Negotiating social identities: the influence of gender, age and ethnicity on young people's 'street careers' in Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper explores the diverse ways that children and young people negotiate their social identities and construct their life course trajectories on the street, based on ethnographic research with street children in Tanzania. Drawing on the concept of a 'street career', I show how differences of age, gender and ethnicity intersect with the time spent on the street, to influence young people's livelihood strategies, use of public space, access to services, and adherence to cultural rites of passage. Using the notion of 'gender performativity', I analyse how young people actively reconfigure gender norms and the concept of 'the family' on the street.

Introduction

There has been a paradigm shift in the literature on street children since the 1970s, directing attention towards the influence of 'time' and 'place' in children's experiences on the street (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003). Recent studies have presented the street as a 'place on the margins' that offers children 'the space and

opportunity to pull away from the constraints of childhood, but in which their presence is seen as uncomfortable and discrepant by many adults' (Matthews, 2003, p.114). Yet despite public perceptions of street children as either 'innocent victims' or 'deviant youths', street children, like all children, are a highly differentiated group of people, with differences of age, gender, ethnicity, class, disability and other characteristics crucially affecting their experiences, self-perceptions and treatment by others (Hill & Tisdall, 1997). Researchers of street children's lives are increasingly exploring the ways that such differences affect their experiences (Baker & Panter-Brick, 2000; Beazley, 2002; Hansson, 2003; Ruvero & Bourdillo, 2003; Aptekar 1988; Aptekar & Heinonen, 2003; Ennew, 2003).

The emerging paradigm of childhood studies recognises that 'childhood' is a socially constructed concept which varies according to historical and socio-cultural perceptions of 'the child' as well as according to the socio-economic and political context within which children's lives are situated (James & Prout, 1997). Comparative and cross-cultural research reveals a multiplicity of diverse childhoods (*ibid*). However, proponents of childhood studies argue that there is still a tendency to regard childhood as a homogenous, universal phenomenon, and call for more research on the intersection of issues of age, gender, class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, amongst others (Jenks, 2004; Thorne, 2004).

This article explores the intersection of issues of age, gender and ethnicity in relation to the life course trajectories of young people in Tanzania. Based on empirical research with street children in Arusha, I analyse how young people negotiate their social identities, within the constraints and possibilities of the social institution of

childhood and prevailing gender norms. Before discussing young people's accounts, however, the article introduces key theoretical strands drawn on throughout the paper. Firstly, the concept of identity is discussed, which informs the paper as a whole. This is followed by discussion of theorizations of age, gender and ethnicity, which underpin the three substantive sections of the paper.

Identity

Theorizations of identity provide some insight into the ways that individuals negotiate intersectionalities (the complex interplay of lines of difference and inequality such as age, gender and class) in their everyday lives. Within the social sciences, there has been increasing recognition of the multiple, fluid and often contradictory nature of identities (Weedon, 1999; Jenkins, 2000). Identity has come to be seen as 'not fixed or ascribed, but emerging out of and through people's social relationships' (Hockey & James, 2003, p.6).

Jenkins defines the process of individual and collective identification as a dialectic interaction between 'internal and external definition', based on 'a name (the nominal) and an experience (the virtual)' (1997, p.72). Thus the process of defining our identity by name and in experience is 'dynamic, relatively ambiguous and will be heavily influenced by wider society' (Nazroo and Karlsen, 2003, p. 904). Indeed, the external definition of a particular social group by society affects the self-image of those defined in this way (ibid). Jenkins' definition of identity draws on Goffman's (1959) ideas about the presentation of the self in every day life, amongst others. Goffman uses metaphors of performance to describe social interaction, suggesting that there is

no necessary consistency in selfhood but rather a range of revelations of self (Jenkins, 1997). Furthermore, individuals are engaged in a process of impression management, in which they seek validation by others of their presentation of self (ibid).

Age and moral careers

Several authors suggest that a life course perspective is useful in childhood research, since it draws attention to theorizations of age and the connectedness of age-related life phases (Thorne, 2004; Hockey & James, 2003). Theorizing the influence of age in the construction of social identities brings in 'processes of temporality' (James et al., 1998), including the 'continuing constitution and reconstitution of persons - cognitively, emotionally, socially - as they move through the life course' (Thorne, 2004, p.405). Furthermore, some researchers of street children argue that the concept of a street or homeless 'career' is a useful analytic device for moving away from snap-shot descriptions of children and focusing attention instead on temporal changes in self-perceptions and social experiences, and on more long-term outcomes of homelessness (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994; Panter-Brick, 2002; 2004; Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003).

This concept has its origins in Goffman's [1961] and Becker (1963)'s studies of social deviance. Goffman defined the moral aspects of the concept of 'career' in terms of an individual's changing self-perceptions and 'felt identity' within a social system: 'the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person's self and in his [sic] framework of imagery for judging himself and others' (1991, p.119). Throughout this paper, and particularly in the analysis of the influence of age, the concept of a moral

or street 'career' is useful to illustrate the processes by which young people construct and negotiate their social identities over time on the street.

Performing gender

Street girls appear to subvert norms of 'gender' as well as norms of 'childhood' (Hecht, 1998; Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998), and face dual inequalities in the street environment on the basis of gender and age. Studies in the UK, Indonesia and South Africa suggest that girls' use of public space often differs from that of boys (Matthews *et al.*, 2000; Beazley, 2002; Hansson, 2003), and that girls are perceived as 'occupying an ambiguous and often uncomfortable position of being the "wrong" gender and being in the "wrong" place' (Skelton, 2000, p.80).

Butler's (1990) concept of 'gender performativity' provides a useful way of theorising this process. 'Gender' is conceived as a set of acts that are reiterated to produce the appearance of a stable identity category in the regulation of hegemonic norms. Butler argues that society punishes individuals who do not conform:

> It is a *compulsory* performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions (Butler, 1993a, p.315).

