as they put it.

There are specific laws designating the person or persons responsible for the care and welfare of orphans and children from broken homes. There are also laws regarding the child custody rights of either parent as well as the inheritance rights of children (Tesfaye 1992:79-80). In the course of my research I encountered numerous divorce cases where fathers had used their 'customary rights' to take away children, especially boys, age five to seven from their mothers. Out of the thirty-two homeless boys and girls I worked with, twenty six had run away from home in order to escape the cruel treatment they received from their stepmothers and/or neglect by their fathers.

As shown above children and adults alike disagreed with some, but not all, of the above stated notions of childhood found in existing legislation. The ideas behind these socially constructed ideals of childhood nevertheless impacted on the manner by which street children's mothers tried to socialise their children. Their efforts were thwarted by the moral, social and economic challenges confronting them and their children. The end product generated a role reversal with children playing a corresponding role in their own upbringing and an imperceptible role in socialising their mothers.

- ### The Socialisation of Street Children and their Mothers

There were similarities to the ways Gudaye and other street children mothers raised their children as well as to how family members interacted with one another. All the street children and parents I interviewed maintained that raising and socialising children is a woman's job. Fathers said that their contribution to child rearing began after the child reaches the age of seven and comes to 'know himself' or 'to know his

soul' *(liju nefsun taweke behuwala)*. They interpreted this to mean 'when a child is aware of right and wrong' or 'when one can talk sensibly to it'. Mothers added a spiritual and emotional consciousness to this explanation. They expressed this in terms of 'when a child realises that it has a mortal soul; when it starts being aware of other people's feelings; when it stops being gullible and childish and is able to hide or dissimulate its feelings'. Devout Christian and Muslim children associated the significance of this concept with the fact that seven is the age at which they are supposed to start fasting.

In addition to the above, age and gender had implication to the different tasks attributed to fathers and mothers in child rearing practices. Mothers were expected to be wholly responsible for infants and for the day-to-day childcare and most of the socialising of children. Fathers' role in bringing up their children was usually restricted to guiding and disciplining troublesome children, especially boys, when mothers were unable to cope. Girls were supposed to be guided, disciplined and trained into womanhood by their mothers or other female members of their families. After age seven, all children were required to learn 'to live with other people' *(kesewgar menor mawek yejemeralu)*. Parents, especially mothers, were expected to inculcate this ideal in their children.

As a general rule, after age seven children and parents had an 'aloof' relationship. Although not very demonstrative physically, the emotional ties among family members were very strong. They loved each other inarticulately, apart from rare instances when a parent wanted to extol directly a child's accomplishment or admonish any transgression. Effusive blessings and praises rewarded a child's endeavour: 'my master, my angel, brave boy, my little lion, my beauty; may god bless and protect you'. Conversely, misdemeanours could unleash a torrent of verbal abuse that would make even a grown up cringe: 'may God take your eyes out; you filth; you monster'. The feelings parents and children had for each other were made apparent not through kisses and hugs but by what they did for each other. It was vocalised not through what they said to each other but by what they said about each other (Heinonen 1996).

In addition to the cultural watershed of seven years, parents added a chronological meaning to the notions of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The implication of these age-related turning points in the lives of street children rested on parental and societal expectations of a more mature social and moral behaviour. Among other things, this was related to frequent and fundamental gender and age-based changes in parents, especially mothers' expectation of home and street-related duties and responsibilities from their children. Dependency, blind obedience and total deference to parents and all adults were associated with the ideal child and childhood. Conversely, children were expected to respond in 'conventionally' acceptable ways to the social pressures and influences triggered by the sex and age-differentiated pattern of their interactive experience with their mothers and other adults. This was a heavy task to achieve since street children were expected to be accountable adults, workers, breadwinners in the street and dependent, malleable and voiceless children at home.

Most, if not all, street children and non-street children's parents assured me that it was no use reasoning or physically punishing children under five-year old since they soon forgot why they were chastised. In real life, this belief did not stop many of them from slapping, pinching or hitting even toddlers for being unruly or disobedient. All agreed that as soon as a child 'knows his soul' 'sparing the rod spoilt the child'. As Tedla Tedla Diressie (1999:14) puts it: "(Ethiopian)...society believes that the family has the right to do anything with their children and corporal punishment is considered to be essential to make children behave and internalise the norms of society". Physical punishment could be a slap in the face, punching, pinching, fumigating children with chilli pepper or even assaulting them with sticks, stones, belts or anything that falls into the adult's hand (Heinonen 1996; Tedla Diressie 1999). Many children told me that they preferred a beating to verbal abuse because of the mental pain they suffered from being insulted, cursed or publicly humiliated.

Several elements went into the socialisation of street and non-street children in Addis Ababa. Mothers' contribution to child rearing involved making sure that children fulfilled the role expectation and behavioural patterns found in the wider Ethiopian cultural context. Briefly summarised, the 'proper' parent/child (or even non-kin adult/child) relationship was ideally based on the expectation of blind obedience and

respect on the children's part. Ritual forms of demeanour, which might be construed as abject servility towards adults from some Western perspectives, accompanied this blind obedience. This was supposed to be achieved through strict discipline, physical or verbal chastisement, sound parental advice and the good example set by adults. More often than not, any infringement of the rules of appropriate social behaviour was met with a severe beating or verbal abuse, known as *tefat ena ketat* (misdemeanour and punishment).

Another aspect of socialisation was related to the notion of *yebetmoya*, which I have loosely translated as domesticity. *Yebetmoya* involved all sorts of domestic and other skills imparted to children (usually girls) by female members of the household in order to equip them for adulthood and motherhood. The ideas of *yebetmoya*, and *tefat ena ketat* embodied the two main aspects of socialisation concerned with child rearing on the domestic front. They affected the emotional and social context of being a boy or a girl (Heinonen 1966).

A third element in the socialisation process of street children had implications for the economic bonds between them and their mothers. The economics of street life compelled street children to acquire adult-like behaviours and responsibilities prematurely. The same process frequently obliged mothers to accept a `diminished' childlike role of dependency on their children. Accordingly, as street children assumed adult-like economic roles including those of workers and home providers, an inevitable development ensued. This called upon children and mothers alike to reshape their roles in relation to each other. In other words, they were obliged to adopt new strategies and assume new identities that could accommodate their changing position and importance within the household. This generated contradictory and at times disruptive role expectations and responsibilities from mothers and children alike.

A last and equally important element in the socialisation of street children involved inculcating them into the art of living with other people. In the highly diversified and over-populated urban context, city-born and in-migrants encounter large numbers of principles governing social relationships to which they had to adhere. One of the primordial concerns of poor parents was framed within the ideals of good

neighbourly relationships. The do and don'ts associated with 'knowing to how to live with other people' were varied and many. Some of these included not fighting with neighbourhood children and adults or loitering around people's houses in the hope of being offered food, not touching other people's property and not discussing family matters with outsiders.

In short, children were expected not to cause any friction with neighbours. Those who caused discord, no matter how trivial the misdemeanour, ended up receiving severe beatings or being verbally abused. The overtly public demonstration that accompanied disciplining children in such instances helped mothers convince their neighbours that they were indeed strict disciplinarians and were therefore raising their children properly. It also defused any tension that may have been created by the children's behaviour (Heinonen 1996). In the following section I shall use examples drawn from Gudaye's and other street children's families to illustrate the above mentioned points.

- ## Gudayes' Children

Gudaye's children, like many home-based street children, had extensive emotional and economic ties with their mother. Like in most street children families, there were gender and age based differences to these bonds. In May 1995, when I first met Gudaye, Isaac was fourteen, Bereket twelve, Abuye ten, Abraham eight, Tutu five and Dojo two years old. Her partner Fikru did not appear on the scene until 1997. Isaac was clearly the favourite. Gudaye never stopped extolling his virtues. He was 'my life, my soul, my father and mother'. She spent all her working days with him. She conferred with him before joining yet another iqub (rotating credit scheme), buying clothes for the children or meat during public holidays. He remonstrated with her whenever she picked a quarrel with other women or lost her temper with policemen. He was as she put it her 'friend', her 'confidant' and definitely 'not a child'. According to my findings, this type of emotional bond was very typical of mother/elder daughter relationships rather than mother/son relationships. The only time I have seen it repeated is in one other female-headed household where there were no daughters in the family.

The turning point in Isaac and Gudaye's mother/son relation began in 1991 after the birth of Tutu when Isaac was barely ten years old. He told his mother that he would stop going to school altogether and work full time in order to feed the family. This is how he expressed it:

> I have never been scared or ashamed to work in the street. After Tutu's birth we were desperate. We had no food at home, mother was not very well and Tutu was dying. I told mother to stay at home and take care or herself and the baby and that I would take care of all of them.

Apart from street children assuming the adult role of homemakers and their mothers' mentors, they have a vital role in socialising each other and their mothers. Mini, Gudaye's best friend's daughter, much like Isaac played a role as home provider and her mother's confidant from age nine onwards. Isaac affirms that Mimi showed him everything there was to know about street life: where he could buy or even beg left over food or sell this and that. Mimi even gave him and their mothers the initial idea of asking merchants to hand over their coins in the evening so that he could exchange them with taxi drivers for a small profit. I have encountered several cases of children like Mimi teaching their mothers or their friends the fundamentals of street trade.

Isaac had a pivotal role in initiating his mother's career in the street. Apart from selling the fuel wood she gathered with Lemlem, Gudaye had never worked in the street. As soon as she realised that there was nothing more for Tutu, Gudaye joined Isaac in the street selling whatever was profitable. Isaac was by then an accepted member of the street trading fraternity. All Gudaye had to do was build upon the goodwill established by her son. She proceeded to expand his network to include policemen, minicab drivers, street traders, shop owners and a coterie of shoeshine boys. Eventually, Isaac was to use his mother's network to find himself a job as a mini cab conductor and create his own network in order to access credit facilities and rent a room.

Until he left home, Isaac had a tremendous impact on how Gudaye dealt with the outside world. Since she could not read or write she depended on him for anything official that came their way. She consulted with him about every aspect of her personal and social life from her dealings with *Kebele* officials or schoolteachers to her

relationship with Lemlem and their other friends in the street. They nurtured each other and she protected him against violence in the street. Isaac again:

> Mother is always panicking. She fears *Kebele* officials, schoolteachers and even doctors and nurses. She is afraid of asking for information or anything even when it is her right to do so. Mimi's mother is the same. Mimi and I have to act as if we were their fathers or husbands and advise them on how to react or what to do.

> Mother is not afraid of policemen or street thugs, but I am. She often protects me and the other children from the many hoodlums who try to rob or beat us. She embarrasses me when she fights publicly with them or the police. She sometimes listens to me when I to tell her off and remind her that they could hurt one of us when she is not around.

As I have pointed out in Chapter 4, 'Defining the Street Child', street boys entry into street life took many forms. The most common involved parents, especially mothers, buying a shoe shine box or raising the initial capital to enable their children to earn money they contributed toward their school related expenses. Just as many children are initiated by their friends or siblings and in rare cases by adult street vendors. Once in the street, the children leant how to function in the street by imitating other street children and expanding their own network.

Isaac's street related economic activity was more or less linked to his mother's and to her people-centred network. This was not the case for many home-based male street children. Home-based street boys seldom worked for activities directly financed or controlled by their mothers. The few that did usually received the initial capital for buying newspapers, lottery tickets or various small items they hawked. The great majority worked as shoeshine boys, car park attendants, and coolies and did any kind of job that was on offer. Their mothers had no way of knowing how much money they earned or controlling their movements. Even though they contributed vital resources to family income, they had flexible economic links attaching mothers to sons.

Most boys gave their mothers a portion of the money they earned. Quite a few hid their money from their mothers by depositing it with various adult street vendors or shop owners for safekeeping. This was mostly out of fear of being forced to hand over the lot if they were found out or obliged to contribute more than they wished because of the dire poverty in which they all lived. In addition, mothers and sons had minimal

contact with each other during the day while the boys were playing, working or attending school. There were therefore less opportunities or reasons for mothers to assert their parental authority.

In the majority of cases, female street children's trading activities were much more closely linked to that of their mothers. The girls worked for their mothers who expected them to hand over the entire proceeds of the day. They usually sold home processed foods stuff like peanuts and roasted chickpeas or retailed pens, matches, cigarettes and other such small articles bought by their mothers. Mothers knew the sale prices of everything and the values of the goods their daughters sold. Most of the mother/daughter conflicts I witnessed were based on mothers' assumption that for all practical purposes the girls' earning should be considered family income. They also expected blind obedience from their daughters and to have the sole right to dispose of whatever money the girls earned.

This state of affairs usually lasted as long as the girls were relatively young and malleable. As they grew older, usually age thirteen and older, daughters asserted their right to some of the fruits of their labour or at least have a say in how the money was spent. This and the mothers' demands that daughters show them due deference, was the cause of constant friction between mothers and daughters. Thus, unlike their male counterparts, street girls had less leeway in how they wished to dispose of the money they earned, their time and their leisure activities.

Since Isaac worked exclusively for his mother, the two had more of a mother/daughter than a mother/son economic link. Even though Gudaye had the final say, she discussed every major expense with Isaac. The second turning point in Isaac and his mother's relationship was activated by his insistence that they share equally whatever they earned in his post puberty years. This began in 1997 when Fikru, her partner, came to live with them permanently. Isaac resented any money spent on him. Fikru was very fastidious. He fasted regularly and attended church at least once a week. He preferred to go without than eat bought leftover food. Yesak and Bereket resented him being treated differently and made sure that he and their mother were aware of it.

Isaac and Bereket left home for good because Gudaye asked Fikru to help her discipline them. Her excuse was that Fikru was the only father they had ever known and that she had no-one else who could help her discipline them. Mothers asking fathers, brothers, and even uncles, to discipline an unruly child is a very common phenomenon among street and non-street children families. Even though they both agreed with this principle, Isaac and Bereket refused to acknowledge Fikru's right to admonish or chastise them. They felt that as long as Fikru lived off Isaac's labour, he should have no say in family matters and accept in silence his role as a dependent.

There were many other cases of children reinterpreting accepted modes of behaviour between children and their elders and imposing their own rules within their family. Many boys aged fifteen and older from female headed households start acting as heads of families and demand to be treated as such. They expect to be fed and taken care of for the money they contribute at home and in the worst case scenario may bring girl friends to stay with them. After the initial clashes, most mothers accept their much-reduced parental authority or risk being abandoned by their sons.

Like their male counterpart, female street children challenge the traditional role of children honouring, obeying and respecting their parents at all time and in all circumstances. Mimi is a typical case of a daughter taking over the role of head of household. Mimi befriended a street vendor and had a baby by him at the age of seventeen. By December 1999, almost five years after I had met them, Mimi and her partner had been living with her mother for over a year. The two had taken over her mother's trading business and expanded it to include lending money to street children and street vendors at high interest. Mimi's mother was restricted to preparing spices that Mimi sold to other retailers. Mimi had also taken over the role of guiding and disciplining her brother and sisters. She had forced both of them to quit street life and resume their schooling.

The turning point in Gudaye and Bereket's (her second son) relationship happened soon after Tutu's birth. Gudaye expected Abuye (then five) to care for the ten days old Tutu and three years old Abraham instead of Bereket (then seven). She explained this by saying that Abuye was a girl and that Bereket was enrolled in school.

Her neighbours told me that after she discovered that Abuye drunk all the milk she left for the baby, Gudaye beat the child every time she came back from an unsuccessful trip to clinics, hospitals, faith healers, soothsayers, sorcerers and priests. Unbeknown to his mother, Bekeret asked all the elders in the neighbourhood to intervene lest his mother killed Abuye and went to jail and they all ended up in the street. They still praise his mature foresight and adult like action.

After this Bereket gradually took over the running of the house and most of the child rearing. He told me that he did not mind doing what he called `girls things' because he could not stand seeing his mother disciplining Abuye. Bereket attended school half day until he reached the age of fifteen. He did all the shopping, washing and most of the cooking. He was in charge of disciplining Abraham who was forever hanging around other people's houses or fighting with neighbourhood children. Abuye fetched water and ran errands for him and occasionally assisted him with the housework. Just like Bereket many boys from poor families help out with domestic work, especially when they do not have an older sister. This usually stops as soon as they reach puberty when peer pressure and the social stigma behind `a man doing women's work' in the kitchen discourages them from helping their mothers in the house.