Furthermore, Butler's notion of 'iterability' suggests that through the constant repetition of gender performances in different contexts, exclusory norms of the family can be subverted (Butler, 1993b; Alsop *et al.,* 2002). Indeed, theorizing about the life course has challenged the idea of 'home' as a fixed space within which different members of the family live, and embraces a broader definition of home as 'where and how identities come into being' (Hockey & James, 2003, p.175). These ideas are useful in exploring the ways that young people subvert gender norms and actively reconfigure notions of the 'family' and 'home' as they seek independent lifestyles in urban areas.

Ethnicity and cultural values

As with theorizations of identity, a social constructionist approach to ethnicity and cultural differentiation recognises that ethnic identity is 'situationally variable and negotiable' (Jenkins, 1997, p.50). Jenkins develops the notion of a dialectic relationship between internal and external processes of identification, which has individual and collective consequences in different contexts (*ibid*). Much of the empirical and theoretical work on ethnicity/ 'race' has been concerned to understand social inequalities, focusing on the external process of identity definition and social categorisation (Nazroo & Karlsen, 2003; Jenkins, 1997). However, Jenkins argues that internal processes of self-identification are just as important and that 'hierarchical difference is not *definitive* of ethnic relations' (1997, p.75). Jenkins emphasises the importance of understanding the individual and collective consequences of ethnic identity in different contexts or 'ethnicity's real-world materiality' in order to account for why ethnic affiliations are so locally variable in their strength and salience (2000,

p.8). The section of this article on ethnicity and cultural values draws on Jenkins's concept of ethnic identity and Goffman's notion of identity as performance.

Methodology

This paper is based on findings from ethnographic research conducted with children in difficult circumstances while I worked as a development worker at Urafiki Centre for Street Children (UCSC)[1] in Arusha, northern Tanzania from 1999-2000, followed by a further two months of fieldwork in 2002. Childhood researchers increasingly recognise children's marginalized status relative to adults, in terms of discourses of childhood, power relations, organisational structures and social inequalities (Christensen & James, 2000). Hence, researchers, both ethically and practically, have a responsibility to take this into account during the research process (*ibid*). A child-focused participatory methodology was considered most appropriate for this study, since this enabled children to participate in the research process, was sensitive to, and sought to address concerns about power relations between 'researcher' and 'researched', and paid attention to differentials of age, gender and ethnicity. The ethical importance of listening to children's views and valuing their narratives guided my approach. In the interests of confidentiality, the names of all research participants and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with children in Arusha have been changed.

I conducted tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews in Kiswahili with 16 young people in 2000 (nine boys and seven girls [2], aged 11-20 years). Ten young people were staying at street children residential centres, while six lived on the street or in

temporary accommodation at the time of the interview. In 2002 unstructured

interviews were conducted with six of the original interviewees who were still in

contact with UCSC. Focus groups were also conducted with ten girls and boys living

on the street and 23 girls and boys staying at NGO centres. Participant observation

was conducted at UCSC, on the street and on a visit to the Tanzanite gemstone mining

site near Arusha. I visited the family homes of 12 street children, three of which I

revisited two years later and conducted interviews with three of their parents/

guardians. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 professionals

working with street children in the NGO and statutory sectors in Arusha and Dar es

Salaam. While the experiences of such a small number of young people are not

generalisable, they offer insight into a diverse range of coping strategies and life

course trajectories of children and young people who have spent a period of time

living and working on the street.

Many researchers have commented on the difficulty of defining 'street children'

(Glauser, 1997; Panter-Brick, 2000), since the term implies a dichotomy between

children who use the street to live and work and 'normal' children who live at home.

Locally-articulated definitions of 'street children' emerged from focus groups with

children on the street, those living in institutions or temporary accommodation

following a period on the street, project staff and parents. These discussions

consistently emphasised difficulties in children's home situations and children's

agency in escaping to urban areas. The term *watoto wa mitaani* [literally, 'children of

the streets'] is used here to describe children who, as a group of street boys staying at

UCSC said: *'live in the streets in difficult circumstances, who have run away from*

home because of problems'. The children staying in institutions identified themselves

as 'street children', hence, this local definition includes children living in institutions following a period spent on the street, as well as those currently living and working on the street.

The trusting relationships I developed with young people through my work for UCSC influenced the composition of the sample: a larger proportion of the young people were staying in institutional settings compared to those currently on the street. This fact may to some extent, affect the young people's level of reintegration into their 'home' communities and their adherence to cultural practices. However, young people's street careers are characterised by considerable movement between the street, institutions, and home; hence, notions of children living on the street and those living in institutions should not be seen as fixed categories. I acknowledge, however, that the young people at the centre may have been influenced by my role as a teacher/ social worker, seeking my approval for their ideas and perceptions of their situations.

I found participatory methods, such as focus groups, drawings and photographic exercises particularly appropriate in engaging young people in the research. Participatory methods are considered particularly useful in enabling children to have more control over the representation of their lives (Christensen & James, 2000). Photography has increasingly been recognised as a particularly suitable ethnographic medium to develop successful collaborative or participatory projects (Pink, 2001). This article discusses photographs produced by a group of boys and of girls (aged 14-16), who were given disposable cameras to take photographs of their activities on the street during a 24-hour period. The young people received a copy of their photographs and explained to me what the images showed. My interpretation of the

images is based both on the young people's comments and my observations of their everyday activities, supported by the theoretical concepts used in this paper.

'Street careers' and Age

Drawing on Goffman's (1991) concept of a 'moral career' and theorizations of age, the research in Arusha found that age and processes of temporality had a significant influence on young people's life course trajectories on the street.

Moral careers

The study explored young people's self-perceptions of their lives on the street and their perspectives of how society constructed them as 'deviant'. Both boys' and girls' overwhelming perception was that life on the streets was 'bad' in terms of their physical and emotional wellbeing. This was related to difficulties in meeting their basic needs, an unhygienic living environment which made them vulnerable to illness, experiences of harassment, verbal and physical abuse, violence and sexual abuse. Furthermore, they seemed to have internalised negative connotations of 'street life' dominant in the wider community, accepting the normative view that street life is morally 'bad'. This was linked to the 'deviant' behaviour they were forced to adopt as survival strategies, such as drug use, stealing, commercial sex work, violence and sexual abuse. These accounts appear to illustrate notions of a 'moral' or 'deviant' career in which collective, external identifications of 'deviance' become incorporated into an individual's self-image or internal identification (Jenkins, 2004). While it was easier for boys and girls staying at NGO centres to condemn bad 'street' behaviour, such as using drugs and stealing, as morally wrong, those living on the street found

themselves in a contradictory situation: while they considered such behaviour 'bad', they themselves followed the 'street' lifestyle that they condemned and faced considerable peer pressure to conform. One of the boys living on the street explained: *'if you refuse to smoke marijuana or sniff glue with your mates, they beat you up and you are considered an outcast'* [3].

Despite exposure to often traumatic experiences, girls and boys demonstrated considerable resilience through developing social networks with their peers, adults (such as night watchmen and shopkeepers) and 'shopping around' (UNICEF, 1999) different street children centres to meet their needs for food, clothing, medical treatment, protection, education and entertainment. The young people also mentioned several positive aspects of street life, which partially offset the risks and difficulties they experienced. These included freedom of movement, both within and beyond Arusha, educational opportunities from street children centres, the attractions of 'modern' urban lifestyles such as freedom to watch television and films in bars, employment opportunities for a cash income, and the sense of empowerment they gained by earning their own money and leading independent lives away from forms of adult control within the household. This suggests that while young people may internalise stigmatised labels of 'deviance', they also resist such external definitions through their everyday interactions on the street.

Age and temporality

Age and processes of temporality also influenced young people's self-perceptions. Their accounts implied that street life became more difficult as they grew older and spent longer periods on the street. Younger street children and those who commented retrospectively on their street careers when they were younger tended to emphasise more positive aspects of street life. One of the boys (aged 11) felt that life on the streets was good, enjoying the freedom of the street and friendships with his peers. The survival strategies that he and his friends described ensured that they usually had sufficient food and that they were protected at night by night watchmen: *'When I'm full there's no problem. It's good, isn't it [on the street], because there's no one to beat you hard, and food's no problem.[...] I like living with my mates, we play together, there's no quarrels'.*

Indeed, when the attractions of urban lifestyles are weighed up against extremely poor and sometimes abusive, home environments (Evans, 2004), it is perhaps surprising how many children from poor households do stay at home. Moreover, children's participation in the informal sector in Tanzania is fuelled by the macro-economic and political context of urbanisation, structural adjustment, and globalisation. As Hecht comments:

> The political economy […] is a part of the backdrop against which street children assess the benefits of leaving the street and returning to the fold of working, nurturing childhood (Hecht, 1998, p.195).

When faced with a political economy that offers little material benefit, Hecht (1998) argues that it is children's sense of a 'moral economy', that is, children's sense of

responsibility for reproducing the notion of family, that makes them stay at home. When he was younger, one of the young people interviewed, Adam (aged 17), experienced a combination of extreme poverty, his father's alcoholism and domestic violence at home; thus, there were few incentives to stay. Conversely, street life offered the opportunity to earn a cash income and the freedom to spend it as he chose, giving him a sense of liberation from oppressive adult-child relationships: *'I liked begging because I got money and when I got money I could do whatever I wanted with it, even if you want to smoke marijuana, there's no one to control you'*. Similarly, one of the girls (aged 14) commented, *'I used to like to live on the streets because I saw that I was free. I could go wherever I wanted'*. Many of the boys drew pictures of long distance buses and described how they enjoyed travelling around Tanzania and even across the border to Nairobi. This suggests that travelling between towns and cities appeals to children's sense of freedom and the thrill of adventure. Street life is thus characterised by a series of paradoxes and contrasts, as other studies have shown (Baker, 1998; Hecht, 1998), and younger children's accounts suggest that their negative experiences are mediated by the pleasures and thrill of subverting the 'norms' of adult society.

Livelihood strategies and deviance

The research suggests that age and time spent on the street also influence the livelihood strategies available to young people within the informal sector in Tanzania. The young people all cited begging as the first strategy they employed to earn money. Their accounts suggested that the effectiveness of this strategy was related to their

age, adult attitudes towards children and time spent on the street. Public perceptions of 'street children' were linked to dominant global concepts of childhood as either passive innocent victims, or as un-socialised or anti-social youths. One of the young people's accounts shows how the notion of a young street child as a 'cute, innocent, victim' influenced his success at begging from wealthy Western tourists: *'I went to beg from the tourists and because I was little, they used to give me food, money and I was very happy. I used to be able to get 2,000 Tsh. or 5,000 Tsh.* [equivalent to £5]'.

Younger street children thus may be more able to elicit compassion and a handout from tourists, due to Western concepts of childhood, which perceive younger children as 'innocent victims', according with research conducted in Brazil, Indonesia and Ethiopia (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998; Beazley, 2002; Aptekar & Heinonen, 2003). Older street children, on the other hand, may be forced to resort to stealing, due to public perceptions that they are 'deviant' youths engaging in criminal acts, who do not deserve a handout. As Ennew & Swart-Kruger comment, 'The transformation from victim to delinquent occurs as time changes children into youth' (2003, p.7). Thus, begging was a less reliable survival strategy for more physically mature street children, forcing young women and men to engage in more 'deviant' activities, such as theft and commercial sex work.

While street youths are conceptualised as 'deviant' and are marginalized by society, they also appear to perpetrate patriarchal social relations, and younger street children are a group over whom they can exert some power. As Walkerdine argues, 'An individual can become powerful or powerless depending on the terms in which his/ her subjectivity is constituted' (1990, p.5). Participant observation and interview data

suggest that younger street children face considerable harassment, violence, theft and sexual abuse from older street youths. One boy commented: *'there are the older boys there, if they find you with something, they grab it and beat you up. And the police, them too, if they find you they beat you, they used to practise on us'.* The girls' experiences, however, suggested that gender, rather than age, was a more significant factor in their vulnerability to harassment, as Maua (aged 14) commented: *'The street children beat you, the older boys, even the younger ones beat you over and over again. They insult you again and again, sometimes, you want to throw things at them'.* These accounts show that age, and the accompanying increased physical strength, combined with processes of temporality, represent key factors which influence boys' stage of 'moral career'.