I have never seen Gudaye hit or insult Bereket or Isaac. She always had the right words or gestures to make them toe the line or make them feel loved. On the other hand, she had an uneasy relationship with Abuye. She literally never spared the rod with her or with her other son Abraham. She often kept Abuye home from school to help with domestic work or nursing when she or any of the other children were ill. Bereket was never asked to skip school for similar reasons. This is in spite of the fact that Bereket and Abuye loathed working in the street, had good relationships with their teachers and wanted to go to school. Asking daughters to act as surrogate mothers and nurses is not uncommon, even where there are several boys in the family. The excuse I was given was that girls do not need to play all the time. They are more patient than boys, they are less likely to disobey an order and that they take their family responsibility to heart while boys do not.

Until 1998, Gudaye's attempts at initiating Abuye in street works were unsuccessful. The poor girl was very shy and terrified of any type of street work. Her younger brother Abraham was too immature and spent his time playing with other street children when he was with his mother in the street. Soon after Bereket and Isaac left home, Gudaye gradually involved both Abuye and Abraham in her street-related activities. On top of that Abuye was made to help out with the household duties that Bereket used to take care of. Gudaye told me that she could not ask Abraham to do the washing and cooking because his father would not allow it. He would accuse her of turning him into a woman, as she did with Bereket. She explained that the man did not mind eating whatever Bereket cooked because he was not his son.

After her brother's departure, Tutu was more or less left to her own devices. Gudaye's excuse for leaving her alone at home was that she could not work if Dojo and Tutu were with her in the street because they never stopped quarrelling. She did not have the means to hire someone to look after Tutu and could not enrol her in a school because she was mentally handicapped. Gudaye believed that the neighbours would keep an eye on her. The only time the neighbours did anything for the poor child was to send someone to call Gudaye, after she had been hit by a passing car and was lying unconscious on the pavement. Tutu was seven years old, and often went to play on the main tarmac road all by herself.

CONCLUSION:

Recent studies on children's childhood have shown that it is wrong to assume homogeneity of childhood even among those growing up in identical neighbourhoods and family settings (James 1993; Netsman & Hurrelmann 1994; Brannen & O'Brian eds. 1996). In spite of the shared schemata of culture and environment, street boys and girls conceptualise and experience childhood differently. Every one must be socialised to some degree if they are to participate in social life. I have indicated that the abject poverty that they lived in and the congested urban-based environment of Addis Ababa homogenised the way in which poor parents socialised their children. There are however enormous variations in how this actually happens and the results it produces even among children of the same family. Street children growing up in identical

neighbourhood and family settings may share in common some elements associated with poverty, poor housing and streetism and not others. Among the families I worked with, the social network and support system their mothers were able to access differentiated the life experiences among even those coming from female-headed households. There were differences in how intra-household interaction and street-based relationships were expressed, interpreted, and received by boys and girls. This was the basis of the gendered aspect of the socialisation of street children and their careers in the street.

The pressures and challenges street children faced at home and in the street were the reasons behind such boys and girls transforming the notion associated with socialisation. Even though parental authority prevailed over the fact that street children were often asked to play the adult role of home providers until they had passed puberty, they at times had a vital role in socialising their parents at a much earlier age. By using examples from Gudaye's and other street children families, I have shown how street children played a corresponding role in their own socialisation. The manner in which they were imperceptibly in charge of socialising their mothers, their friends and siblings enabled them to transform the traditional link that unite mothers to their children. In other words, the children transcended the child to adult transference behind the taken for granted socialisation process.

From the children's perspective, it was obvious that the street was where street boys and girls learnt to assume adult roles. They were often called upon to be responsible adults in the street and dependent children at home. These contradictory role reversals obliged them to prematurely enter the adult world of workers and home providers. It also caused frequent and fundamental gender and gender based changes in the roles and identities they had to assume at home and in the street. I have used Gudaye and her children's life experiences to demonstrate how the above-mentioned processes work. I have drawn examples from other street children families to illustrate pertinent points. My data also includes information about the changes over time in such mothers' relationship with their children.

From the adult point of view, the basic enquiry into the meanings behind the socially created notions of childhood and the ideals behind the parent/child interaction I started with led me to explore the diversity in the mother/daughter and mother/son socio-economic links. This became part of the analytic model of the affective and monetary aspect of their relationships and therefore the role and effect of streetism in the lives of girls and boys. By observing the type of actions that caused conflict between mother and street child, I was able to infer implicit expectations from the mothers and/or children's point of view regarding the socialisation process of children and adults. Finally, I have demonstrated how girls rather than boys experience a high level of domestic violence at the hand of their mothers.

Chapter 7

Homeless Street Children

This chapter seeks to examine the societal relations of gangs of homeless adolescent boys and girls living together in loose-knit social groups, seemingly independent of family supervision and cut off from the adult social world. As I have detailed in Chapter 4, 'Defining the Street Child', they fall under the UNICEF classification as children OF the street. They are commonly referred to as Borco in Addis Ababa. One of the criteria distinguishing them from street children living at home is their lack of family ties, but not necessarily a family. This chapter demonstrates how the lifestyle and life choices of homeless street children differ from the life experiences of those living with their natal families. It also shows how the socio-economic relationship home-based street children have with members of their own families, peer groups and non-kin adults in the street integrates them into society at large and how the same factors separate homeless children from the adult organised social world.

My long-term data concerns three gangs of homeless street boys and one mixed sex gang. I chose to focus on one of them, Zelalem and his friends, primarily because their age and membership size is similar to studies made of other such group of street children in South America and Africa (Aptekar 1988; Swart 1988; Sharf et al. 1986; Connolly 1990;Tyler et al. 1992). The group comprised a minimum of four boys at its lowest and a maximum of twelve at its highest. Even though the size and composition of Zelalem's group was in a constant state of flux, five boys formed the nucleus of the gang. This was because at least one or two of them were part of the group at one time or another throughout the five years I carried out my research. I have singled them out to illustrate the role of gang life and how the group functioned in the street. I have used information from the data I gathered from the two groups of older boys in order to illuminate certain issues that were relevant to the Zelalem and his friends' social world.

In the literature on gangs of homeless boys and girls, it is written that such children establish some form of enduring and viable networks among themselves as well as a stable and fixed mode of interaction between themselves. The Strollers of Cape Town

had a democratic decision making set up that they used for in-group conflict resolution as well as to facilitate emotional and material support among group members. The same organisational mechanism ensured the socialisation and well being of younger children (Sharf et al. 1986). The Malunde of Johannesburg had regular and extensive discussions about day-to-day activities including what to eat, where to go and what to do and wear (Swart 1988). Street children in Bogota, Colombia and Guatemala are said to have a loose organisational structure that nevertheless allowed group members to engage in mutual support and coping strategies (Connolly 1990). Research carried out in India indicated that out of two hundred street and working children interviewed, fifteen percent stated that they depend on their peers for emotional support (Rane ed. 1994). There were two types of groupings among the well-organised street children of Cali in Colombia. Those who had a purely economic tie within their group named themselves Gamada and those who stayed together for emotional support called themselves Gallada (Aptekar 1988). A comparative study of street children in Bogota and street youth in Washington DC indicated that such children had the capacity to express and accept caring relationships between themselves and others (Tyler et al. 1992).

None of the homeless street children I knew could be located in specific network systems or within the same social networks used by street children living with their families. This is because the existence of a social network assumes that the individual child has a stock of personal contacts that he/she can make strategic use of in case of need. The gang of boys I worked with did not belong to any network system that they could count on for leisure, shelter, nurturing, feeding or protection from physical danger for any length of time. They did not even have a dependable economic and affective network among themselves or a fixed and stable mode of interacting with each other. The only tangible type of network they could all rely on was support from other members of the group in time of illness and bereavement. However, even the support system they possessed during illness and bereavement was ephemeral. This was mainly due to the intermittent and extremely volatile relationships they had with one another.

I entertained the thought of analysing group life among the gangs of homeless boys I worked with in term of exchange theory for a long time and gave up. Exchange theory views people as rationally trying to acquire what they want by exchanging

valued resources with others i.e. love in marriage, favours among friends and subordinates, compliance in return for rewards from superiors and so on. This exchange is not necessarily a dyadic one. It can include groups or other social systems as a whole. The values behind exchange theory are sharing, loyalty and mutual co-operation as well as calculation of self-interest and maximisation of individual gain. The individual participating in a system based on mutual loyalty and sharing derives benefits not from his interaction with particular people but from his/her overall participation in the system. Families, pre-industrial and pre-market tribal societies are said to operate in this way (Blau:1986; Cook:1987; Cook & Whitmeyer:1992). Exchange theory thus presupposes the existence of a principle of organisation, stability and continuity; the very things lacking in the lives of homeless street children. Turnbull (1966) comments that he found it difficult to present the principle organisation of the Mbuti since they lacked the formal institutions found in larger or more sedentary society. Much like the Mbuti bands he studied, the gangs of homeless boys and girls I worked with were a highly mobile, volatile entity with constant changes in the composition of their groupings. All this made it difficult for me to analyse the interactions between them in terms of social network or exchange theory. I found that the type of emotional and economic exchange that existed among all three gangs I studied is best analysed in terms of reciprocity.

In the social sciences, reciprocity as a concept refers to the establishment and maintenance of relationship between persons or social groups. Reciprocity is said to unite people through a relationship of exchange and divide them as separate members of the exchange relationship (Mauss 1955; Polanyi 1968; Sahlins 1974). Sahlins (1974) elaborated the significance of reciprocity by creating three types of links between material flow and social relations, each correlated with social distance. Generalised reciprocity is the flow of free gifts or the sharing of resources without strict measurement of obligation to repay between close kinsmen or within a restricted or intimate social group. It is characterised by the existence of a diffuse obligation of return, which is moral rather than economic in nature. Balanced reciprocity is a form of exchange between structural equals, who trade or exchange goods or services with the strict expectation of return. Balanced reciprocity is less personal and moral and more economic in type. Negative reciprocity is characteristic of interaction between enemies

or distant groups. It involves maximising ones profit at the expense of others and may take the form of haggling, thieving and even raiding in war. Sahlins suggests that all three types of reciprocity form a continuum, which correlates kinship ties and social distance. He also affirms that as exchange creates groups, so it creates boundaries between individuals and groups. This double function of uniting and setting apart makes reciprocity a particularly appropriate analytical tool for interpreting the social relationship of the gangs of homeless boys I studied.

In this chapter, I shall begin by giving a brief overview of the physical environment they operated in. This is because territory rather than group alliance was the key factor that held them together. Since each child is a singular personality with his own pre-street life history, I have included details of their lives before they entered the street world and how the group came into being. I also describe how they developed personal relationships with each other and with their peers in the street. I show how in spite of the violence amongst themselves and the imperfect system of reciprocity that existed between them, they occasionally used membership of the gang to buffer stress, loneliness and as a support network in time of illness. Finally, the chapter details the painful process of their disengagement from life in the street coupled with their search for supportive social alternatives away from the street and gang life as post adolescent boys.

- **Physical Environment**

Geographic position, rather than social network or life circumstances, was the pivotal factor that brought and held Zelalem's group together. They slept, lounged and gambled next to a church wall, behind a cluster of trees, which provided shade from the sun and shelter from the rain. Because they operated from a fixed location, I was able to find at least one boy any time day or night throughout the years I worked with them. This was different from to the other two gangs of boys I knew. The latter were obliged to change their sleeping places constantly because of police harassment or fights with other gangs over sleeping territory, lucrative begging and gambling spots. They therefore slept on pavements, in roadside ditches, on shop verandas and at traffic roundabouts. The longest one of the older groups stayed in any one place was five months. This was mainly due to the fact that they were able to build plastic and cardboard makeshift shelters behind a dilapidated apartment building, hidden away from the main road and police vigilance.

As soon as the owners of the building started carrying out repairs, they forcibly removed them by burning down their shelters and sending guards to harass them at night.

Zelalem and his friends were cleaner, since they could wash themselves at the water tap provided by the church for the use of the poor. They defecated and urinated further down the same church wall behind the bushes that grew along it. The older gangs used riverbanks or indescribably dirty public toilets to wash themselves and considered most public spaces to be open-air latrines. The church wall was propitiously positioned opposite a busy traffic light where Zelalem's group begged from passing cars and outside churches during particular saints' days. I have never seen the other two groups beg or work during the day. They operated at night. From time to time the police harassed homeless adults and children night and day in order to push them out of the street. As long as these surveillances were on, street children and adult beggars were unable to earn any money from begging in the streets. During such lean periods, some of the older boys migrated to rural areas or to other parts of the city in search of temporary employment on building sites or at the Abattoir. They invariably returned to their street pursuits after a few days or weeks because they never earned enough money to cover their shelter, food and leisure requirements.

Zelalem and his friends were able to leave their *duritos* (patched up blankets) behind the trees growing alongside the church wall. These blankets were their most treasured possessions, since they had nothing else to protect them from the cold high altitude nights. Older beggars or unlicensed street vendors operating nearby kept an eye on their belongings. This was important since the other two gangs were obliged to wear or carry everything they owned or leave someone behind to watch over their personal effects. Zelalem and his friends did not need to go far to find entertainment or food. There were several affordable teashops, bars, restaurants, video parlours and a bakery in the vicinity of the church. They were considered credit-worthy in most of these places. The area was alive with shoppers, pedestrians, passengers, churchgoers, and revellers until late into the night.

Another crucial point was the existence of one of Mother Theresa's Hospices for the Dying two miles up the road. As I have explained in Chapter 5, public health centres

and government hospitals require patients to present *Kebele* identity cards or a letter of reference from the *Kebele* before admitting them. In order to acquire an identity card a person has to be domiciled or at least registered in a *Kebele*. Since this excluded most destitute persons, the Hospice was a last resort place for homeless adults and children. All the children OF the street I knew had been patients of the Hospice at one time or another. The sick usually waited for the nuns to open their gates before daybreak and hoped to be included among the lucky few desperately ill children and adults admitted each day. The nuns usually admitted those who looked at death's door.

Zelalem's and his friends shared the church wall with an assortment of jobless young men aged nineteen and over. Such people are known as *Bozene* (unemployed youths) but the group referred to them as the *Gulbetegnotch* (tough bullies/the mighty ones). The *Bozene* looked cleaner and were better dressed than the Borco. They had a better social image and the police seldom harassed them. Those operating near the church wall offloaded trucks and generally did odd jobs for the numerous bars and restaurants found in the vicinity. They also helped the nuns at the Hospice carry the sick and the dead in exchange for food. These were occasional job offers. Most days, they just sat around waiting for something to happen. They subsidised their meagre earnings by extorting `protection' money from Zelalem and other street children, forcing them to gamble and lose money or arbitrarily robbing them of any cash they had on their persons.

- Life histories and how the group was formed

Zelalem and his friends were all under sixteen when I first met them: "the years of middle childhood, that crucial period between complete infant dependency and the troubled years of adolescence" (Ennew 1994:412). The other two gangs were in the fifteen to twenty age groups. The membership size of all three groups changed constantly. Old-timers disappeared after quarrelling with their comrades; new recruits replaced some. Individual boys from the two older age groups frequently migrated to rural areas in search of job opportunities and some joined other groups when they came back to the city. Since Zelalem and his friends' entry into street life and joining the gang was inextricably linked to their pre-street childhood experiences, I shall connect their life history with how the group came into being.

1.   Wolamo's story:

Wolamo was a Wolamo from Wolayta. He was very short and had the face of a wizened old man. He looked as if he had never had a bath or change of clothes. His family was landless. Wolamo's father disappeared just before the overthrow of the Derg's Government in 1990 when he was nine years old. His eighteen year old brother followed suit soon after. After his brother and father's departure, his mother was obliged to work on other people's farms to make ends meet. He claims that his two adult sisters beat him constantly and made him skip school in order to help them gather fuel wood and chop logs that they sold in the local market. Whenever he complained, his mother told him that as the youngest child he was duty bound to obey blindly his older sisters and that they had the right to chastise him. He remembers with some bitterness that his mother did not punish one of his sisters when she threw a stone and blinded his left eye when he was six years old. He often wondered whether he was born out of wedlock and his father had brought him to live with his wife and her daughters and then abandoned the whole family.

Wolamo ran away from home after throwing a stone at the sister who blinded him in one eye because she gave him yet another beating for disobeying her. He was eleven years old. He remembers leaving her lying motionless on the ground, with blood gushing out of her head. He made his way to Addis Ababa by boarding a very full cross-country bus and lying under a bench. Adult passengers saw him but they kept quiet because he told them that his father was dead and his stepmother was abusing him. A homeless boy approached Wolamo as soon as he got off the bus and took him to his friends. Wolamo gave them a false name, but they nicknamed him Wolamo. Although the word is considered derogatory, because of its association with the history of slavery in Ethiopia, he not did mind his friends or anyone else using it to refer to him. He wanted complete anonymity because he did not know whether he had killed his sister and feared being caught by the police and hanged for murder.

The first boy who approached Wolamo as he got off the bus became his mentor, protector and guide. Wolamo followed him to another part of the city when the boy was pushed out of the group for refusing to share his money with the others. The two walked to the airport and joined a new group of boys. Wolamo fell very ill a few weeks after they moved to the new place. His comrades brought him to Mother Theresa's Hospice.

He was released from the clinic before he was strong enough to walk back to where his friends were. He reached the church wall and fell asleep behind the trees. The next morning people coming to pray gave him food and money. Most of the street children operating around the traffic light and the church at that time were Gurage shoeshine boys. The rest begged at the traffic lights or from churchgoers or carried parcels for taxi and bus passengers, but they went home at night. Those who took refuge near the church wall were older homeless male beggars. He was the first homeless boy to sleep rough behind the trees next to the church wall until Tadele joined him.

Wolamo was fourteen years old in May 1995 when I first met him. He had been living near the church wall for about two years. He and I estimated that he must have come to the church wall in April 1993, a few days before Ethiopian Easter. He vividly remembered begging food from rich households and celebrating Easter with old beggars as well as eating meat and butter saturated left over food. Tadele joined him approximately three months later in mid-June 1993, just before the big rainy season.

2. Tadele's story:

Tadele at sixteen was the oldest boy when I first made contact with the group. He came from a well to do family. He was born and brought up in Addis Ababa. Both his parents are Amharas. He was the least liked boy of the group. He was bad tempered and rude to everybody, even to blind and handicapped beggars. He was addicted to cigarettes and *tchat*. He was tall and had a dark complexion. He kept his hair short and clean. He washed his face, hands, feet and clothes regularly. He was the only one of the group who did not look like a typical Borco unless he was wearing his tattered *durito*.

Tadele's father was sixty-eight years old and his mother seventeen when they got married. The father had four married daughters from previous marriages. Tadele was his only son and he doted over him. He died when Tadele was eight years old. The mother re-married within a year and had other children. Tadele hated his stepfather. Tadele made life impossible for everyone by his disruptive behaviour. His mother sent him to live with his paternal grandmother. He started running away from home when he was eleven years old. His mother and grandmother sought him out and forcibly brought him back home several times. His paternal uncles were asked to talk some

sense into him or to physically chastise him. After each beating, Tadele stole money or destroyed property before disappearing again. The family finally gave up and asked a distant relative who had a video rental shop not far from the church to keep an eye on him. She alerted them whenever he was in trouble. Tadele knew about the arrangement but refused to have anything to do with her.

Tadele's mother, grandmother and other members of his family often came to enquire about his well-being. He invariably accepted whatever gifts they brought and hurled insults at them for everyone to hear. He went back to see his mother or grandmother from time to time. I have met him twice after such visits. The first time he boasted that he had destroyed enough property to bankrupt his mother. The second time he had over one hundred *birr* on him. He told us that he had stolen the money from his grandmother. He bought himself second-hand clothes and spent the rest partying with his friends.

Tadele had been detained at various police stations and even jailed several times for street fighting or stealing before I met him. He told me that his grandmother was present when he appeared in court for the third time. She is supposed to have asked the presiding judge to send him to prison or to a mental institution because she was too old and feeble to help control him. He was sentenced to a year in the only remand home for boys in Addis Ababa but was released seven months later. The following is a reconstruction of bits of narratives about how he how he joined the group:

Tadele:
> I landed near the church by accident. I helped carry one of the homeless boys I was living with to Mother Theresa's. I met Wolamo outside the hospice's gate. He was ill but the nuns refused to re-admit him. We started talking. I followed him to the church and nursed him. I was happy to stay with him. The older boys I used to be with beat me if I did not give them money. They sometimes forced me to go to my mother's house and steal things. Wolamo and I were the only children sleeping here until Melit joined us and then we let the others become part of our group.

3.   Melit's story:

Melit was nicknamed `baldy', because of his fondness for shaving his thick curly hair. He was fourteen and had been with the group for just over a year when I first

met him. He looked dirty and unkempt. He frowned all the time. He spoke with a very soft voice avoiding making eye contact and with his head bowed to the ground. This made him look more aggressive and angrier than he was. He said little and stood apart from the group. He even slept a little away from the others.

Melit was born and brought up in Addis Ababa. His father died when he was nine years old. His paternal grandmother was an Oromo and his grandfather a Dorze. He does not remember his mother because she left his father when he was three years old and returned to her home village in Gondar. Melit's father doted on him but brought another women to look after him within days of his mother's departure. The women gave birth to two sons and his father married her. Soon after his father died, Melit's stepmother brought a daughter and son she had from another union to the house.

Melit:

> My life became hell after that. The woman enrolled all her children in the school and gave them the choicest foods. She bought them all, including the two she had from my father, new clothes and all their school equipment when school resumed. She told me that she did not have enough money for all of us. I did not have all the exercise books or pencils I needed. I stole from her children and she beat me. I complained but she called me a selfish child. Her children had never had anything. My father had spoilt me and it was now time for others to have the things I had always taken for granted. My stepsister and I are about the same age. We quarrelled all the time. My stepmother beat me every time the girl complained, even if she reported that I had given her a dirty look. I had no one I could tell what was happening to me. I had no one to protect me against her oppression.

> I suffered even more when school was closed during the rainy season. I used to go out in the morning and stay out all day to get away from them. That is when I started begging for money and food. I was always hungry. They all pretended not to notice. I was too angry and ashamed to ask them to feed me. The whole family, including my half brothers, started calling me a beggar and a vagabond. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I stole twenty birr and ran away. I thought it was a lot of money; I was ten years old at the time. I prayed everyday that the police or my stepmother would not find me. I have since found out that she never even tried to look for me. I met other children the same day. They helped me spend the twenty birr I had and then taught me how to live like them. I was very happy at first. We were four children. We slept near the big Mosque.

Melit and one of the boys decided to move to another location because of the constant harassment they received from a gang of older street boys. They moved to the city centre and joined another group. Melit did not fit in. He walked to another part of

town and joined a group of older street boys. Melit was the only one of the gang who worked during the day. He earned a lot of money by watching cars and carrying out garbage for people living in apartments. The others found out that he was saving up money because he wanted to become a street vendor. They asked him to contribute a certain amount of money each day towards their nightly drinking sessions. Melit refused. That same evening they came back drunk and robbed him of his money and durito and gave him a severe beating.

Melit:

> It was very late at night and I was afraid that they might kill me. I ran and ran and ended up near the church wall. I just lay on the ground and cried myself to sleep. The next morning, Wolamo walked over to where I was. He told me that I could share his *durito* until I acquired my own. He paid for my breakfast and I stayed. Wolamo fell ill soon after this. Tadele and I carried him to Mother Theresa's. He was released two weeks later at the same time as Zelalem. They were both very weak. Zelalem decided to stay with us after we nursed him back to health. Zelalem and I came to the church within weeks of each other.

According to my calculations Melit joined the group on January 7th, 1994, Ethiopian Christmas day. Zelalem ended up near the church wall sometime in February 1994.

4.   Zelalem's story:

Zelalem was also fourteen years old when we first met. He had run away from home three years previously and been with the group for sixteen months. He was tall, skinny and light skinned. He had a permanent infection in one eye. This made him look sickly. He had periods when he went to great lengths to keep himself clean and well groomed. These never lasted more than a few days. Most of the time he looked like a typical Borco.

Like Tadelle, Zelalem came from fairly well to do family. His father was a well-paid civil servant. His family owned the fairly big villa they lived in. It had a telephone, a big garden, and electricity and running water. His mother was an Amhara and his father an Oromo. They met in Harrer where his father was working as a schoolteacher. His mother was visiting her married sister. Soon after they were married,

Zelalem's father was offered a lucrative government job by the *Derg* government and posted to several places around the country. Zelalem and his two older brothers were born outside Addis Ababa. Zelalem's father was posted to Addis Ababa in 1988 where his two younger sisters were born. This last posting had a negative impact on the entire family.

Zelalem:

> We had too much money when my father worked as a high-ranking government official in the rural areas. People used to give him gifts of money and food in order to influence him. My mother could open the safe and take all the money she needed. We live off my father's salary in Addis Ababa. She has to ask him for money all the time. She hates doing that. They fought constantly about money and everything else, they still do.

Apart from the family's financially more restrained circumstances, Zelalem's mother was not able to build up the type of support network she had with other women wherever they were posted in rural areas. She knew no one in Addis Ababa. She told me that they bought their villa with money saved from previous postings, moved in, closed the main gate and her children became her friends and neighbours. Besides being socially isolated and having marital difficulties, she had to cope with her spirit possession. Zelalem explains it better:

Zelalem:

> Because of her *wokabi* (spirit possession), Mother is not able to hire a domestic servant. She had many women friends in the rural areas; they knew what to do. `HE' accepted them. `HE' does not want to see anyone in the family, let alone outsiders when `HE' wants to be with her since we moved to Addis Ababa. When the spirit possesses her, she goes into a trance. 'He' throws her from wall to wall, from bed to floor. `HE' makes her bleed from the nose and mouth. She appeases him by performing a special ritual every Wednesdays. I am the only one she is allowed to admit into her room. I know exactly what to do; I started participating when I was seven years old. I brew coffee. I get some fresh *tchat* and help her calm `HIM' down. This can take the whole day and night or just a few hours. If she gets upset or quarrels with father, `HE' attacks her very, very badly.

According to the entire family, Zelalem assumed the role of a housemaid as well as being his mother's confidant after they settled in Addis Ababa.

Zelalem:

> I was the only one who helped mother with household chores. I have done ever since I could walk properly. I even helped her when she gave birth to my two little sisters. I did not mind at the time. I love her very much. I am her favourite. The others resented her praising me all the time.
>
> I left because my sisters, brothers and my father treated me like an outsider and a slave. My brother Samson was an alcoholic. He and my father used to boss me around and beat me if I did not obey them promptly. My father used to call me a girl and that I would never grow to be a real man. He often said that he was not sure that I was really his son. At the same time, he ordered me to make him tea, serve him his meals or fetch him this and that. He hates me and I do not love him.

Zelalem's father and older brother readily admitted to having physically and verbally chastised him in the past. His father justified this by saying that Zelalem was a complicated child who needed to be constantly praised and coaxed into doing anything. He claimed that his wife had spoilt Zelalem and turned him into a whinging female. Zelalem gave me a multitude of reasons for running away from home. The two recurring themes were his mother going to Saudi Arabia, coupled with his hatred of his father and his brother Samson.

Zelalem:

> My mother acts as a spirit medium from time to time. She cannot help or talk to just anybody. Many go back without an answer to their problems. `HE' tells her whom to assist. Some give her money and others gifts although she never asks for anything. Her sister came to visit from Harrer and introduced her to a Saudi Arabian lady. My mother solved her problem and the Arab woman took her to Saudi Arabia.

Zelalem's older brother fell very ill soon after their mother left for Saudi Arabia. All the housemaids they hired left complaining that it was too much work for them to cope with such a big and unruly family. His two sisters were four and six years old at the time and therefore too young to be of any use. Zelalem was the only one who was willing to nurse his brother Samson and take care of domestic work. Father and brother told me again and again that Zelalem ran away because he missed his mother too much and not because of their constant abuse. Zelalem says he run away from their tyranny.

Zelalem:

I ran away from home when I was twelve years old. Father ordered me to pay his *iqub* (rotating credit scheme) in another part of town. I told him that I was tired from doing the housework alone and that he should ask one of my older brothers. He slapped me and even refused to give me taxi money. I felt very bitter. I just walked aimlessly for hours. I entered a church and cried until dark. A very old beggar approached me. I told him that my mother had died and that my stepbrothers and stepfather were making my life impossible. He offered to raise me. I left him three weeks later because I resented doing for him what I did for my family and handing over the money I earned from begging. I joined a group of street children I used to meet while I was begging with the old man. I felt happy and free with them. They taught me everything I know about hustling and begging. I fell ill and the children carried me to Mother Theresa's Hospice. Wolamo and I were released at the same time before we were well enough to take care of ourselves. Melit and Tadele nursed us. Wolamo is the only other human being apart from my mother that I love and trust. I decided to stay. Godje is a relative new comer. He joined us recently.

5.   Godje's story:

Godje was born in Godjam. He joined the group in January 1995 and had been with the group for five months when I first met him. He was very short for his age. His clothes were always dirty and tattered. He kept his hair short and washed his face frequently. He had an impish look when he smiled. He looked out of place among the others because of his pretty face, small size and obsequious demeanour. Godje ran away from home in 1993 because of the constant beatings he received from his father.

Godje:

We had four cows, one bull and several goats and sheep. I was the oldest of the three boys and two girls. I was therefore made to care for the animals. I took them to a shepherd before going to school and fetched them late afternoon. This was very difficult for me. I had to run up and down to keep them together. All along the way, the goats strayed into people's fields. Whenever the farmers complained to my father; he beat me with a stick or pinched my thighs and arms. He also beat my mother and all of us whenever he was drunk.

I ran away from home because I lost two cows on a Christmas day. I took the herd to the field and joined other boys in a game of Christmas hockey *(yegena tchewata)*. I forgot all about the animals until late afternoon. I had lost one cow before. She was new and headed for her original home. It took three days to get her back. My father beat me so hard that I could not walk for a long time. These two had been with us a long time. I had no way of knowing which way they had gone. My friends and I looked for them until it got dark. I decided to run away there and then. I made my way to the bus station and threw myself at the feet of the drivers and begged them to take me to Addis Ababa. I told them

that my father had died and that my stepmother was oppressing me. I was crying so hard that they felt sorry for me.

Godje met two boys soon after he got off the bus and joined their gang. After a few weeks, the two boys fell out with the others and decided to move on. Godje followed them. They joined a large group of older boys in another part of the city. His friends stole two *duritos* and disappeared. Even though he had nothing to do with it, the others beat him up. It was late at night. Godje walked up the road and fell asleep outside the church gate.

Godje:
> The next morning Tadele spotted me. They all saw that I was hurt and that I had been crying. They told me that I could stay with them if I wanted to. At first I slept with Tadele because I did not have my own *durito*. He soon got fed up with me, so I borrowed money from the others and bought my own. I am now twelve years old. I came to Addis Ababa two years ago.

Although I have been able to reconstruct how Zelelem's group came into being, there is no pattern to how such groups of street children are formed. As indicated above, Wolamo came to the church wall in April 1993, Tadele sometime in mid-June 1993, Melit in January 1994, Zelelem at the beginning of February 1994 and Godje in January 1994. The causes that spurred each boy to enter street life or join the group was as diverse as their family and ethnic background. All of them had previous experiences of surviving in the street and gang life before joining the group. Tadele and Zelalem had some contact with their families since they lived in Addis Ababa. They both considered the emotional relationship they had with their parents unsatisfactory. They also had complete control over the amount of contact or type of relationship they had with their parents, siblings or close relatives. Although his stepfamily and some close relatives lived in Addis Ababa, Melit lived in the abject emotional and material abandonment that followed the death of his father. He had run away from the constant abuse of his stepmother and stepsister. Wolamo and Godje were runaways from rural areas. Both knew where to find their families but had decided never to see them again.

Like most of the homeless boys I have talked to, Zelalem and his friends had all been abused pretty badly by their respective families. This abuse is an extension of the nefarious cultural practice of verbally and physically disciplining children. My data show that it is not only parents who abuse their parental authority. It is not uncommon for

children to be mistreated by stepmothers, uncles, especially half siblings or stepsisters and brothers as well. I have recorded seventeen cases of runaway boys and girls under the age of thirteen. They had all tried to escape the tyranny of one or more members of their extended families. They all joined a gang for a short period of time before being either reunited with their families or joining other groups of children.

- ## How the Group Functioned

Although group life did at times provide some of the functions ascribed to it by other researchers elsewhere in the world, I found that the three gangs of homeless boys I studied had set up a highly unstable society. The instability stemmed from the overriding concern held by each child with his own personal freedom of action and his need for immediate organisation. By immediate organisation, I mean that the children wanted to be part of a group and its, albeit imperfect, organisational structure, while being apart from it. They all liked the idea of being able to move in and out of the group at will and they frequently did so. They treasured their freedom to choose how to spend their money and their ability to socialise with any member of the group or with outsiders. Their need to act autonomously and adhere to group life were two primary values that modified the ethic of reciprocity.