Age and institutional support

Age divisions and increasing physical maturity also seemed to have a detrimental impact on the moral careers of young people living in institutions. When asked if the needs of street children varied according to age, project staff perceived a difference in terms of educational priorities. The experiences of one of the boys revealed the inappropriateness of formal primary education for young people who have missed out on several years of school due to time spent on the street. Devi (aged 17) was studying in Standard Three of primary school and living at the centre when he returned to the street for over a year. In an interview two years later, he said that he had found maths and English particularly difficult, and was embarrassed studying in a class with much younger children. Following contact with project workers, Devi

returned to the centre, where he was studying carpentry and construction. This suggests that young people do not feel their needs for vocational training are being met by the system of formal primary education offered by street children institutions, and they may express their agency by returning to the street for temporary or more permanent periods.

Similarly, the life course trajectory of Juma (aged 14) highlighted how institutional provision defined strictly according to age divisions could have a negative effect on young people's moral careers and transition to adulthood. Project workers attempted to reintegrate Juma into his father's polygamous household, although his parents were separated. Juma said he was harassed by his step-mother and returned to the centre after a period on the street. Throughout the interview, he expressed a sense of anxiety about his future, worrying that when he became 15, he would have to leave the centre: *'I feel good, but not very good, because I am still asking for help and because you stay here until you're fifteen and I haven't got a good foundation for my life yet. […] I was told that when I become fifteen, they want me to leave'.* This relates to the institution's policy aim to concentrate on younger street children, that is, those under the age of fifteen, as they were deemed easier to 'reintegrate' (UCSC, 1999). Juma's concerns reflect the findings of a UNICEF study (1999) that street children staying at NGO centres complained that there was little preparation for life once they became too old for the institutions. When interviewed two years later, Juma continued to live at the centre and was attending a three-year vocational training course in construction work, supported by a private sponsor. However when he finished the course, he still felt dependent on the NGO for financial support in order to rent his own accommodation and improve his basic skills. These examples suggest that street

children institutions may create a culture of dependency and, constrained by a lack of resources, are ill-equipped to support young people's varied needs, interests and aspirations as they seek to make the transition to independent adulthood.

Gendered life course trajectories

The literature on street girls in Tanzania expresses concern that, although girls only represent an estimated 20-30 per cent of the total numbers of street youth [4], they are considered to be at more risk than boys due to sexual exploitation, sexual violence and the consequent high risk of infection from sexually transmitted diseases and HIV in particular (Mwakyanjala, 1996; Africa Education Fund International, 1998). The research in Arusha found that gender was a salient differential which influenced young people's social identities, use of public space, and 'street careers'.

Sexual vulnerability

Many of the young people (both male and female) perceived girls to be more vulnerable than boys to sexual violence whilst living on the street, supporting the notion of being the 'wrong' gender and in the 'wrong' place. One of the interviewees, Farida (aged 18) explained that she was a young mother who supported herself through commercial sex work. She highlighted the problems girls face in terms of sexual violence and becoming pregnant on the street:

It's easy for boys, they are more able to survive on the streets. Girls get more problems, a youth could want you and force you and you don't want him, he beats you. Or you can get pregnant and the youth rejects you.

However, the experiences of boys participating in the study showed that younger boys are also vulnerable to rape and abuse from older street youth, night watchmen, the police and other men. Thus, as UNICEF notes, 'What little research evidence exists about the dangers to which children on the street are exposed in African societies seems not to bear out the hypothesis of exclusively female sexual vulnerability' (1999, p.282).

The widely held perception of girls' greater sexual vulnerability was accompanied by girls' experience of higher levels of discrimination and verbal and physical abuse from members of the public. In focus groups, the girls said that they were most commonly referred to by adults, the police and other street boys and youth as *malaya* and *machangudoa* [slang for 'prostitute'], and sometimes as *vibaka* [meaning 'pickpockets'], or *kapurwa* ['street kid']. The boys, however, only mentioned the less stigmatising terms *kapurwa*, *watoto wa mitaani* [meaning 'street children', commonly used by NGO staff] and *nyoka* [literally means 'snake', used to refer to 'skinny' boys who work in the mines].

Gendered livelihood strategies

In addition to experiencing higher levels of discrimination and the perceived risk of sexual violence, the employment opportunities in the informal sector available to girls were more limited than for boys. While some girls had engaged in small business activities, begging or theft, in interviews, many of the street girls said that they were employed as domestic workers within people's homes for periods of up to several months, where they were sometimes exploited and harassed. Many girls and young women engaged in sexual relationships with older men or youths in exchange for resources, and some referred to occasionally engaging in commercial sex work. Conversely, boys were more able to survive by begging, doing a range of casual jobs in the informal sector, or working in hazardous conditions in the mining industry. Thus, the social position of street girls is doubly marginal to that of street boys, in terms of discrimination and income-generation opportunities, which reflects studies in Indonesia, South Africa and Zimbabwe (Beazley, 2002; Hansson, 2003; Rurevo & Bourdillon, 2003).

The narratives of the young women suggest that their 'street careers' were characterised by considerable fluidity of movement between the street, periods of domestic work in exchange for food, shelter and financial support, staying with friends and boyfriends, and sometimes NGO institutions. They would rarely stay in households where they performed domestic work for longer than a few months and often left if they felt they were being exploited or abused. Amina (aged 14) explained how she had started living on the street:

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I went to her house, and went to live there. Then sister wanted to go away, to take her child to Moshi. She told me, "I'm taking my child to Moshi, where are you going to live?" I decided to go back to town. I walked round and round, I met Halima and her friends, I went round with her, up to now. […] Then I left to work for a man, I didn't want to live on the streets anymore. I went to this man's place and stayed with his wife and child. His wife ran away, left with her child and came to Arusha. I carried on living there, this man worked in the hunting business. I saw that there was no one left for me to stay behind with, and thought it was better for me to come back to town.

In an interview two years later, Amina said she had spent periods performing domestic labour in different households, and staying with friends or a boyfriend. This illustrates the fluidity of young women's 'street careers', as they weigh up the benefits and costs of adopting different livelihood strategies from the limited options available to them. The narrative of Upendo (aged 17), a young woman staying at Theresa Centre [5] who used to engage in commercial sex work also illustrates this sense of mobility and transience:

We used to live in a guest house. We used to stay two to a room, and other girls each had their own room. […] We stayed for a long time, then I went to [Tanzanite mining town] for three months. When I came back, I didn't stay for long in the guest house, about one week, then I came here.