The children themselves used Amharic words in current usage to describe their activities. They talked of group life in terms of *abro menor* (living together). They referred to working, begging and making a living as *meshekel*, which literally translated means hustling. They described affective bonds that held them together as *guadenet* or friendship bonds and their economic transactions as *metebaber*, which loosely translated means co-operating. Health matters or nursing each other was *mastamem* and bereavement was *lekso*. Minor crimes and misdemeanour were *matchberber* (deceiving) and *mesrek* (stealing). Most forms of violence or fighting among each other were explained away as quarrelling or *metalat*. In real life, these activities did not involve networking on the part of the individual child. It meant entering into a complex and an imperfect system of reciprocity that did not always provide the individual child with the supportive companionship system he sought. The above listed recurring themes in their lives and narratives may not have covered the totality of their experiences in the street, but they were the issues I found readily identifiable as crucial

to their way of life. I shall therefore use them as indicators to illustrate the link between material flow and social distance among the groups of homeless boys I knew.

i. Living together (abro menor):

Researchers have shown the importance of membership to the group for the individual street child's survival strategies (Aptekar 1988; Swart 1988; Sharf et al. 1986; Lucchini 1988;Ennew 1994). Furthermore, even where the group is said to have a loose organisational structure and frequent changes in membership, group life is said to allow each child to have a role to play in-group activities. All the children OF the street I knew expressed a pronounced desire for autonomy coupled with a need to feel part of the gang. Their organisational structure was therefore heavily influenced by their intense need to act autonomously while belonging to the group. This need for freedom and organisation was exceptionally reflected in the ill-defined rules governing entry/exit into the group. It was also made evident by the total lack of leadership or other explicit roles for the individual child to play in- group activities. I shall therefore attempt to explain group life in terms of entry/exit into the group and the lack of leadership or explicit roles for members of the group.

a. Entry/Exit:

I never saw or heard of any member of the group actively recruiting newcomers. They all admitted that as soon as their numbers increased the atmosphere around them deteriorated. More children meant more visibility, more fighting among group members and more trouble with the police and the *gulbetegnotch* (tough bullies). All those who joined Zelalem's group did so voluntarily. Entry into the group was problematic only when one of the established members took a dislike to a newcomer. Reintegration into the group was unconditional as long as there were no scores to be settled or debts to be paid. The price of assimilation was the extent of exploitation a child was willing to suffer initially at the hands of one or two members of the gang. Although there were no fast and set rules for recruiting a newcomer, the one who talks to a newcomer first usually felt a sense of 'ownership' long after the event. There was an unwritten agreement between Zelalem and his friends that when a newcomer joined them, the one who met him first had the right to exploit him.

All the homeless children I knew have told me that they felt free and happy when they first joined a gang. A new kid did not have time to get scared. His finder became his special friend, advisor, patron and exploiter. If the child had any money or valuables that could be sold, his finder helped him spend the money. The new boy followed his mentor everywhere he went, ran errands, played and begged with him... that is, until he tired of his subservient role and refused to team up with his finder. More often than not one of the *gulbetegnotch* would then assert his might, took over the role of mentoring and pressurised the child to either gamble, supply him with cash or cigarettes. This exploitative relationship therefore lasted only as long as the newcomer accepted the situation. Most of the street children I saw join any of the three gangs found ways of avoiding giving or sharing all their earnings within two or three weeks of joining a group. Many voted with their feet as soon as the situation became unbearable. Some disappeared and reappeared several times before giving up the idea of becoming part of the gang.

Because of my long term and close association with Zelalem's group I was able to observe the above-mentioned rules enacted time and again. Twenty-three children joined Zelelem's group while I was carrying out my research. A few had already lived with other gang of boys; others were either running away from their families or other street children. Only two remained with the group for more than a year, the rest were pushed out or left after a few days or weeks. Bedwetting, excessive farting, talking too much, bragging, lying, being a know-all or whinging were some of the grounds for evicting a newcomer. However, I have heard the original five occasionally accuse each other of having one or more such undesirable habits. Since there were no fast and fixed rules about staying with the group, those who left or were rejected were children who did not manage to fit in somehow.

Among Zelalem's group Godje was the smallest and most vulnerable child. The *Gulbetegnotch* forced him to run errands for them, gamble or hand over money on demand. He was often beaten or harassed by Tadele his finder. Godje frequently left the group and slept across the street or behind the church with adult homeless beggars for a few days. This is how he explained his need to re-integrate himself in the group:

kenesu gar eyenork; arfew betewugn new emefelegew (what I really want is to live with them and have them leave me alone at the same time).

Simply stated, Godje wanted to `be part of the group' by at the same time `being apart from the group'. The other reasons he gave for staying with the group were also similar to the countless excuses I was given by other such children. He felt lonely and depressed when he was alone. Even tough older street boys and the Gulbetegnotch abused him constantly; they also abused other children. Their abusive behaviour did not hurt him as much as his own father's cruelty towards him and his mother had. Besides he knew that he could leave the group any time he chose to.

b.   Leadership and other roles:

Zelalem's group, much as the other two gangs of predominantly homeless boys I befriended, lived together in a loose knit social group. They all assured me that they did not have a leader. If anyone declared himself their chief, the others would plot his violent downfall. No, they did not have a name for their gang. No, they did not function like a football team or a household. No, they were not controlled marginally or otherwise by any one in the group. They did not necessarily have their meals together or go to watch video as group. They begged at the traffic light alone, in twos or threes. The only times they were all together was at night, early morning or during the hottest times of the afternoons when they lounged behind the trees or gambled and smoked cigarettes. However, there were times when one or two members of the group were able to force or pressurise the others to contribute to leisure activities or into doing things they did not want to do. This included roaming around town at night, gambling with other gang of boys in another part of the city, seeing the same video film more than once and so on.

Even though they did not adhere to any script regarding how they lived together, there were certain things that they all agreed upon. Stealing money, *duritos,* food or patrons from other members of the gangs was not accepted. Informing the police, family members or any outsiders about the whereabouts of a missing comrade or his social and economic activities was considered an act of betrayal. Refusing to help an injured or sick comrade, not lending money for food and running away when they were attacked by complete strangers or other gangs was not tolerated. Infringement of the above

proscriptions resulted in ostracism, exclusion or more often than not a severe beating. From time to time the above mentioned principles were ignored, bent or changed at the whim of a bigger boy or a couple of boys within the group. These occasional `betrayals' as they called them, more than the beatings, hurt the victims.

The above notwithstanding, all three gangs had a special child who was the object of the entire group's affection. Wolamo was the beloved of his group. A sickly boy nicknamed Papas (the pope) and one called Tyson were the most liked children in the other two groups. Leadership qualities did not come into this. Wolamo was liked for being self-effacing and kind. Papas was loved for being gentle, pious and patient. He did not drink, smoke or gamble and attended church regularly. His comrades empathised with Tyson because he was meek and harmless. He had innumerable scars all over his skinny body as a result of years of physical abuse by his stepmother. In other words, all three were admired for upholding the dominant values in the surrounding society. None of them were treated differently or given prominent positions within the group. No one physically abused Papas, perhaps because of his illness. Tyson was the skivvy of his gang and was regularly slapped and kicked by older boys and the *Gulbetegnotch* for not obeying orders with alacrity. I have seen Tadele kick and punch Wolamo for not wanting to gamble with him, for not waking him up on time to join the others for breakfast and other trivial reasons. Zelalem once beat Wolamo severely for not warning him that the *Gulbetegnotch* were waiting to pounce on him and steal his money.

ii.   Work (meshekel):

Many factors separated gangs of homeless boys from the adult organised social world but not from adults. They survived by begging from adults and by interacting with waiters, shopkeepers, the police, adult beggars, and numerous jobless youths and unemployed adults on a daily basis. However, their life-style, their homeless status and their identity as Borcos militated against any of them gaining a foothold into the already desperate job market as well as in the public health and formal education sectors. As far as work was concerned, they either did not have a *Kebele* Identity Card or the pay was so low that they could not have fed themselves as well as they did from street life, let alone enable them to afford renting a house or pay for leisure activities. As described in Chapter

5, street children living with their families had some kind of permanence, or at least continuity, in their lives. Their mothers were located within various social network systems, which enabled the children to access a modicum of education and health care. They, or their mothers, were able to derive some material or social support from neighbours and connections with community based voluntary associations. Zelalem and his like were not even able to rely on each other to secure their daily bread in time of hardship. Their need to live 'as part' of and 'apart' from of the group superseded their need to work as a team. Aside from times of illness or bereavement, the same imperfect reciprocity that existed in their work relationship permeated every other aspect of their lives.

As I have detailed in Chapter 4, 'Defining the Street Child', there was some kind of division of labour between street children living with their families, street working children and the jobless youths who preyed on them. Although there seemed to be a clear division of labour, most vending, portaging, working and begging activities were taken up by anyone when the opportunity arose. Since there were few opportunities for either group to earn a decent living, this often caused skirmishes among the street children, street working children and the jobless youth and male adults. The worst fracas occurred when cars broke down and several of them wanted to help push start it or when they all offered themselves to help carry parcels. The Borcos operated outside this fray.

I have seldom seen the older gangs beg or work during daylight. Whenever I saw them late or early morning, they were either asleep or looked as if they had just woken up with a severe hangover. They operated at night or very early in the morning. They roamed around supermarket, traffic lights, bars, nightclubs and restaurants and begged from drivers, owners and clients alike. Some mornings, they woke up to find money left there by pedestrians on their way to church or work. On particular Saint's days they slept outside a church and mingled with the lepers, the handicapped and other beggars in order to receive alms in the form of food, clothing and money from worshipers.

Their physical appearances and age precluded older homeless boys from inciting the same kind of sympathy younger street children, women with babies and the handicapped elicited from drivers. Pedestrians, especially ladies, were intimidated by the

way they looked. Most shop owners did not want them in their car parks or outside their shop. They hired guards to keep them away from their customers. This is how one of the older boys explained their predicament:

> We cannot keep ourselves clean. We sleep on pavements, shop verandas, ditches, anywhere convenient. We have no homes. The *Bozene* (jobless youths) may be young and jobless but they have families and homes to go to at night if they want to. We are *duriyes* (vagabonds) and people know it. We cannot fool them. Many of the *Bozene* you see hanging around here were born and raised in this neighbourhood. They have home addresses and identity cards from their *Kebele*. If we try to compete with them, they will call the police and have us evicted from here for good.

Zelalem's group experienced many of the problems faced by the older gangs. However, their ideal geographical position enabled them to survive more or less by begging from drivers at the traffic lights opposite the church. The group faced hardship whenever the traffic lights were not working. These incidences could last a few hours or days. The first thing they did when they ran out of money was to eat on credit from the few teahouses and very cheap restaurants where they were considered creditworthy. The problem was that when one of them defaulted, the owners held them collectively responsible. This caused rifts and recriminations within the group since it went against their desire to act autonomously. Debt ridden children facing their comrades' resentment either disappeared altogether or left the group until they could pay back their debts.

Every now and again the police intensified their vigilance and violence in order to rid the streets of homeless adults and children and all sorts of handicapped beggars. These exercises often lasted several days or weeks and were the only times when Zelalelm and his friends were unable to feed themselves. The group had a range of options during such times. Their first coping strategy was to risk police violence or detention by continuing to beg at the traffic lights. Their second coping strategy was to compete with other destitute people for begging opportunities outside the church and from rich households in the vicinity of the traffic lights. During such lean times they also bought begged left over food from adult beggars on credit or worst still rummaged in municipal garbage bins.

Their last resort coping strategy was to either migrate to other parts of the city or beg away from the streets and as far away from the police as possible. It meant begging

from door to door. Watchmen or maidservants either gave them left over food or told him to go away. They had to work for several hours in order to obtain enough leftover food to make it worth their while. Zelalem and Wolamo were very good at this; they often went begging together. Melit and Godje preferred to beg on their own. Tadele was the only one who refused to beg from house to house. His comrades said that it was because he came from a rich family and this made him too proud to beg. Tadele said that he was not as lucky as the other at eliciting pity from people because he was too tall and older.

Although they all earned their living by begging from drivers at the traffic lights, Zelalem and Godje earned extra money from their patrons. These were Ethiopians and foreigners who gave them more than a few coins in preference to other children. Street children referred to such people as their customers *(dembegnotch)*. This type of patronage never gravitated to another level since these were brief and chance encounters at the traffic light. Melit and Wolamo occasionally hit the jackpot. Tadele was the only one who did not have a special customer. The other explained that he was too arrogant and had not learnt to act humble in front of adults.

Zelalem's group did not attempt to combine their begging activities with working as street vendors, porters or watching cars. They explained that they earned more money from begging at the traffic lights in a few hours than did most street children did in a day. Besides the *Gulbetegnotch* would rob them at night of anything they were selling. Other street children and sales persons from around the church told me that the boys loved gambling and were addicted to hashish and cigarettes. They regularly roamed around all night and got drunk. They were therefore too tired or had hangovers to be able to function normally during the day.

iii. Friendship (guadenet) / Co-operating (metebaber):

Zelalem's and his friends displayed the same need for individual freedom and being part of group life in their emotional and financial dealings with each other as they did in every thing else. Friendship bonds (*guadenet*), especially during leisure activities, meant establishing temporary emotional bonds with one or several comrades. Such affective relationships brought them closer to achieving Sahlin's (1972) 'generalised reciprocity', where free gifts or resources as well as emotional support are shared without strict

measurement or obligation to repay. Conversely, economic exchanges, which they euphemistically called co-operating (*metebaber*), involved a complex system of reciprocity with the individual child entering into intricate debit/credit relationships with one or more members of the group. These in-group economic exchanges reflected some form of 'balanced reciprocity'. Sahlin's (1972) describes balanced reciprocity as more of an economic than personal or moral type of material exchange between structural equals. However, like most things in their life as a group, the rules and regulations governing their affective relations and material transactions were at times discarded, evaded or arbitrarily changed. Unrequited love and unrequited reciprocity are words that best express these emotional and economic exchanges. I shall therefore use unrequited love to describe their affective relationships and unrequited reciprocity to describe their economic exchanges.

1.   Unrequited love:

Swart (1988) found that the Malunde shared the values and abided by the norms sanctioned by mainstream society and that group life provided them with emotional support and affective relationships. The moral standards by which Zelalem and other homeless children judged each other's behaviour and described their emotional bonds were similar to those used by mainstream society. This was because like the home-based street children I described in Chapter 5, their natal families had imbued them with local cultural and universal human values before they entered the street world aged ten and older. Tyler et al. (1992) wrote that the interaction between children living in a group is characterised by a sense of responsibility towards one another and lasting emotional bonds. I found that the Borcos extreme need for autonomy precluded the formation of enduring affective emotional attachment between themselves and therefore an enduring sense of responsibility for one another.

Ennew recommends that primary prevention programs must recognise and incorporate such children's "capacity to express and accept caring relationships between themselves and others" (Ennew 1994:418). All the homeless boys I knew spent most of their time forming temporary or inconsequent alliances with one another. In addition to appreciating the beloved of the group like Wolamo, Tyson and Papas, each child strove to establish a long or short-term attachment to one or two members of the gang.

However temporary the friendship bonds that united an individual child to another from among his group was vital to the quality of his emotional well being and his relationship to the group as a whole. Emotional attachment to another member of the group meant having someone special with whom to share leisure activities or unburden one's grief. It also meant that there might be someone who will stand up for you during a quarrel with another member of the gang. Failing that, someone who will console or nurse you after a beating or verbal abuse by other comrades.

The most distressing thing I have heard them recount is the betrayal by that special friend on whom they had invested all their emotions and trust. Zelalem was forever trying to be Melit's or Wolamo's special friend. He also desperately sought to endear himself to one and all with kindness and generosity. He was unfortunate in his quest since everyone he got close to eventually rejected him. He was emotionally very needy, so were all the others. His problem was that that he could not hide this vulnerable trait.

Wolamo:
> He wants to force us to love him. He is very kind and helpful and we all love him but he spoils it by trying very hard to please one or the other. He wants to be praised for every little thing he does. He is not ashamed to cry openly like a woman and for hours if he is upset with one of us. He is always threatening to leave town, to leave us and so on whenever he feels rejected. He never goes very far. We sometimes beg him to stay just to shut him up.

Ironically, Zelalem's need to be loved, appreciated and praised all the time were the very same accusations levelled against him by his father and siblings.

Melit:
> Zelalem can be elated, happy and your best friend one day and depressed or angry the next. If Wolamo or I refuse his invitation to party with him when he has a lot of money, he gets very upset or tearful and emotionally pressurises one of us to go with him. He chooses where we go, how long we stay in one place and what we must do and eat. The problem starts when he runs out of money because he expects whoever he had chosen to spend his money with to be grateful and to hang around with him forever. I just pick a quarrel with him before he finishes his money and let him cry and sulk for a while.

Tadele's erratic behaviour and lack of socially desirable traits such as compassion, sense of shame or fairness more than his bad temper and violence against smaller children condemned him in the eyes of his comrades. The traits Tadele was said to lack are the

very same personal characteristics that are considered culturally becoming in a decent person in the wider Ethiopian culture.

Godje:
> No one loves Tadele, not even Wolamo the saint. He tries very hard to be Melit's special friend but Melit avoids him all the time, even when he know that Tadele has money for partying.   Tadele has no sense of shame. He does not care what people think of him *(yilunta yelewoom)*. He does not fear God's retribution. He even begs from the beggar girl with the new-born baby. He thinks he owns me because I am the only child he has ever `found'.   As soon as I sense that our quarrels are irritating the others I give in for peace sake.

Wolamo
> Tadele is capable of starting a quarrel about anything. He accuses someone of having lied to him or anything. He beats up and threatens the smaller boys unless they buy him cigarettes, lend him money that he never pays back and so on. Even the *Gulbetegnotch* get fed up eventually and let him have his way. He abuses me because I do not like fighting and Godje because he is the smallest.

Wolamo basked in the knowledge that they all liked him. He was praised for displaying culturally recognised attractive qualities such as generosity, compassion, being self-effacing and helpful. They all liked spending time in his company and often chose to spend their money with him when they felt like partying unless they were trying to endear themselves to a particular comrade. This did not stop Tadele or Zelalem from insulting or beating him or the *Gulbetegnotch* from abusing him. Wolamo felt deeply hurt by this abuse. He liked being with Melit most. Melit returned his affection. They hugged each other and danced together. They deloused each other's heads and mock wrestled. These were occasional displays of affection. Neither Wolamo nor Melit stood up for one another against the others or the *Gulbetegnotch* nor did they team up for leisure activities.

Melit was said to be self-assured and dependable. He minded his own business. He did not try to endear himself to anyone else but Wolamo. He was the only one who occasionally stood up to Tadele and the *Gulbetegnotch*. He was feared, admired and respected by the others for possessing such manly qualities. Although he never showed any weakness in front of his comrades, he often cried when he was alone with me. He sobbed the whole time he told me about his tragic relationships with his stepfamily two years after I met him.

The whole group had ambivalent feelings towards Godje. On the positive side, Godje minded his own business; he was polite, friendly and humble. On the negative side he was considered too much of a loner, too secretive, and (wrongfully) unfeeling. They remarked that he remained an insider/outsider by design as well as by default. Zelelem told me that although Melit minded his own business, they all felt that he was part of the gang. Godje did not project Melit's sense of belonging to the group to the others. This was why no one in the group tried to be his special friend or to protect him from Tadele or the Gulbetegnotch. Godje told me that he really liked being with Wolamo, but he could not compete with the others for his affection. If Zelalem were not such an emotionally erratic fellow, he might have liked him more. He hated Tadele and was wary of Melit. He never cried in front of his comrades but he was always in tears whenever he told me how one or another of his comrades had been cruel to him.

2.   Unrequited reciprocity:

Swart (1990) states that the Malunde of Cape Town practised a complex system of reciprocity that involved an intense network of debit/credit relationship. They also kept a mental record of what is owed from and lent to others. The result was that those who did not reciprocate ended up by being excluded from the network. A somewhat similar form of purely economic exchange existed in the organisational set up of all the three groups I studied. They assisted one another and exchanged foods and other goods with the strict expectation of return fitting and so fit in with Sahlin's (1972) 'balanced reciprocity'. They generally abided by this principle but occasionally made crucial exemptions when it suited them thus distorting Sahlin's classic model. Conversely, Sharf et al.'s findings showed that the Strollers of Cape Town "continually reinforced each other in their survival activities, in their joys and fears, in the majority of cases, they shared their earnings equally among themselves" (Sharf et al. 1986:257). In other words, the Strollers practised Sahlin's 'generalised reciprocity'. In real life, the manner in which all three gangs in Addis Ababa regulated their material transactions was flawed and unstable because of the boys' individual need to act autonomously while belonging to the group.

The type of reciprocity that existed among all three groups encapsulated a loose obligation of a moral nature sometimes with and sometimes without expectation of restitution and/or a strict economic interchange of money and other goods. The borderline

between obligations of a moral and/or of an economic nature was blurred since it shifted according to circumstances and the whim of the individual child. This lack of strict measurement of economic or moral obligation created an unstable set of circumstances they all had to deal with. They considered lending or borrowing from each other to be an economic transaction. They often abided by this principle but made exceptions when it suited them. The key to their behaviour can best be perceived in the way they talked of food in either purely economic or purely cultural terms. Paying for someone's lunch or tea was considered a loan and the transaction narrated in economic terms. The partaking and sharing begged food as well as partying were considered to be some kind of a moral obligation and explained in cultural terms.

- **Monetary exchanges:**

Each child kept the money he earned and disposed of it as he saw fit unless he was robbed by the *Gulbetegnotch* or pressurised to spend it by one of the bigger boys. Generally speaking the whole group lent each other money with the expectation of being paid back in cash and in full. However, it was not uncommon for one of them to deviate from a supposedly non altruistic exchange by making an exception when dealing with a special friend, the groups' 'beloved' or someone in particular he wanted to win over. Conversely, the dispenser of an altruistic obligation of a moral nature might change his mind and demand immediate restitution for past good deeds.

Melit:
> Sharing or pooling our money together would create fights with those who contribute the most complaining or wanting to have a vote about how things are distributed. It is easy to keep account when we borrow money from each other, or pay lunch or tea or cake. Sometime we pretend to forget the loan when we want to be nice to someone. However, if a boy I have lent money to upsets me, I demand that he reimburse me the money on the spot even if I know that he does not have it.

Wolamo:
> The only time we share our money willingly is when we invite a special friend or friends or even the entire group to have a good time with us. We do not care how much we spend when the mood takes us. We can even sell our duritos or borrow from everybody to have a better party.

- Food exchange:

The rules governing obligation to reciprocate bought or begged food were different. If a boy paid for another's meal or shared bread or food he has paid cash for, he expected the recipient to reimburse him the exact price of the meal or food item. On the other hand, the exchange of begged food was more of a moral than of an economic nature. They all agreed that begged food ought to be shared with hungry comrades. They treated the sharing of begged food and food gifts the same way as most Ethiopians. It is common behaviour in Ethiopia to invite whoever drops in while food is being eaten or served even if there is not enough to go around. They spoke of such food obligations in cultural terms, emphasising what is commonly accepted behaviour in society at large.

Zelalem:
> If I am ill, the others will feed me without expecting me to pay them back when I am better. If I sit down to eat begged food and one of my friends comes, I have to ask him to join me. It would be (culturally) unseemly if I ate alone while my friends are hungry. Even Tadele, the hyena, would agree to that. We behave the way we would behave at home when we are eating begged food. This rule does not apply when we are in a teahouse or restaurant. Where money is involved, we keep a street account and consider it as a loan and not an invitation.

They all affirmed that they never fought over begged food obligations. First of all it would be (culturally speaking) a shame *(newur new)* to ask for food back. Secondly, how can any one measure how much food a friend had eaten? However, even the rules governing begged food were not as straightforward as they seemed. During one of the period when they were unable to earn enough money from the traffic lights due to police harassment, Zelalem was able to secure several plastic bags full of begged left over food. He gave every one enough to eat and sold the rest to adult beggars. Tadele insisted that he share the money as well. Zelalem refused and they exchanged blows. The others did not come to Zelelem's defence and this, more than the blows upset him very much.

iv.　`Imediatismo'

Being depressed or elated caused more than one of them to behave erratically and dispense kindness and generosity. Their need to gratify their whims immediately, or `imediatismo' as Lucchini (1988) calls it, which personified their attitude towards leisure activities, further demonstrate what I call unrequited reciprocity. Ennew explains the apparent lack of long term planning and their inability to defer gratification or `imediatismo' among such children as `swift adaptive strategies'. This is because "they

have a sense of reality and recognise that such plans are not congruent with their present resources" (Ennew 1994:417). Lucchini (1988) and Swart (1990) say that `imediatismo' among homeless children is due to the fact that they cannot protect their money from thieves or are at risk of danger if they have money on themselves. The above statements hold true for all three groups. Zelalem and Godje spoke for all his friends when he summed up additional reasons that stopped them from having long or short-term plans:

Zelalem:
> The real problem is that we do not earn enough money to cover all our expenses every day of the week. There are days when some of us make twenty or forty cents only. We are then obliged to borrow money from our friends or let them pay for our meals. There are other days when we have a lot of money. We pay back our debts; we may buy a better *durito*, clothes or other necessities. If we feel sad or lonely we may decide to spend it on food and drinks entertaining our friends.

Godje:
> I have never tried to enter an *iqub* (rotating credit scheme) because I never know how much I will be able to earn in a week. If I fall ill, I may not be able to earn enough money. If I am obliged to contribute to some activities or if the *Gulbetegnotch* rob me, I will be obliged to either borrow from others or default. There is no point in having long-term plans when you live like us. In any case, if I had a substantial amount of money, the others would encourage me to spend it on food and drinks. If I refuse, they might beat me or make me feel guilty.

v.   Leisure (meznanat)

Most street children including the *Gulbetegnotch* took every opportunity to play on pinball machines, watch videos, play football or hand ball with other children. Apart from gambling, the members of the two older gangs I worked with did not join in any kinds of fun and games in the street. Their principal leisure activity was gambling or chewing *tchat* and drinking alcoholic beverages very late at night in the numerous shebeens found in many back streets of Addis Ababa. The only time I have seen them act like children is when they mock wrestle each other while walking side by side.

Zelalem's group idea of a good time was throwing a big party and getting drunk or drugged smoking hashish or chewing *tchat*. They also liked watching videos, playing on pinball machines and gambling. They spent hours chewing *tchat*, chatting and lounging about under the trees by the church wall. They did not go to football matches, play football or other games like the other street children. I once offered to buy them a

football, they told me not to bother because they would sell it before I had reached the end of the street. Ultimately, unrequited love, unrequited reciprocity as well as `immediatisimo' were the result of the unstable society they had created.

vi.   Bereavement (lekso)/Healthcare (mastamem=nursing)

Ill health and bereavement were two afflictions when membership to the group mattered. Illness more than any other adversity spurred members of the group to act as one or replace the family of the sufferer so-to-speak. Sahlin's (1972) `generalised reciprocity' refers to the interaction between close kinsmen and within an intimate social group. It involves the exchange of free gifts or the sharing of resources without any strict expectation of return other than the existence of a diffuse obligation of moral rather than economic nature. If close kinsmen and intimate social groups are defined as people who provide or are thought to provide support in time of need, `generalised reciprocity' comes closest to the type of exchange that existed in time of illness and bereavement between members of all the three groups I worked with.

- ● **Bereavement:**

Weddings and funerals are significant events in the wider Ethiopian culture. While wedding parties are by invitation only, funerals are a must for relatives, friends and acquaintances. Since Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and Islam require that the dead be buried within twenty-four hours, it is not uncommon for factories or whole offices to come to a sudden standstill while everyone attends a funeral. In Chapter 5, I have elaborated on the importance attached to belonging to a burial association (*idir*) by rich and poor alike. I have shown how people living in difficult circumstances strove to keep up their membership of such organisations. The truly destitute are those who had to operate outside the social network system provided by voluntary associations such as *iqub* (rotating credit schemes), idir (burial associations) and *mehaber* (religious associations). The homeless children and adults living near and around the church where Zelalem's group operated went to great lengths to observe funeral rites even towards people they barely knew. It was not uncommon for beggars, street children and unlicensed street vendors to contribute towards funeral expenses and the obligatory fees for priests to officiate at the funeral of homeless destitute children and adults. Zelalem and all the homeless boys I knew contributed small amounts of money and paid their respect to the

dead and bereaved.

As mentioned above Tadele was very unpopular. His comrades often commented the he was selfish, cruel and very quarrelsome. Tadele's grandmother died in April 1997. He refused to go home for the funeral. He cried for a whole week and shouting to all who could hear him that he was finally truly alone. His comrades took it in turns to be with him and supplied him with food, alcoholic beverages, *tchat*, and cigarettes. Other street children, even older beggars brought gifts and came to condole with him, thus re-creating among themselves and in the street, the dominant values held in time of bereavement by the rest of society.

- Ill health:

Ill health, like bereavement, is a social event in Ethiopia. People go to great lengths to visit a sick relative or friend. Although gang members rely primarily on each other in times of illness, it is not uncommon for other street children or adult beggars to offer help or even contribute to medical expenses. None of the homeless boys I knew looked malnourished since they all managed to eat twice or more times a day. Since they did not have regular body washing habits and lived in indescribably unhygienic conditions, they were prone to all sorts of infections. There was never a time throughout the years I have known them, when one or the other was not suffering from something. The major ailments I have recorded in my diaries are: mouth and leg ulcers, abdominal or chest pains, coughs, eyes, ear, mouth, skin or throat infections, tooth ache, headache, nausea, diarrhoea and vomiting. The private clinic where I took some of them diagnosed bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma, diarrhoea, amoebic dysentery, abdominal pains caused by anxiety and various forms of intestinal parasites. Five under fifteen-year-old boys had sexually transmitted diseases. They have all told me that many street boys start sexual relations with women from age twelve onwards.

Economic constraints and their status as homeless children made it difficult for the Borcos to gain access to health care facilities. They had a limited number of options when they fell ill. Since they did not have a home address and therefore *Kebele* identity cards, it was practically impossible for them to be admitted to a Government run hospital unless they were severely injured. They therefore usually waited until they got worse

before taking any action. The first option was to tell a pharmacist what ailed them and take whatever he suggested. Those who had money readily chipped in to buy the prohibitively expensive drugs. They also resorted to all sorts of traditional herbal medicine and/or took holy water (*tebel*) from the church. They took it in turns to nurse a sick comrade. The patient's special friend usually took it upon himself to be there as often as possible. No expense was spared to buy the types of foods or drinks they thought would help the patient recover. The last resort option was Mother Theresa's Hospice for the dying. Gang members helped each other drag or carry a sick comrade to the hospice in the hope that he would be 'chosen' as they put it.

vii. Violence (metalat-fighting):

Zelalem and his friends often suffered from injuries due to violent attacks by the *Gulbetegnotch*, the police, other gang members and each other. Swart (1988) gives vivid descriptions of the kind of unconditional and altruistic support provided by group members towards injured comrades among the Malunde. Such 'generalised reciprocity' also prevailed among the Borcos of Addis Ababa during injuries sustained at the hand of the police or outsiders. However, this support did not always apply to injuries from violence within the inner circle or from the Gulbetegnotch. Each case was judged on its own merit. If the sufferer was said to have triggered the wrath of his friends or the Gulbetegnotch, he was left of fend for himself or count on being nursed or consoled by his special friend. If two members of the group started a punch up, the others would let them fight it out or as they put it: let them exhaust their anger. Thus violence against and between themselves generated varied forms of reciprocal support.

The violence that existed between Zelalem's group was less brutal than that described by Hecht (1995) as prevailing among Brazilian street children. Conflict and violence were nevertheless part of everyday occurrences. They fought for trivial reasons.

Zelalem:
> It is not easy to remember what triggers a fight among us. We would all be lying down and if someone has his leg in the way, Tadele's instinct is to kick it. I am prone to shout, "Get your filthy leg out of the way". Someone would say something and another one would tell him to shut up. Anything or anyone can make us angry when we are sad or hungry. Tadele hits anyone near him when he is angry or has a craving for *tchat*, a cigarette or something to drink. Wolamo is the only one who never gets on anyone's nerves. Tadele and Melit, even I, still

manage to find reasons to beat him up from time to time. We just go on living together as before after a quarrel. If someone sulks or tries to make any one of us take sides, the others gang up on him or make fun of him. They have made me cry so many times because I side with the small ones.

The worst fights happened at night. The *Gulbetegnotch* often cajoled or pressurised some of them to roam around at night in search of other gangs with whom they could gamble. Tadele and many newcomers willingly went along. The problem started when they were unable or unwilling to pay their gambling debts. Enemy gangs occasionally raided Zelalem's group at night and stole their *duritos*. The scene would be repeated the other way around, until one of the gangs called it quits. Any boy who did not show alacrity in joining inter-gang fights was robbed, beaten up and hounded out of the group for being a coward and a traitor. Re-entry into the group was made intolerable by the contempt and mockery poured over the poltroon. On the positive side, those who were attacked by outsiders could more or less count on the support of their comrades.

Melit:

> You can only get help from your own friends if they are physically present when trouble starts. If not, it is your fight. Even your best friend will not go back there to defend your rights. It is too dangerous. But if they come around and attack anyone of us, we must defend our friends.

In addition to the above, the *gulbetegnotch* regularly took advantage of Zelalem's group lack of permanent cohesion or loyalty among them:

Zelalem:

> Tadele regularly reports to them everything we do, say or earn and they leave him alone. Even though he knows that they are robbing us, he kow-tows to them in order to partake of the spoils.