The girls participating in the study all came from households affected by chronic poverty, as did the majority of boys (Evans, 2004). Many girls who engage in

domestic work or commercial sex work are motivated to migrate to urban areas to earn a cash income in order to support themselves and sometimes their relatives. Upendo (cited above) was motivated by altruistic feelings towards her extended family in response to chronic poverty:

> I used to feel bad but there was no alternative. […] Life was tough at home, I saw my relatives suffering and thought, I'll go and find a life in town, then I can help my relatives.

However, for some girls, seeking domestic work as an employment strategy within the households of unrelated adults in cities and towns could be seen as a way of rejecting traditional gender roles in which they are expected to perform domestic tasks within the home without receiving any financial payment. This suggests that despite girls' doubly marginal position on the street, they are actively challenging hegemonic gender norms by pursuing independent lifestyles in urban areas. Stambach (2000) describes similar strategies among more educated young women in the Kilimanjaro region, referring to so-called 'city-sisters' who orient themselves towards an urban and independent life, as opposed to becoming 'stay-at-home mothers'. This also reflects research in Indonesia, where young women perceived the city as offering more opportunity and freedom than the village, and was often 'a source of liberation' (Beazley, 2002, p.1674).

Discrimination and access to services

Several studies highlight the fact that most of the thirty-six street children centres in Tanzania provide services predominantly to boys, and the number of girls in projects which do provide services to both boys and girls is very minimal (Lugalla & Barongo, 2000; UNICEF, 1999). During fieldwork, UCSC responded to the identified lack of provision for street girls in Arusha by building girls dormitories and employing more female social workers and nurses. By the end of 2002, eight girls aged 8-14 were accommodated at the centre where they lived with roughly 50 boys.

While the girls appeared to value the educational opportunities offered by the NGO, the experiences of one of the girls suggested that such institutions may not be aware of the significance of girls' peer relationships to their moral careers. Amina (then aged 16) stayed at the centre with the younger girls for several months and attended a vocational training school. Soon after the younger girls were moved to UCSC's other residential centre to attend primary school, Amina stopped attending school regularly and left the centre to stay with other street girls. Amina cited the lack of peer company, inadequate provision of school equipment, and restrictive rules imposed by project staff which infringed her freedom of movement, as the factors influencing her decision to leave the institution. She expressed a desire to continue her studies, but commented on the difficulty of being the only girl at the centre, missing the friendship and support of her female friends: *'You're lonely here just with the boys, without any other girls here with me. Before the other girls left, I stayed here properly, I did well, I didn't used to go anywhere, I lived here with them properly'*. This suggests the need, within an institution dominated by boys, for girls to be accommodated with their female friends, in recognition of the value that girls place on their friendships and the effect that a lack of peer company can have on their street careers.

Prior to this, Theresa Centre [5] was the only residential centre in Arusha that provided services specifically aimed towards young women from poor backgrounds. One project co-ordinator in Arusha felt that the stigma of prostitution affected the responses taken by NGOs:

> The difference comes only with the stigma, the label that society puts on them. Boys are called robbers, thieves, difficult children – this is the label. The girls are labelled as prostitutes, therefore their needs are different only because of the stigma.

This corresponds to the findings of a UNICEF study (1999), when project directors of street children institutions expressed their concerns about the perceived difficulties involved in accommodating girls, stemming from assumptions that girls on the street are involved in prostitution and are likely to become pregnant (Lugalla & Barongo, 2000).

Established by Christian brothers in 1999, Theresa Centre provided accommodation and training opportunities for up to seven young women who had completed primary or secondary school so that they could gain skills to become 'self-reliant', as an alternative to commercial sex work or domestic work as a 'house girl'. In an interview, the manager explained that staff often found it difficult to stop the young women from going back to town at night and had had to introduce rules restricting girls' absence from the centre at night, being late back, or telling lies when asking for permission to visit her family, which could all result in being expelled from the

centre, following a warning. Although the girls confirmed that the rules of the centre had been drawn up in consultation with them, these comments suggest that the project aimed to 'rescue' girls from the street, driven by restrictive notions of girls' sexuality, which were likely to be linked to the Christian philosophy of the centre. This reflects the findings of a UNICEF study (1999), which argued that street girls, who, like street boys, were accustomed to their independence on the street, were likely to reject such restrictive, predominantly Christian institutions and 'escape once more to the freedom of the street' (*ibid*, p.282). Thus, the discrimination and stigma associated with girls' presence on the street appears to be mirrored in their access to service provision, as well as in their treatment by service providers, reinforcing the notion that street girls are the 'wrong' gender in the 'wrong' place.

Constructing boys' and girls' places

Butler's (1990) concept of 'gender performativity' helps to explain the stigmatisation of young women in public spaces. In Tanzania, as in many diverse countries, prevailing gender norms mean that girls are seen as responsible for domestic duties within the home, while boys have more freedom to explore public space and engage in income-generation activities in urban areas (Koda, 2000; Bendera, 1999; Omari & Mbilinyi, 1997). Indeed, as girls reach puberty, their identities are perceived primarily in terms of their sexuality (Rajani & Kudrati, 1996). Girls who do not conform to conventional gender roles, such as street girls, destabilise the identity category 'female' and subvert norms of 'gender' as well as norms of 'childhood'. Since street girls cannot be situated in their conventional place as daughters, sisters,

wives or mothers performing domestic duties in the home, they are overwhelmingly characterised as sexual beings, and the stigma of prostitution is attached to them. Girls' doubly marginal position on the street, in terms of discrimination and income-generation opportunities, and the lack of service provision for street girls compared to that available to street boys, can be seen as society's punishment of the girls and reassertion of dominant gender norms.