Godje:

> Two nights ago the *Gulbetegnotch* wanted more 'protection' money from us. They shook Zelalem up and found nothing on him. They said that they would let him go if he told them if anyone else had money. He showed them the place where I had buried my money. They took it all and punched and kicked me. Zelalem and Tadele watched them beat me up, they were both laughing. I got very angry and told them that Zelalem was keeping his money with the teahouse owner. They made him go and fetch the twelve *birr* he had saved up. They all got drunk. Zelalem hit me all over the body with a stick the next morning because he had no money to pay for his breakfast.

As they grew older and some of them became sexually active, sex related conflicts added to the already high incidence of violence in their lives. Toward mid-1997 several homeless young girls started visiting the group at night. Godje explains:

Godje:

> Many girls join us at night. They are like us; they are in trouble with their families. Datchi is the worst of the lot and a great sinner. At first we all liked her and felt sorry for her. They have now started quarrelling over her. The *Gulbetegnotch* invite her to smoke cigarette or hashish, chew *tchat* or drink with them. Some of them refuse to pay her after they 'have done it with her'. In retaliation she makes them fight each other. I cannot explain how she does it but she and her girl friends manage to involve all of us in their quarrels with the *Gulbetegnotch*. Tadele received a severe beating the other night because the newest and prettiest girl told them that she did it with him for free. They slapped Zelalem because the same girl made him stand up for her when they beat her up for insulting them. The girls know how to provoke all of us. As soon as the punching and kicking begins, they disappear. They wait a few days and reappear one by one or with new girl friends and the whole thing starts all over again.

viii.   Crime:

Membership in the gang conferred the individual child with an identity as a Borco and this operated to buffer real or potential violence by complete strangers or other gangs. The same public image militated against such children being considered anything but a danger to society, especially by the police. In contrast with the vast majority of street children living with their families, they were indeed capable of criminal behaviour. Many homeless boys have told me that they had been in police custody several times, most of it for petty theft or fighting with other children. Zelalem and his friends were regularly picked up for vagrancy while I was researching for my Thesis. They were either beaten up on the spot or kept in for a few hours or days in police cells with adult prisoners and released after being told to desist from begging or sleeping in the street. Before I met them Zelalem, Tadele and Melit had had longer sentences imposed on them for stealing and were sent to prison and/or the only remand home for boys found in Addis Ababa. Zelalem's worst nightmare was his family finding out that he was imprisoned for five months for stealing a jerry can full of kerosene from outside a shop. As mentioned before Tadele's grandmother encouraged the judge to pass a longer sentence on him when he was jailed for stealing shoes left outside a church by worshippers. Melit was jailed for six months for snatching a woman's handbag. They all found their experiences behind

bars harrowing and were very bitter at having been sent to prison in the first place. Melit explains why:

Melit

> Jail is the worst thing that can happen to you. They only feed you once a day. None of us have relatives and friends to bring us food parcels. The prison guards do not allow people without *Kebele* Identity cards to visit prisoners. Our friends cannot visit us because they do not have a *Kebele* Identity card. We are left completely alone. I used to cry at night from hunger and bitterness.

The following comments by two law enforcement officers reflects how most of them view the Borcos

Police officer:

> They must have stolen money or done something dreadful before running away from their families and entering street life. They are hardened criminals; they steal and fight because they really enjoy it. No one picks a fight with them because they are capable of murder. We regularly find screwdrivers, hammers, knives, and razor blades even syringes on them.

Traffic policeman:

> I know that some are very poor and abused children but as soon as they enter the street world they get `damaged'. You do not know how hard it is for us. We have to beat them up to stop them from stealing everything they can remove from cars. The Borcos you like so much spoil plants, bushes along the street and in the roundabouts. They rob people at night. They fight each other with knives. Sometimes, when we see them beating each other, we just ignore it. We are fed up. There are too many street children, too many beggars and too many poor people in this town.

The public image of Borcos as dangerous criminals and inveterate liars and thieves is hardly warranted. By the time I recorded the following narratives, none of them had a reason to lie to me.

Zelalem:

> Professional thieves do not look or live like us. They are very clean and well dressed. They use razor blades and other instruments to cut through people's bags and pockets in taxis and buses. They even go to Church to steal from worshippers. We only steal when the opportunity arises. It is very difficult to steal from people or from cars at the traffic lights and get away with it. Most of us do not even dream of stealing. If we get caught, people will kick us to death. If something drops from someone's pocket, bag or parcel and no one sees it, it is ours. If a person goes in the Church and leaves a packet behind to pick it up later, he is a fool.

Melit:
> The bigger the crowd after a traffic accident, the better the chances we have to pick people's pockets. If we find someone drunk at night, especially at the end of the month, we go through his pockets and take everything he has. If he in unconscious, we take his shoes, clothes or anything that can be sold and leave him there naked.

Epilogue

Zelalem's group started disintegrating towards the end of 1997. Territory and age were pivotal in the break up of the group. The first push factor was the fact that in January 1998 the Church authorities built an iron fence along the front of the church wall and thus made it impossible for them to use the trees as a home substitute. The police and church guards made sure that no one slept or defecated near the wall. Zelalem and his friends were obliged to share sleeping space with adult beggars behind the church, away from the traffic lights and the shelter of the trees. The second push factor was that Selamu, one of the *Gulbetegnotch* went to live in an uninhabited no man's land near the Airport. He managed to lure several under sixteen-year-old girls into his gang. They built makeshift shelters and encouraged many street boys to join them.

Selamu declared himself the leader of the gang he established. They lived mainly off what the girls earned by begging and prostitution. Both girls and boys handed over everything they begged and earned, i.e. food, money or clothes to SelamuHe took what he considered to be his share and provided what he deemed appropriate to the needs of individual members. The rest was used for partying all night. He also distributed 'wives' to those he favoured. He expected gratitude and complete obedience from one and all. Those who did not obey his orders, and/or hand over their earnings, were beaten into submission by Selamu and his henchmen. The membership size of Selamu's gang changed constantly because many children, especially the girls, left the group within days. This is how one of the girls explained why the girls willingly joined Selamu's gang:

Fifteen years old girl:
> Some girls stay because they are in love with one of the boys, others because they have seen it all and find peace here. I accepted at first because I had nowhere else to go. We all prefer to live here with other children who have suffered like us. We understand each other. We are all very bitter because we have suffered a lot; many of us have been sexually abused by close male relatives. No one wanted to believe

or protect us. No one insults us or judges us here. We are not lonely or alone here. I do not mind giving Selamu my money. We often buy all kinds of things that we like in order to have a good time. We make a big fire and smoke and drink all night. For many of us, this is the first time in our lives that we have had any kind of fun.

Very few children ON the street find a satisfactory alternative to gang life, as they grow older. Their lack of social network in the adult social world makes it extremely difficult for them to be re-absorbed into mainstream society. The children who go back to live with their natal families are few and far between. The successful ones are those who have a member of their family they can trust to care for their welfare and who is prepared to protect and defend them from whatever they had run away from. Zelalem and his friends experienced entering a different age group and sexual maturity differently. Each case tells us something about the options available to homeless children as individuals rather than as a group or as members of a gang.

Wolamo:

Wolamo was thirteen when I first met him. He was eighteen years old by December 1999. After yet another disappointing stay with Selamu's gang, his comrades told me that Wolamo was lured by a *Penti* preacher into joining the sect sometime in February 1998. *Penti* is a derogatory term used by many Ethiopians to refer to followers of a foreign-based Pentecostal/Evangelical church. Wolamo came back two weeks later. He told us that he felt like an outsider among the *Penti* family where he was fostered. The preacher came to talk to him every evening and eventually persuaded him to go and live with a group of other street children that he and his wife were trying to reform. Wolamo stayed with them for two months and reappeared one evening. He said that one of the teacher/supervisors in charge of daily routine beat him and the other children regularly. He also resented not being able to come and visit his friends. The preacher came back and persuaded Wolamo to join a home for street children he had established forty kilometres outside Addis Ababa. None of us have heard from him since.

Tadele:

Tadele was sixteen when I first met him. He was twenty-one years old in December 1999 and looked older. He joined Selamu's gang soon after it was established.

He lasted three weeks the first time and three days the second time. He was severely beaten by Selamu for insubordination and inciting others, especially the girls, to disobey his orders by withholding some of the money they earned. Sometime in October 1998 he was caught stealing shoes left outside the church by worshipers and held in a cell at a nearby police station. The rest of the gang took food parcels and begged other visitors to pass them on to him while he was in the local police station awaiting trial. In December 1998, he was sentenced to one year and transferred to a prison for adults. Since visitors to prisons are required to show their kebele identity cards, his comrades were not able to visit him. They soon gave up and forgot about him.

Tadele was released in November 1999. I saw him frequently throughout December 1999. He was begging and sharing sleeping space with adult beggars behind the church. He was invariably depressed when I met him. He often pretended to be mad and walked up and down the street without any clothes on. The adult beggars with whom he now associated told me that he often slept outside various churches on different saints' days and pretended to be mentally retarded or very ill. He told me that he had tried to work on a building site but left after two days. He could not keep up with the others workers. His showed me the cuts and bruises he had on both hands and feet. He stopped begging at the traffic lights because drivers did not feel sorry enough to give him coins. He said that he was too ashamed to ask his mother for help.

Melit:

Melit was fourteen when I met him. He was nineteen years old in December 1999. He refused to join Selamu at first. He went to live with his stepmother in October 1997. He left after a few weeks because he felt unloved and unwanted. He joined Selamu's gang but left after a while because he did not fit in. He went back to live with his stepmother once more. He found a job as a day labourer on a building site but was fired because he could not keep up with the other workers. He went back to the church wall. He told me that he felt unloved by his stepfamily and he did not want to give them the satisfaction to see him fail in life again.

In May 1998, Melit teamed up with a boy and a girl and went to live with them near another church wall. They pooled their resources and started selling cigarettes and

other small items. The partnership lasted three months. The two boys quarrelled constantly about the proceeds of the sale and the girl. They had a big fight and the girl sided with the boy. The boy held him down and she slashed his ears and arms with a razor blade. Melit went back to the church wall.

I last saw Melit sometime at the end of the end of March 1999. He told me that he found it very difficult to beg from cars because people did not feel sorry for him. He was also too ashamed to beg for food from door to door. He had enough of being insulted by maidservants and watchmen and everyone telling him to work for his living. Some time in May 1999, he sent words to me to let me know that he had joined the army and was going to the front to fight in the War with Eritrea. He asked that I pray for him from time to time.

Zelalem

Zelalem was fourteen years old when I met him and nineteen by December 1999. He was he first one of the group to join Selamu's gang. The exact date is September 22nd, 1997. Although he resented Selamu's tyranny, Zelalem was very diligent at carrying out his orders and fitted in with the group. His gentle nature made him popular with the girls. He spent his days begging leftover food from rich households and his nights regaling them with wild stories about his childhood experiences all over Ethiopia. Selamu awarded his contribution to group life by assigning him a `wife' he had discarded. The girl's mother had abandoned her when she was eight years old and her father had died when she was nine years old. She had run away from the constant sexual abuse from male relatives in her paternal grandmother's house. Selamu gave Zelalem the necessary material and helped him build his own shelter. Sometime in February 1998, Selamu's new `wife' disappeared with another girl. He demanded that Zelalem hand over his 'wife' to replace her. Zelalem and the girl refused claiming to be in love with each other. Selamu came back very late in the night with Melit and three other boys. They dragged them out of their hut and beat them up. They then poured kerosene on the hut and burnt it to the ground. Zelalem was more upset of Melit's betrayal that of the beatings he and the girl received at the hand of Selamu's gang.

Zelalem and the girl joined another group of mixed sex homeless children. The girl ceased to prostitute herself. They survived by begging food and collecting bottles, plastic bags, and various types of containers from the airport garbage dump, washing them in a stream and selling them to open-air market retailers. They lived happily until the girl got pregnant. They had a harrowing time, until she eventually found a way to abort the child. Zelelam left the girl and returned home several times. He told me that he could not cope with the responsibility of taking care of the girl. He phoned me on April 19th, 1998 (Ethiopian Easter day) to tell me that he had gone back to see his mother and did not have the courage to leave her because she was very ill. His older brother was bedridden and she could not cope with him. He ran away from home as soon as his mother felt better. He eventually went home for his brother's funeral sometime in December 1998 and has not left his home since.

Godje

Godje was twelve when I first met him. By December 1999, he was seventeen years old. He was the only one who refused to join Selamu's gang. He never even visited the place where they lived. He stuck to the church wall until the owner of the teashop offered him a job in June 1998. He was not allowed to handle money and was not paid a salary. His duties included taking out the garbage, serving customers, running errands cleaning the place throughout the day, and fetching water for the restaurant one mile up the road. He worked every day until ten at night, including Saturdays and Sundays. In return, he was allowed to sleep inside the shop. He could eat two meals a day or all the left over food he could handle. Godje lasted six months. The cook and the cashier stole foodstuff. Godje eventually reported it to the owner out of the fear of being accused of stealing. The cook and the cashier had been with the owner for many years. They swore that the thieving had started after Godje had joined them. The owner preferred to believe them. They took it in turns to slap and kick Godje and told him never to set foot in the shop again.

From January 1999 to March 1999, Godje befriended a street working boy who invited him to live with him and his mother. They took it in turns to sell cigarettes and assorted sweets. Godje had left his job at the teahouse addicted to cigarettes and coffee.

The boy's mother did not approve of his heavy smoking. She ordered her son to quit the partnership and threw Godje out of her house. Godje went back to the church wall. The last time I met him was in May 1999. He looked unkempt and unhappy. He told me that he felt too depressed to do anything. He wanted to go back to Godjam to see his family. I lent him money. He disappeared. Sometime in December 1999, Tadele told me that Godje had not gone back home. He was living in the middle of the town in a makeshift shelter with older beggars and working as a porter during the day. Other children have corroborated this story.

As can be deduced from the above, Wolamo and Zelalem were the only ones who managed to be re-absorbed by mainstream society. Wolamo was an interesting case of religion coming in to the rescue. Zelalem found a way out by returning to live with his family unable to deal with the complexities of an adult heterosexual relationship. Tadele's fate shows how the break up of his family ties exacerbated his ability to extricate himself from street life. An unexpected war with neighbouring Eritrea provided Melit an exit into the army. Godje's destiny was more representative of what befell the other homeless boys I knew. By December 1999, none of them had found homes, jobs or had managed to secure Kebele identity cards. They had abandoned gang life, discarded their wild hairstyles and anti-social demeanour. Those I met in the street told me that they were still looking for a job and that they did not know the whereabouts of their old comrades. In other words, they had all joined the ranks of jobless destitute men and women found all over the City. This belies the widely held assumption in Ethiopia that such children become hardened and dangerous criminals when they become adults.

Conclusion:

The age differences notwithstanding, there were similarities and dissimilarities in the internal group dynamics of the three gangs I worked with and other such groups of homeless children leading brutish lives in other major cities of the world. The similarities were confined to the fact that the Borcos had most of the essential characteristics associated with streetism. They occupied a well-defined territory in street life. They did not live with adults. The street was not only their work place; it was their home as well as their playground. The public perception of their background in Ethiopia

as elsewhere is that such children are either abandoned, orphaned or that they came from very poor and dysfunctional families. My data goes against some of these stereotypes. I found that far from being abandoned, many of them were runaways from dysfunctional families and the constant abuse by members of their natal or stepfamilies. Most of them had deliberately abandoned their families and poverty was not necessarily the sole cause of their predicament.

Several writers maintain that there is strong evidence to prove that group life provides an adequate child on child socialisation environment for children OF the street. (Swart 1986:1988; Sharf et al. 1986; Aptekar 1988; Ennew 1994). Another dissimilarity between my findings and written reports about other homeless children is that in Addis Ababa such children are not socialised by some kind of child on child interaction. Those I worked with, were all initially socialised by families before joining a gang age ten or older, This is exemplified by the way Zelalem and his friends often invoked religious or popular maxims to put across their ideas. The manner, in which they abided with the cultural practices related to the giving, taking and sharing of food, is another case in point. The spirit with which they re-created among themselves and in the street, the dominant values held in times of bereavement and ill health by the rest of society is also a fitting example. Furthermore, the moral standards by which they judged each other's behaviour and the personal characteristics that they considered culturally becoming in a decent person were comparable to those used by adult Ethiopians.

The boys from the three gangs I worked with had created an 'imperfect community', which did not provide them with all functions of the family. Much as home life was unsatisfactory, gang life did not replace it with a better alternative. It did not bring about continuity, permanence or the emotional and affective bond children need. They had all run away from the abuse of their immediate families and entered into another form of abusive and exploitative relationship with children like themselves and young adults. The crucial point was that the boys felt less loyal to other gang members, less obliged to obey orders from anyone or reciprocate in terms other than their own than did home based children towards members of their natal families.

There are numerous texts describing the lives of homeless children (Swart 1988; Sharf et al. 1986; Aptekar 1988; Lucchini 1988; Connolly 1990; Tyler et al. 1992 Ennew 1994). Most give vivid accounts of such children's child/child inter relationships in the street. All the gangs I worked with in Addis Ababa were in many ways dissimilar to their counterparts in Asia, Africa and South America. They did not have a special name for their group or for their activities in the street. Even though they gave the impression of working in concert in all aspects of their social life, this was not the case. Unlike their African and South American equivalents, they did not recognise the importance of a leader and rejected the idea of having a fixed role to play in group activities. As a matter of fact, none of the gangs I worked with had a leader. The issue of leadership came into Zelalem's and his comrades' lives after they had left the church wall and became sexually active.

Children OF the street in Addis Ababa do not exist outside the adult social world. They are inextricably linked to the outside world after entering street life. This is because of their reliance on the generosity of various groups of adults for their survival and their inevitable associations with the police, other street children, older beggars, the *Gulbetegnotch*, their patrons and food sellers. The social resources and social support systems available to home-based street children differ considerably from those of street based children. Therein lie the most important factors that integrate or separate the two categories of children from the adult organised social world but not necessarily from the adult social world. In contrast with street children living with their families, homeless children lack the reciprocity expected of close relatives and friends that goes along the nature of social support and social network available within the family unit. The vast majority of home-based street children attend school part time; none of the homeless children I knew attended any kind of educational institution. Street children living at home can count on some form of continuity in their lives. They have someone to provide them with emotional support and with a place of sleep, and on whom they can count for help in case of ill health or injury. Because of the fragmented and troubled ties they have with their families, street based boys and girls lack any kind of social resources that they can count on for any length of time. Due to the unstable society that they create for themselves, they cannot even count on each other for emotional, material or social support, unless they are ill or severely injured by outsiders.

Generally speaking, home based street children are made to feel useful and productive by their parents, friends and neighbours because their street related activities subsidise their school expenses and/or help support their families. They have therefore a better sense of self worth and self esteem than street-based children. Homeless children have more opportunity to engage in criminal and problem behaviour. Both boys and girls are more than likely to have initiated sexual activity at a much earlier age, some as young as twelve. In addition street based girls inevitably enter into premature and exploitative sexual relationships with adolescent street boys, unemployed young men or other adults. They have the means and opportunities for alcohol abuse and to get addicted to cigarette smoking, alcohol, *tchat* and hashish. They also have more trouble with the police because of minor criminal activities like begging, petty thieving, gambling and vagrancy.

Homeless children's lack of family ties, home address and therefore Kebele identity cards reinforce the negative and criminal image they project. The very same factors exacerbate their ability to disengage themselves from street life with the onset of adulthood. Home based street children use their parents' networks to get a foothold in the job market and the adult organised social world in their own right. With the passing of time "age becomes their worst enemy" (Aptekar 1988). Police officers and ordinary citizens cease to look upon them and their personal appearances with tolerance. The fear and dislike they generate as young men temper people's erstwhile generosity towards the helpless children they represented. Sexual maturity means that they also enter the complex world of heterosexual relationships. These two factors increase their needs to be reabsorbed into mainstream society. This means that the painful process of disengaging themselves from the street and trying to establish alternative relationships outside the gang structure begins for all of them. The type of long-term data that I was able to collect shows that for most of them the hellish life they led as adolescent street boys barely alters when they reach adulthood. In the case of Zelalem and his comrades the imperfect society that they had created meant that each boy had to find his own way out of street life and into adulthood.

Summary & Conclusion

Cultural anthropologists have studied marriage almost exclusively in relation to kinship. In chapter 1, and throughout the dissertation, I have tried to show how difficult it is to study the street children population of Addis Ababa in terms of kinship let alone marriage, household formation or reproduction. In Chapter 4 and 6, I have pointed out that there were enormous variations in household composition even among female-headed households. In the same and subsequent chapters, I have emphasised the heterogeneous character of the street children population. This is because neither the children nor their families' social position could be defined in terms of age, gender or birth position, or marital status. As far as the children are concerned, there is the natural transition from childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The inconsistency of their life experiences that I have tried to depict in the thesis shows that neither the children's nor the parents' life circumstances remain unchanged. Finally, in spite of the shared schemata of an urban environment, street boys and girls experience socialisation in childhood and streetism differently.

In Chapter 4, Defining the Street Child, I pointed out that family circumstances rather than culture, religion or ethnicity were the major factors that spurred the individual child to the street. I also wrote that they come from different backgrounds, groups, with difference in race, norms, social values and languages. There are more than eighty ethnic groups in Ethiopia; about seventy percent of the total population belongs to the Oromo, Amhara and Tigray ethnic group. In the Southern Regions alone there are forty-five ethnic groups with distinct languages, cultures and socio-economic organisations. The great majority of the Region's population belong to the seven major ethnic groups namely the Hadiya, Gurague, Sidama, Kembata, Wolaita, Alaba, Tembaro (source: Southern Region Community and Family Survey 1997). The two dominant religions of Ethiopia are Orthodox Christianity and Islam, with a small proportion of the population following traditional forms of worship or Protestant religions. All the above-mentioned major ethnic groups and religions are well represented in Addis Ababa and, as in all capital cities the world over, there is a mixing of races, cultures and religions.

Research on marriage and marital stability as factors influencing household formation and fertility have been studied and continue to be studied by demographers and sociologists using quantitative methods. Statistical analysis of socio-economic and cultural variables and intermediate demographic determinant of marriage patterns are usually looked into in order to establish facts about marital stability, household formation and reproduction. Among other things these include ethnicity, education of mother, housing, age at first marriage, economic status, employment, stability of first marriage, religious affiliation and type of marriage: civil, polygamous, monogamous, Sharia and customary law. (See for example: Kabir's 1980 World Fertility Survey Program and Zoughlami & Allsopp's 1985 Demographic and Health Survey Program).

It is difficult enough to talk in terms of marriage, household formation, or reproduction when referring to the more homogenous, primarily agrarian rural societies found in the Southern Regions of Ethiopia let alone among the heterogeneous population of Addis Ababa. It would be absurd to generalise from the twenty-five families I selected for special attention. A good example is the above-mentioned 1997 survey, which was conducted to examine population dynamics in terms of fertility, mortality and migration. The survey also looked into family structure and marriage in order to investigate basic social and developmental problems within the framework of community and family study. The Old Ethiopian Civil Code sets the minimum age at first marriage for girls at 15, the Fetha Negest at 12, the Sharia law at 9 and the Gada at 16 (Alasebu 1988). The current population policy promulgated in 1993 stipulates that the minimum age at first marriage should be 18 years. All these types of marriages are said to exist in the surveyed area. The survey indicates the persistence of early marriage for females among Moslems, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and followers of traditional religious beliefs and later marriage is found among followers of protestant churches. However, it is very difficult to disentangle the effect of age at first marriage, ethnicity, education, and religion on marital stability, household formation and reproduction.

As for determining the above-mentioned issues among the street children families of Addis Ababa, this may be achieved by applying statistical concepts or massive surveys. The definition of a household in the urban context of Addis Ababa has a broad meaning even among female-headed households, since relatives and non-relatives often live together, on a temporary or long-term basis. There are different types of marriage and

short or long term cohabitation arrangements, which are just as varied and volatile. Living arrangements and household formation are more often than not associated with life history events like the sex life of mothers, access to housing, employment, marital status, number and sex of children and these are variables that are liable to change. I have visited households where the men whom female respondents had referred to, as their husbands proved to be temporary lovers and never married mothers who claimed to be widows, divorced or abandoned women. It is therefore difficult to find a unitary definition of what constitutes a household that would be easy to apply in practice to the urban context of Addis Ababa.

In Addis Ababa children born from various cultures enter the world of the street with similar handicaps: poverty, lack of proper education, health care and adequate shelter. They share a similar physical environment, financial circumstances and life styles. They frequent the same kind of people, participate in nearly alike work/educational/leisure activities and eat the same type of food. It is this interactive aspect of their social life, which creates their `common culture'. However, the same factor does not establish normative rules, which could be revalidated in action among the poorer segment of society let alone throughout the entire population of Addis Ababa. I have touched upon the issue of culture, norms and social meaning in Chapter 3 and mentioned that norms, values, attitudes and traditions are not immutable customs. Nor are related concepts to norms such as custom, convention, etiquette, law, custom, folkways and mores. In any case, in spite of all the explanations given by different social scientists, the conceptual treatment of norms remains unsatisfactory.

No particular generic definition of norms is widely accepted in the social sciences, and there is also a lack of consensus as to how to differentiate types of norms. In the literature, norm as a concept is nonetheless conceptualised in a multitude of ways. In conclusion as Holly and Stuchlik (1983) have so ably demonstrated a norm cannot be conceived of as a unitary system and is not necessarily related to action. The verbal statement of an informant and his or her observed behaviour are not always in accord. Norms, according to Holly and Stuchlik, are a set of basic assumption and actions about social reality projected or acted by an individual or individuals in ways understandable to others of the same group. Studies aimed at the investigation of the relationship between

norms and actions have clearly shown that people do not treat norms as cause or reason for action, but at best as guidelines for action (ibid, p. 82).

> What ...... studies clearly indicate is that norms can be manipulated, applied, disregarded, but that they have no internal compelling force to summon action. By themselves they are merely a specific category of notions made relevant only when people invoke or disregard them in their action explicitly or implicitly (ibid p.83)

Ethiopian society has been radically transformed during the last thirty years. As a result of the country's turbulent history, family behaviour has changed radically and many traditional patterns of interaction have become redundant. Marriage arrangements in the urban and rural cultures have also been transformed. The population of Ethiopia proceeded from the feudal paternalistic socio political scenario that existed during Emperor Haile Selassie's reign, to that of the 1974 to 1990 unstable oppressive military/communistic rule. The Derg's regime disrupted the old order and destabilised the entire society including pastoralist and agricultural communities. The land reform program as well as the political, economic and social system imposed on Ethiopian society by the specific Derg's Marxist agenda rendered many organisational arrangements obsolete.

The Derg's rule was too short and too brutal for any new patterns of interpersonal relationship of an enduring kind to emerge. Some old norms of super ordination and subordination such as blind obedience and respect for the monarchy, church leaders, all adults and elders ceased to be adhered to, without being replaced by new normative behaviour. Since 1991, a new regime, which professes to follow a market economy, still maintains that land (the only asset worth having in an entirely agrarian economic) should remain state owned. The major part of the nationalised houses by the previous regime and practically all the ramshackle dwellings where the poor live are still owned and administered by state controlled *kebeles*. Drought and famine, economic mismanagement still cause the internal displacement or rural/urban migration of entire families.

The recent war with Eritrea, high youth and adult unemployment both in the urban and rural areas, student unrest, and political instability continue to exacerbate the already flux nature of society. The only certain thing about Ethiopian society is its uncertainty. The only constant aspect of people's social lives and social behaviour is its interactive

aspect. Fortes' (1956) apt statement, which I quoted at the beginning of this dissertation, "norms (in these societies) cannot be discovered by inspection and haphazard comparisons", still holds true. Much like Forde, Southhall, Gutkind, Mitchell and Baton in earlier times, I found that any generalised assumptions about urban social behaviour difficult to maintain.

As already explained in Chapter 1, sociality theory does not replace culture theory as an analytical tool, nor it is meant to. In relation to my thesis and within the social and cultural flux I worked in, sociality theory has provided me with a methodological tool, which has enabled me to look into one set of universally valid social characteristics, namely the connection between a street child and his/her parents as well as with unfamiliar adults. This is in order to give an insight into how they relate to each other, how they attend to one another's emotional and material needs. It is based on the maxim that regardless of the type of household unit, children interact with their fathers, mothers, grandparents, uncles, aunts and siblings. In addition to this, street children have daily encounters with numerous familiar and unfamiliar adults. Sociality theory facilitated the task of concentrating on the form this child/adult link takes (over a five-year period) in the home and in the street while carrying out my fieldwork. It also provided me with a means of projecting the changeability and flexibility in culture and society. I was only able to look into their social world in terms of socialisation a year into my fieldwork and in terms of social support and social network as well as reciprocity when it came to analysing and writing up my data in the third, fourth and fifth year.

It is daunting enough to grasp the sheer complexity and comprehensiveness of one way of life. In the urban environment we are faced with a multitude of cultures with their diverse linguistic, domestic, economic, political and to a lesser extent religious life experiences. Even within the strictly limited geographical confines of Addis Ababa, analysing such children and their families' social world in terms of culture, values and norms may be fraught with the perilous risks of cultural reductionism and cultural misrepresentations. Since it is practically impossible to depict every aspect of the social life of the people I studied, I chose to concentrate on themes and issues that were glaringly obvious and pertinent to their way of life from my data. These are expressed in terms of socialisation, social support and social networks as well as reciprocity. It is also

because it is impossible to establish norms and values (in the urban context of Addis Ababa) that I chose to use sociality theory as a methodological tool for carrying out my field research.

There is still controversy over the manner in which street children are defined and classified worldwide. UNICEF's classification of children ON the street (home based street children), children OF the street (homeless street children) and children ON and OF the street (orphans, handicapped and abandoned children and children who abandon their families) uses the children's sleeping place as its main criteria. This classification has been criticized for being too rigid and not reflecting the realities found in most urban centres. There are nevertheless broad criteria used internationally for grouping and categorizing street children. Apart from the child's sleeping place (i.e. home versus the street), these are types of relationship such children have with their immediate families, their lack of family ties or the magnitude of deviant behaviour. In order to reflect the complex reality prevailing among the street children population of Addis Ababa, I have added relevant information to the criteria used internationally for defining and grouping street children. These are school attendance, street related activities in terms of whether they beg or work full time or part time in the street, age and gender based differences of their career in the street as well as family and community responsibilities. I have consequently re-classified them into three broad categories, namely street working children, working children and street children.

Street working children are home based street children who attend school part time and work or trade in the street the rest of the time. These children have extensive economic and affective ties with their families, especially their mothers. They are also attached to the adult organised social world via their mother's networks in terms of shelter, education and health. Working children include home based children aged eight and older who do not beg, do not attend school and work full time in the street. Both working children and street working children play a vital role in the economic survival of their families. They nevertheless depend heavily on the presence of adults in their lives for their sustenance at home and to some extent for their career in the street. They and their families form part and parcel of the neighbourhood they live in.

I have classified as street children all those aged five and eighteen who do not attend school and beg full time in the street. Those under eight years of age, alternate between home and street life. The others are mostly groups of homeless boys and girls aged ten and older who live together in loosely knit social groups. These gangs of mostly homeless boys operate outside the adult organised social world. They do not belong to any community based voluntary associations such as burial associations or rotating credit schemes. They do not have home addresses or identity cards. They are therefore ineligible for publicly funded housing, healthcare or education. They nevertheless depend on the charity of adults for their livelihood. They also have regular encounter with the police, adult beggars, unemployed youths and various shopkeepers and waiters. They are therefore not completely cut off from the adult social and economic world. The criteria differentiating them from home based street children is their lack of family ties and therefore the type of support such connections provide poor children in terms of nurturing, shelter, healthcare and education.

At least ninety-five percent of the street children found in Addis Ababa are said to live with their natal families and attend school regularly. The great majority of those I have met were city born and bred. The rest were in-migrants children brought to the city by mothers escaping rural poverty, abusive marital or familial situation or by internally displaced parents due to wars, social conflict and famine situations. Homeless children included rural and urban runaways from family abuse and dysfunctional families and sexually abused underage girls. In spite of the controversy surrounding the UNICEF definition, the present study covers the two broad categories of children ON the street (home based) and children OF the street (homeless). It is concerned with the lives and life styles of home-based street children, especially children coming from female-headed households and with the life circumstances of gangs of homeless boys and girls.

The research methods I have used are street-related, child and adult centred and participatory. Economic factors are part of the problem that leads many a child to streetism in Addis Ababa. However, social, cultural and institutional factors exacerbate their plight. Studies on street children worldwide usually focus on the most visible feature of their life style; namely their street related activities. They neglect the broader

context of the wider institutional forces, such as housing, education and health, which affect their childhood. There is also little attention paid to the importance of adults, especially mothers, in such children's lives. Scant reference is made to street children's role in the emotional, social and economic lives of adults. In order to build a full insight of the street children social world and not just its street aspect, I have based my research on adults' and children's interpretation of their real life situation at home, within the community and in the street.