Public perceptions and the stigma associated with their presence on the street mean that young people tend to construct different urban spaces as dangerous or safe. Girls and boys identified different gendered places for shelter in order to minimise the risk of harassment and abuse. Many of the interviewees said that they slept with their peers in separate gender groups on the pavement under overhanging shop fronts, or at the bus stand. However, despite being found in groups, the street children in Arusha rarely formed organised, stable gangs (as noted by Hecht, 1998 and Aptekar & Heinonen, 2003), with the exception of one young woman who was involved in a gang for stealing. Many of the boys mentioned a relatively stable attachment to territories, where they regularly slept under the protection of a night watchman. Some boys said that they slept in the gutters, or in the bushes, while one boy used to ask people if he could sleep on the veranda of their house. As discussed earlier, street girls faced greater discrimination and stigma on the street and therefore often stayed in guesthouses, or in temporary accommodation with girlfriends or boyfriends/ partners for periods of up to several months, rather than sleeping rough. This partly explains the less visible presence of girls on the street.

The photographs taken by street boys and girls illustrate how young people construct different gendered places and negotiate their identities on the street [6]. The boys' photographs show themselves in public spaces with their male friends, engaging in a range of activities: watching a pickup van containing beer bottles for the owner in return for payment; buying a cigarette; crouching in front of a popular tourist café, where they were often chased away from; hanging out in the evening on an area of wasteland; and a boy showing off a watch while the other put a finger up at the camera in front of an independence monument in a park where they often played football and relaxed in the afternoons. The photographs illustrate the boys' friendships and camaraderie with each other, and show the boys parodying stereotypical assumptions about their 'deviant' behaviour in the centre of town, where they are considered a social embarrassment and nuisance to foreign visitors. Thus, the images suggest that street boys enjoy resisting and subverting norms of public space and adult society.

The photographs taken by street girls differ markedly from those taken by the boys and suggest that girls construct their own gendered places in urban areas within predominantly private spheres. The images show the girls in domestic settings, outside the two rooms rented by one of the girls' mother, where they had lived together for the past few months. The girls appear engaging in a range of activities: hanging out with older boys (who they told me were their boyfriends); washing dishes wearing the conventional *kitenge* cloth worn by women; playing with one of the girls' younger brothers; posing in more 'Western'-style clothes looking 'tough' with fists clenched by their sides; dancing; and applying lipstick in the evening, using a paraffin lamp to see in the mirror. In the same way as the boys' photographs, these images

show the girls playfully resisting dominant norms, refuting the stigmatised label, 'prostitute' by parodying stereotypical images of themselves and showing themselves in different styles and poses. Using Goffman's (1991) concept of identity as a performance, the girls present a variety of revelations of the self. The images also illustrate how young women construct their own gendered sense of place or what Beazley (2002, p.1679) calls 'geographies of resistance' within the urban environment.

Reconfiguring notions of 'home' and 'the family'

Life course perspectives challenge the notion of 'home' as a fixed space in which family members live, defining 'home' instead in terms of a fluidity of movement in which identities emerge through people's social relationships (Hockey & James, 2003). Street children can be seen as actively reconfiguring traditional notions of 'home' and 'the family'. By making their home on the street or in institutions, they are redefining their social identities and organising their living arrangements among their peers rather than within traditional kinship relations. Households in Tanzania are characterised by considerable diversity of size and composition, but according to the Demographic and Health Survey (1991/2), the majority of households in urban and rural areas are extended – that is they contain three or more related adults (Omari, 1995). Children who move to the street can be seen as rejecting such kinship relations and household structures, which, in their narratives of 'home', they often experienced as oppressive (Evans, 2004).

The photographs and interviews suggest that the stage of young people's 'street careers' and processes of temporality have a significant influence on the ways that young people negotiate their relationships with their peers and reconfigure concepts of 'home' and 'family'. The life course trajectories of boys who had spent several years on the street illustrate this process. I originally met Joshua (aged 14) when he was staying at the UCSC project in 1999. In an interview at the mining site in 2002, he explained that he spent a few months working at the mines and then returned to Arusha, where he slept on the street with his friends. When I saw him again a year later, he rented a room in town with one of his peers. Thus, the street seemed to represent a transitional stage before he could assume a more independent status by renting his own accommodation with a friend and earning a livelihood in the informal sector.

Similarly, the street careers of young women may involve them moving into a rented room with their male partners, particularly if they became pregnant, creating a new sense of 'home' and 'family'. By living with a partner and creating a conventional domestic life together, Rajani & Kudrati suggest that 'relationships are viewed as one way to recreate families that the street girls have lost or never had' (1996, p.314). The girls referred to their friends' male partners as their 'husbands', and one of the street girls who was pregnant and lived with her partner intended to get married soon. Despite their experiences of sex as power, intimidation and practical exchange, Rajani & Kudrati (*ibid*) suggest that many street girls continue to experience sexual feeling in terms of love, physical attraction and yearning for friendship. Indeed, Holland *et al.* argue that 'femininity is constructed from within heterosexuality and on male territory' (1998, p.11), and it is 'through individual women's participation and

collusion that heterosexuality becomes so firmly embedded within the discourse of masculinity' (Hockey & James, 2003, p.150). Thus, the young women interviewed could be seen as participating and colluding in hegemonic gender relations and reaffirming heterosexuality. Indeed, Amina (then aged 16) suggested that patriarchal power relations and violence characterised both her and her friend's heterosexual relationships:

A: I used to live with a youth called Amir. Now I'm staying at Tausi's place. I left that youth because he used to hit me. He told me if I go anywhere, even not very far away, when I came back he used to hit me. He said, 'why are you going there? You have to stay here', he just told me, 'don't go anywhere'.

RE: And now you live with Tausi, Maua, Regina [friends who were street girls] and who else?

A: Tausi's mother and her little brothers. […]

RE: Where does Blandina live now?

A: Blandina lives with her 'husband', who is called Rajabu, but her 'husband' is not a good person. They go and drink together and later then he hits her. To tell the truth, I'd really like to help Blandina, but there's no point anymore, because if you tell her, she says I can't leave Rajabu again.