I have tried to transcend the intractable and abstract nature of culture by focusing on one set of universally valid social characteristics, namely the connection between a child and his/her parents. It is based on the maxim that regardless of the type of household unit, street children interact with their fathers, mothers, grandparents, uncles, aunts and siblings. They also have daily encounters with non-familiar adults and children within the neighborhood they live in and in the street. I have accordingly dealt with familial situations in terms of how they attend to one another's emotional and material needs. I explored the economic links between mother/son as well as mother/daughter so as to understand how they interact as a family and connect to street life. I delved into the gendered aspect of the socialization of children and the role street children play in the socialization of their mothers in order to give an insight into the cultural aspect of their lives.

I have addressed the institutional forces, which affect home based street children's childhood, in terms of their mothers' networks. Accordingly, I have analysed the different ways such women access government owned and controlled cheap housing, education and health care for their children. Street children have daily encounters with numerous familiar and unfamiliar adults in the street. I have looked into the form this child/adult link takes in the street by describing the gendered aspect of their career in the street. Added stressful experiences such as schooling and violence amongst and against street children are explored in order to look into the non-home related environment that affects their childhood.

Due to their diversity and the complex nature their life circumstances, ethnicity, geographical location or household composition are of little use for understanding the

street children phenomena in Addis Ababa or choosing a target group. Street children and their families live in socially diverse communities, scattered about the city and can be found in practically every neighborhood. There are conflicting estimates of the street children of Addis Ababa. This is due partly to their diversity and wandering life styles. Furthermore, their numbers continue to swell by the influx of families fleeing war zones, famines, rural poverty and untenable family relationships. Consequently, it is difficult to find a stable reference population of street children and their families in any one location allowing the construction of a representative sample.

The debate on street children, in Ethiopia as elsewhere, is concerned with culture and social norms. If we consider culture and social norms to be rigid and immutable categories, we celebrate a system of knowledge that fixes street children as 'the other'. There is general agreement that at least 95% of street children of Addis Ababa have regular contact with their families. Like children the world over, they interact with their natal families as well as non-kin adults. Unlike other children, however, they live off the proceeds of their own labor, by begging, trading or working in the street. Their relationship with their families and street life in general are two components of the reality in which street children are directly implicated as social actors. The balance between childhood experiences at home and competence in the street constitutes the street child 's social world. I have consequently concentrated my analysis on the socially interactive aspects that street children and their families share in common. That is on how members of street children families relate to one another, to the street and society at large. This has enabled me to look at an aspect of their common culture without diminishing the significance of their diversity. The type of long-term data I was able to gather facilitated the task of giving a chronology of events that avoids imparting a fixed imagery of the street children life experiences. It also helped me show the inconstancy of their life predicament.

Addis Ababa is the administrative and economic center of the country. It is where most, if not all, the social amenities and government offices are concentrated. All ethnic groups are well represented and, as in all capital cities the world over, there is a mixing of races, cultures and religions. Urbanization encourages the intermingling of people coming from the different regions of the country as well as marriage across ethnic and religious

lines. Among the two hundred or more parents and children that I have so far talked to, I have identified twelve major ethnic groups. I have also encountered numerous intra-ethnic marriages and partnering. Some mothers have several offspring from different fathers coming from the various regions of Ethiopia. There are numerous types of household arrangements for the 'family' to be typical of anything even where both parents have lived in long term relationships. This diversity is even found even among female-headed households. There are city born mothers, in-migrant mothers, divorced, widowed; never married mothers as well as handicapped or chronically ill mothers. Ethnicity is therefore less pertinent than family circumstances to understand the causes and effects of streetism on street children's childhood.

In spite of the above-mentioned diversity, poverty, physical proximity due to overcrowding, work and eating habits homogenizes the life style and habitat of the poor. This has a tremendous impact on the way they socialize their children. Life in the city often entails the erosion of the type of kinship relations found in more homogenous rural areas. These are not entirely replaced by neighbourhood mutual help and support systems in an urban setting. The public nature of child rearing as supposedly found in an African ancestral environment, notably the watchful eye of the entire extended kin network, is impossible to replicate in the city. The urban population of Addis Ababa is not able to count on services provided by kin, neighbors or family members as informal or personal arrangements. People living in cities cease to be dependent for their livelihood on family-based work activities such as farming and animal husbandry. This separation between production and consumption affects the quality of care that poor working mothers can provide to their children. It also dictates a certain uniformity of language and social behavior. Even recent migrant families do not set themselves apart from the broader urban culture of the communities they live in. My findings indicate that the various social strata and ethnic groups found in Addis Ababa do not appear to inhabit differing patterns of the wider Ethiopian culture in the socialization process of children. They seem to share a set of basic understandings as to what the proper relationship and ritual forms of demeanor between a child and his parents ought to be.

Generally speaking, within the wider Ethiopian culture, children are presumed to show deference to their parents and all other adults and to accept their authority over

them. It is assumed that this can be achieved through strict discipline, physical or verbal chastisement, sound parental advice and the good example set by adults. This process is embodied in the notion of *tefat ena ketat* (misdemeanour and punishment). The entire weight of parental expectations of more mature and moral social behavior from their children begins around the age of seven years. That is when they are said to start to 'know their own souls' to differentiate right from wrong. It is the age at which it is believed that a parent can start talking sensibly to a child, advise, admonish or chastise him or her. Those over seven years of age are supposed to be able to vocalize, hide or dissimulate their feelings and to be conscious of other people's needs. In other words, a lifetime process of learning to live with others commences.

In Addis Ababa, children born from various cultures enter the world of the street with similar handicaps: poverty, lack of proper education, and healthcare and adequate shelter. They share a similar physical environment, financial circumstances and life styles. They associate with the same kind of people, participate in nearly identical work, education and leisure activities and eat the same type of food. The coping mechanism adopted by urban dwellers in order to limit enmity with neighbours is to inculcate their children with the values of 'knowing how to live with other people'. The sources of aggravation brought about by children are related to infringements of the idea of good neighbourly relations, as well as of expected norms of behaviour between children and adults. Relations between neighbours are often marred by enmity created by the congested atmosphere poor people live in and by children's behaviour.

Mothers, as a whole, are the ones expected to teach children to show deference to adults and accept their authority over them. They are the ones responsible for administering disciplinary measures and socializing children. They are more or less solely responsible for most aspects of child rearing. Fathers concentrate on their traditional role as heads of households. Their role in socializing children is often restricted to disciplining a child after a mother, a stepmother or a neighbor has complained of its unruly behavior. Single mothers find it hard to provide for their children and maintain discipline among them. Mothers with children not involved with street life know where their children, especially daughters are, most of the time. Street working children or street children's mothers are not able to control the movement or associations of their children. Schooling

is a stressful experience for most poor children. Many street children skip school for all sorts of reasons, which are at times unrelated to their street work. The fear of facing a severe beating by teachers for being unkempt, for not having the proper school equipment, for being late encourages many of them to skip classes or stay on in the streets.

There is much written about the domestic and other tasks undertaken by rural children in the socializing processes that lead to adulthood. Girls are assigned female domestic duties in the home. Boys assume male-oriented tasks like farming and herding, within the community. Such gendered rural examples cannot be extrapolated in an urban setting, since farming and farm related domestic chores are irrelevant to city-based street children's life styles. While there are no obvious comparable tasks that can be performed by children in the city, there are many chores replacing such gendered rural examples in the urban setting. Children from poor families are often asked to act as surrogate adults or as substitutes to the servants families cannot afford. They are expected to act as caretakers and caregivers to younger siblings and members of the family who are ill. There is not much housework to do in a one-room house, but people must eat. The notion of domesticity which is known as *yebetmoya* in Amharic, incorporates all activities involved in home life and arrangements, such as cooking, serving food and other related domestic work. In the past such skills were exclusively imparted to girls, from rich and poor households alike, by female members of the family. The changing role of the family in an urban setting and gender ideology is reflected in the association of domesticity, once the exclusive domain of female domesticity, with pre-adolescent boys. In poorer households, both boys and girls are called upon to cook food, brew coffee, clean the house, and wash clothes and kitchen utensils. But this stops for boys by age fourteen while the domestic duties of girls are increased.

Very few families in Addis Ababa are able to feed and clothe their children adequately, let alone provide their children with the necessary funds for school and leisure activities. The street is where street children are able to supplement or replace their parents' inability or unwillingness to cater for their everyday needs. It affords them with a place and the opportunity to beg, trade or work, so that they can feed and clothe themselves, help their families and subsidize their school or leisure activities. The street is also their playground and refuge from the overcrowded home environment. Street

children's mothers are involved in the economic aspects of their children's street related activities and income. Most girls work for their mothers who expect them to hand over the entire proceeds of the day. This means that girls cannot dispose of their earning to feed themselves or buy small treats. Street boys have more leeway to how they wish to operate in the streets. They have a relatively more independent financial arrangement with their mothers since they seldom work for activities financed by their parents. They are also more or less at liberty to dispose of their earning to buy food in the streets, school equipment or even pay for leisure activities.

The crucial element to the street related economic ties between mothers/daughters and mothers/sons, goes beyond the fact that girls are more restricted in the way they can dispose of the proceeds of their labor and leisure time. Mothers perceive their daughter's street related activities as some kind of an extension to the girls' domestic duties and responsibilities. The girls refer to the money they earn as their mother's property. Street working girls selling processed food supplied by their mothers complain that their mothers do not buy them shoes or other everyday necessity. They nevertheless do not seem to automatically expect a share of the profits. Mothers assume that all joint ventures with daughters constitute household income to be disposed for the benefit of all the family. Conversely, boys talk in terms of 'giving money to their mothers', 'using their money for their everyday needs', and 'spending their money for leisure activities'.

Their street related activities and household duties often create discord between street children and their mothers. Most girls sell processed food or goods provided by their mothers. If the girls loose money, or spend it on themselves mothers are prone to chastise them verbally or physically. Mothers who take in clothes for washing expect their daughters to either fetch the necessary water or deliver the washing. If daughters fail in this or other household duties assigned to them they risk a severe reprimand or beating. On the whole mothers react to excessive play or lack of carrying out orders more severely against daughters than sons. Boys operate independently to mothers. Even where they provide the shoe shining equipment, parents have no way of knowing the exact amount earned by their sons. Boys are therefore less likely to arouse the wrath of their mothers and therefore face less domestic violence than girls.

The violence boys and girls face in the street differs. Boys are subjected to more violence than girls are in the street. If they work as parking boys or shoeshine boys, male street children have to fight for territory or pay protection money to bigger street boys or jobless young men. Since they have money and time to dispose, their leisure activities often lead to fistfights because of non-payment of gambling debts and such. The most in danger of violence from other street children and the police are the numerous gangs of homeless boys and girls. Police officers and ordinary citizens do not look upon their way of life or personal appearances with tolerance. Many end up in jail for vagrancy, fighting among themselves, robbing other street children or petty thieving to subsidise their life styles. Bigger boys or young toughs often sexually harass girls, especially the older ones. Those selling peanuts, samosas or chickpeas are often robbed by school children or have a rough time getting credit customers to pay their debts. Law enforcement officers hound them if they try to sit in a street corner to sell their goods instead of circulating. There is relatively little violence among the street working girls. Unlike boys, they seldom fight over territory or gambling and related leisure activities.

Generally speaking, socializing is presumed to be an adult to children process. As I have mentioned earlier the crucial role of adults in street children's social world is ignored in many accounts of their lives. Similarly, apart from the vital role they play in the economic survival of their families, there is no account of the social role street children have in their parent's lives. We are all socialized into absorbing human values that are deemed appropriate by the societies we live in. Parents, teachers, peers and at times the whole community structure the process by which we become aware of social and familial norms in infancy and childhood. However, socialization is a life long process. We learn new types of behavior and modes of action to fit in with the new roles we acquire through life, as students, workers, parents, employers, and employees. We master the necessary skills that enable us to interact with the various people we encounter through life. We also assume the responsibilities that come with the different statuses and identities commensurate with our different role in life.

Children in Ethiopia are expected to show deference to their parents and all other adults and accept their authority over them (Habtamu 1996). The give and take of poor urban-based children's everyday lives is nevertheless repeatedly challenged and re-negotiated by the street children. This is because they have asymmetrical and

contradictory relationships at home with their families and with non-kin adults in the street. They are asked to simultaneously play the role of voiceless dependent children vis-à-vis their parents on the one hand and assume the adult role of home provider for the entire family on the other. Conversely, they are expected to adopt adult-like responsibilities and behaviors in the street.

My findings indicate that there are ongoing changes to the adult on child socializing process among the street children population of Addis Ababa. In many instances street children are more literate, are better informed about street life and more entrepreneurial in their actions than their parents. They are able to help their (more often than not) illiterate mothers deal with officialdom. Many teach their mothers and siblings the intricacy of street work and trade. They often act as their mothers' confidant and in many instances end up assuming the primary role of home providers and caregivers in adolescence or their post adolescence years. They thus end up in playing a role in the socialization of their mothers and siblings. This type of mother child interaction reveals a novel child to adult aspect of socialization.

Cultural values also play an important role in the ways homeless boys and girls perceive and exchange food, in the way they judge each other or lend material and emotional support to each other in time of ill health and bereavement. They have wide ranging knowledge of food taboos, alternative practices to modern healthcare including self-care, folk healing and traditional herbal medicine. These give clues to the fact that homeless children, much like home based children, are socialized into the wider Ethiopian culture before entering street life. All those I have talked to had deliberately abandoned their families aged ten or older. Those who still had contact with their biological families controlled the extent and type of these encounters.

The above homogenizing factors notwithstanding, there are crucial factors that differentiate street children, even those coming from female-headed household. These are related to the mothers' institution-based and people-centered networks. The most important institutionally based network in the lives of poor people is the housing network. Housing permeates many aspects of lone mothers' social, material and cultural life. It affects their experience of integration into neighborhood community based voluntary

associations. It impacts on their ability to form long lasting friendships and identities and thus secure social support in times of adversity, ill health or bereavement.

Since the nationalization of land and houses in 1975 by the then Marxist military regime, the bulk of the houses in Addis Ababa are still government owned and controlled by *Kebele* officials (urban dwellers associations). Street children's mothers ability to access cheap housing and other vital social resources is determined as much by their eligibility to secure these resources as by the type of personal connection they have with government officials. For example, the more centrally located they are within the flow of information of the housing network, the more access they have to social resources in terms of health and education for their children. Street children mothers' community based networks are also linked to people centered support systems. These can be associated to emotional support they can count on in time of illness and bereavement as well as information about jobs, credit and loan facilities. In addition, government, inter-government and non-government organizations often chose their target groups with the help of *Kebele* officials. Being on good terms with *Kebele* workers enables poor mother to access information about such opportunities. It also increases their chances of receiving the material support such organization bring to the poor.

The crucial factor which differentiates street children coming from female heads of household, who might otherwise be homogenous in their abject poverty, is the different access such mothers have to the above mentioned social resources. However, the types of material, social and emotional support street mothers require change over time and form a continuum. This is because of the type of nurturing children need in infancy, childhood and adolescence change. Additionally, there is an age and gender based difference in street children's career in the street and the type of relationship they have with their mothers. The children's ability to contribute to family income and be less of an economic burden to their families changes over time. Furthermore, when the children reach adulthood, they can avail themselves of the goodwill they have established through their mothers' networks to either enter the adult job market or establish a network in their own right thus establishing some kind of across generation continuity in network formation.

All the homeless boys and girls I worked with did have families. The main factor, which differentiated them from home based street children, was that they lacked the nurturing and social support their mothers' networks would have provided them in term of shelter, education and health. The same factor integrated children living with their family into mainstream society and excluded homeless children from the adult organized social world. Unlike home-based street children, homeless boys and girls could count on the supportive element of the wider social environment. There was no permanence, continuity or solidarity to their loose knit group. They did not derive emotional or social support from group strengths unless they were severely ill or bereaved. Most of their social, affective and economic exchanges took the form of an imperfect system of reciprocity. The life histories included in this study reveal the extent to which factors outside the children's control play a significant role in child abuse and streetism. This abuse can be traced to the extremely archaic and oppressive form of child rearing found in Ethiopia. The lack of support and understanding of their life situation by law enforcement officers and civil society resulted in homeless children being stigmatized harassed and discriminated. The case studies also demonstrate that in as much as streetism and homelessness is always lived as a particular kind of human experience, it does have a gendered aspect to it. It also shows how the lack of social and familial support inhibits homeless children's ability to extricate themselves from the street world or be reintegrated into the organized social work in adulthood.

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