However, as Hockey & James point out, it is 'within the privacy of one-to-one sexual relationships that young women exercise some degree of power and agency, or at least [can potentially] engage in a process of empowerment' (2003, p.150). This illustrates the notion of 'iterability'; through the constant repetition of gender performances in different contexts, such as homelessness and dislocation from conventional kinship

relations, restrictive and exclusory norms of the family become destabilised and subverted (Butler, 1993b; Alsop *et al.,* 2002). This enables new meanings and more empowering and supportive family forms to emerge. The interview cited above and the photographs the girls took outside one of their mothers' rooms indicate that street girls may stay with female friends for periods of up to several months as an escape from abusive relationships, or as a strategy to avoid sleeping on the street. Thus, young women appear to reconfigure notions of the 'home' and 'family' through their friendships with their peers and other women, whom they live alongside, and construct such female-headed households in urban areas as safe, gendered places.

Ethnicity and cultural values

Some researchers emphasise the importance of ethnicity and cultural values in understanding how multiple lines of difference and inequality shape young people's experiences on the street (Aptekar & Heinonen, 2003). Tanzania is characterised by considerable diversity of ethnic groups, and in the Arusha region, the main ethnic groups are *Waarusha* and *Chagga*, while other minority groups include Asians, *Pare*, and small tribes from neighbouring regions (Kadonya *et al.*, 2002). This section draws on Jenkins' (1997) concept of ethnic identity as well as Goffman's (1959) notion of identity and social interaction as a performance. Belonging to particular ethnic groups, however, did not appear to significantly affect young people's self-perceptions and social relations on the street.

Collective street identity

Through observations and discussions, it is evident that both boys and girls felt a sense of collective identity as '*watoto wa mitaani*' [literally 'children of the street'] and experienced solidarity and companionship with one another, regardless of ethnic group. Young people tended to stay together in loose-knit groupings of mixed ethnicity and usually of the same gender. Many of the boys acquired nicknames amongst their peers in the street environment, which sometimes referred to their ethnic group, such as *Maasai, Mpare* and *Mbulu*. However, such nicknames did not appear to be associated with negative connotations.

While the young people clearly valued their friendships with one another, they felt ambivalent about the extent to which they could rely on each other for emotional support and advice. Indeed, some children commented on the difficulty of reconciling 'bad' advice from their friends with their own moral values and on their attempts to avoid peer pressure, for example, to use drugs, while maintaining their friendships. The children's responses seem to indicate a sense of solidarity among their peers, but simultaneously, an overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness on the street, where many children told me that a philosophy of 'each for themselves' ruled. This reflects findings of research in Addis Ababa, which argued that children's strong desire for personal autonomy seemed to limit the development of enduring emotional attachments and mutual ties of responsibility (Aptekar & Heinonen, 2003). Nevertheless, observations and interview data suggest that, particularly in cases of illness or injury, street children relied on their social networks with each other, other adults, or NGOs to access medical treatment and, to some extent, for advice and emotional support.

Performing the 'cultural stuff' of ethnicity

Belonging to particular ethnic groups and expressing an ethnic identity appeared to have a greater influence on young people's self-perceptions, social relations and ties to their 'home' communities than it did amongst their peers on the street. This is linked to the individual and collective consequences of ethnic identity in different contexts (Jenkins, 2000). Kiswahili was the common language used on the street, as throughout Tanzania, which meant that young people's ability to speak their local language often diminished in relation to the period of time spent away from their 'home' communities. The example of a young man, Onessmo discussed below demonstrates how this loss of language could be problematic for young people who wish to be reintegrated into their rural 'home' communities. Furthermore, in the rare case of adoption of street children by unrelated adults, children may find themselves having to learn a new language and to adhere to the social values of the dominant ethnic group to feel a sense of belonging to their adopted 'home' community. This was illustrated by the case of two young street boys who had been staying at the UCSC centre and who were adopted by a childless couple from a different ethnic group. As their adoptive father commented, following teasing by their peers, the boys were quick to learn the new language to 'pass' as belonging to the dominant ethnic group and feel accepted within their adopted rural 'home':

> To a great extent, they have already become part of our tribe [*Waarusha*], they already know the language completely […] When they were at school, often

when they started there, the children teased them about being from a different tribe, but they didn't like those kind of jokes, later they tried to learn the language, they were happy with the environment here, they were happy with our tribe, they don't have any problems at all. They have learnt the culture of the people of this region.

This example suggests that the material consequences of ethnic identity were such that the boys quickly learned what Barth called the 'cultural stuff' or 'content' of ethnicity in order to present the self as belonging to the dominant ethnic group (Jenkins, 1997, p.12). This corresponds to the notion of identity as a performance, in which individuals seek to manage impressions of themselves. Thus, while young people experience, or may feel the need to conform to, a sense of collective identity regardless of ethnicity on the street, expressing an ethnic identity is important for children's self-perceptions and sense of belonging to rural 'home' communities. This appears to form part of the process of re-accepting the 'moral economy' of the household (Hecht, 1998), in which children engage when they return to their 'home' communities.

Boys' and young men's adherence to cultural rites of passage [7]

The life course trajectory of Onessmo (aged 15, of the *Waarusha* ethnic group), illustrates how ethnicity and cultural values intersect with gender and age to provide both constraints and possibilities for young people to reintegrate into their 'home' communities. Following several months at the UCSC centre, staff facilitated a home

visit and tried to persuade Onessmo to stay at home, where he would inherit a large farm. Onessmo left for the street shortly afterwards, despite the efforts of his father and uncles to persuade him to return. Two years later, street boys reported that Onessmo had returned home with his father. During a home visit with a project worker, we found him in seclusion for a month, following a traditional circumcision ceremony, in which the group of boys were taken out to the bush overnight to test their endurance, and the circumcision was performed at dawn.

According to African concepts of childhood, initiation rites represent a child's progression to adulthood and initiation into the next cycle of life, and represent a key component of the informal teaching of the family and community (Omari & Mbilinyi, 1997). As part of the informal teaching, Onessmo learned about respect for others and his duties and responsibilities to his family, as noted in my fieldwork journal:

Onessmo told us that he was visited every day by older *morans* [warriors – term used for circumcised *Maasai* young men] who were responsible for the informal teaching and advice that accompanied the circumcision. This included regular beatings for failing to remember exactly what he had been taught, which Onessmo said happened to him frequently, not least because he was finding it hard to remember the local language, *Maasai,* which he had not used on the street. He often used to see his uncles near where he used to sleep and they told him that his father wanted him to come home to become a *moran*. One morning, at 6am, his father came, and Onessmo just got up and left his friends sleeping, without a word. He had been living at home for about a month, and said that he had only once felt like returning to town, but on the

way, he had met someone from the village on his bicycle, and had returned with him. Since then, he had not felt tempted to go back to town (fieldwork journal, 2002).

Onessmo emphasised his intentions not to return to the street, in response to the community's expectations of responsible behaviour in his new adult status as a *moran*. While his previous behaviour in drifting to the street was associated with being an irresponsible child, the initiation rite symbolised a sense of transition from childhood to adulthood or 'manhood'. Onessmo's conformity to the community's expectations of his ethnic identity was also linked to the material consequences of non-conformity; he knew that the older *moran* would be watching him closely, and would punish him severely if he defied them.

While some project staff and researchers have suggested that male circumcision represents a cultural practice which may drive boys and young men away from home (Koda, 2000), in this and other cases, male circumcision was experienced more as a motivating force for young men to return to their home communities, whether temporarily or more permanently. As in the example above, for some street boys from families of rural subsistence farmers with assets such as land, adherence to cultural rites of passage accorded them a more respected adult status as a 'man' within their 'home' communities, and thus provided an incentive for them to reaccept the 'moral economy' of the household (Hecht, 1998). This is linked to the 'materiality of ethnicity' (Jenkins, 2000, p.8) and the consequences of non-conformity to the cultural values and norms of the collective group.

Tanzanian children rarely have a say in decisions over initiation rites (Koda, 2000). However, the experiences of street boys who lived within institutional settings for extended periods of time revealed how their separation from their 'home' community and ethnic group represented a way that they could have more control over decisions about adhering to cultural rites of passage and defining their ethnic identity. Juma (aged 16), who had lived at the UCSC centre for several years, explained that peer pressure, the 'modern' values attached to living in town and increased medical costs related to age, had influenced his decision to go to hospital himself to have the circumcision operation performed before the age of 18, which was not customary for his ethnic group (*Meru*). He spent two weeks following his operation recovering and receiving some informal teaching about respect and other values from his older male friends in seclusion in a small goat shed at his mother's place in town, since she lived in one rented room. Juma left the UCSC centre to undergo the operation without informing staff, because he feared that he would be told to wait until the school holidays. However he returned, apologised to members of staff, and was accepted back into the centre once his period of seclusion was over.

This suggests that without the external definition of the 'home' community, material consequences and collective values of the individual's immediate social group assume greater significance in young people's self-image and performance of ethnic identity. Furthermore, this and other examples illustrate street boys' independence and agency. While the boys could be seen as missing out on the 'traditional' cultural practices of their communities because they live within institutional settings, their particular situation means that they are able to resist cultural norms and take more responsibility for decisions about when their initiation rites should be performed.

Conclusion

This study has shown that young people's 'street careers' and gendered life-course trajectories in Arusha are characterised by considerable diversity and fluidity of movement between difficult home environments, the street, the mines, NGO centres, rural and urban areas. In particular, gender and age intersect with time spent on the street to both constrain and enable young people to negotiate their social identities, and significantly influence their livelihood strategies, use of public space and access to services. While girls are positioned as doubly marginal on the basis of gender and age inequalities and have differential access to service provision, this study argues that they are actively subverting gender norms by seeking independent lifestyles in towns and cities. Children's relationship to the street varies according to their experiences, needs and aspirations at particular periods of their lives. Ethnicity and cultural values intersected with gender and age in the initiation rites of boys and young men and provided opportunities for street boys to become reintegrated into 'home' communities for temporary or more permanent periods. The street therefore represents a transitional space where boys and girls construct their own gendered places, where identities are contested and negotiated, and where stigmatising labels and restrictive norms can be resisted and reconfigured.

The different career outcomes and life course trajectories of street children over time further illustrate the diversity of young people's experiences and aspirations. For some young people, the street appears to represent a transitional stage that they move through in order to assume a more adult and independent status in the community. As

young people grow older, they reconfigure norms of 'the family' and 'home', establishing new household forms with their peers within the comparative freedom of the urban environment. In particular, young women seek relationships with male partners as a way to create their own families and for financial support. While some children valued the educational and training opportunities offered by institutions, others found it difficult to engage with the longer-term educational goals of such projects and rejected institutional settings. Some young people continued to live on the street and supported themselves through casual work in the informal sector.

This illustrates the complex ways that young people express their agency and highlights the importance of diversity in understanding young people's life course trajectories on the street. Further research is needed over a longer period to explore young people's continuing relationship with the street and long term career outcomes, including the opportunities they are able to access to escape their marginalised status, their motivations for re-accepting the 'moral economy' of the household (Hecht, 1998) and other ways that they become reintegrated as members of mainstream communities.

Notes

[1] Urafiki Centre for Street Children (UCSC) was a non-governmental organisation which provided accommodation, informal education and counselling, access to formal education and training, home visits and family reintegration at two residential centres in the Arusha region for up to 90 children and young people (predominantly male) aged 7-19.

[2] The proportion of girls included in the discussions and interviews was higher than that actually found in the general population of street children, but this was intentional since I wanted to gain a comparative sense of experience by gender.

[3] Translated by the author (with assistance) from Kiswahili transcripts of tape-recorded interviews.

[4] Such figures should be treated with caution however, since generalisations are often made on the basis of methods for counting that are problematic in the context of a highly mobile population, and are complicated by problems of definition (Connolly & Ennew 1996).

[5] Theresa Centre was a non-governmental project run by a Christian organisation which provided accommodation, education and training for up to seven girls and young women facing disadvantage, aged 11-20 years old.

[6] The photographs taken by the young people are described rather than printed here to protect the young people's anonymity.

[7] The illegality of female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) meant that there was widespread secrecy about the practice among tribes who still performed FGM, such as the *Waarusha*. The research was therefore not able to explore girls' experiences of female initiation rites.

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