STREET CHILDREN AND BROKEN PERCEPTION:
A Child's Right Perspectives

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ABSTRAK

Anak jalanan merupakan salah satu potret kemiskinan di daerah perkotaan di Indonesia. Mereka menjalani kehidupan yang keras, tidak hanya untuk menghidupi diri mereka, namun kadang-kadang mereka juga harus menghadapi orang-orang dewasa yang seringkali melakukan kekerasan dalam berbagai bentuk terhadap mereka. Kehidupan jalanan yang keras dan tanpa pengawasan orang dewasa merubah pola dan sikap mereka sehingga membuat mereka melakukan hal-hal yang dianggap tidak wajar untuk seorang anak. Mereka "memecahkan" persepsi masyarakat yang sudah terbentuk tentang kehidupan seorang anak. Kehidupan mereka oleh banyak ahli sosiologi disebut sebagai sebuah bentuk dari sub kebudayaan (*sub-culture*) dari budaya masyarakat yang ada. Namun dibalik kerasnya hidup dan sikap mereka, bagaimanapun mereka tetaplah anak-anak yang membutuhkan perlindungan. Pendekatan yang dilakukan harus bisa "memahami" suara-suara mereka, jika tidak, segala upaya membantu dan melindungi mereka akan sia-sia.

Kata kunci: anak jalanan, hak anak, sub-kebudayaan

INTRODUCTION

Amid the skyscraper buildings of Jakarta, at every intersection of its street, the heart-moving view, where rumpled children are becoming beggars, street singers, or street vendors in front of expensive cars, has become a common sight. This reality is not restricted to Jakarta as the biggest city in Indonesia, but it also spreads to other cities all across Indonesia. Volpi (2003) once asserts that, the existence of street children in one country is "a signaling alarm" about the growing poverty and the country's social development. In Indonesia, behind the vast physical development there are hidden problems of poverty and the weakening of family structure, which can partly be seen through the growing number of street children.

Much evidence has shown the growing number of street children in larger cities all across Indonesia. A research by the Centre for Community Research and Development at Atma Jaya University in Jakarta, has found that in 1999/2000, there were about 75 thousand street children in 12 cities in Indonesia (The CRC 2002: 113). Meanwhile, data from Childhope Asia, a non-government organization in Asia, has estimated higher number of 170 thousand street children in 1999 also in 12 cities in Indonesia (as cited by West 2003). The most recent data from the Social Ministry of Indonesia in 2002, estimated that the number of street children in 12 cities in Indonesia is around 94 thousand (Social Ministry of Indonesia, 2004). Although there are differences in estimating the exact number of street children in Indonesia, its growing and high number is obviously a worrisome problem. West (2003) in his article on street children in Asia acknowledges that the difficulty in counting street children arises not only because, "street children are not usually counted, nor subject to census", but also because of their mobility and their existence sometimes overlaps with other categories of children, such as children living in poverty, drop-outs children, juvenile or delinquent children, children who are being trafficked, child labour or victims of physical or sexual abuse.

Regarding the increasing number of street children, there are calls to take urgent actions to reduce the numbers of street children. It is important to notice that actions to help street children must consider their voices and perspectives. A lot of aid workers or charity givers have "failed" to see these children as survivor as they have shown resiliency through the toughness of street life (Glauser 1997: 145; Panter-Brick 2000: 11). An admirable research by Beazley (1999) has found that in Yogyakarta, one large city in Central Java, street children have formed their own identity and culture, which is different from the 'mainstream'[1] society. They are independent, both socially and financially. They also claim that they have the autonomy to care for themselves. Related to the issue of identity and autonomy, in this article I would like to examine the causes, conditions and perceptions on street children, from the perspective of child's rights.[2]

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[1] I use the word 'mainstream' to differentiate between the cultures of the society in general and the culture of street children in particular.

[2] In later explanation will be refer as the CRC.

Background Factors behind the Existence of Street Children

In Indonesia, the street children's issue emerged in the middle of the 1980s. However, before 1990, the government of Indonesia refused the existence of street children in any cities in Indonesia (West 2003). The government believed that the Indonesian people had 'a strong' family structure and that Indonesia has reached a remarkable development during the 1980s. Nevertheless, the real situation was that economic centralization and growth-oriented development have created inequality between the urban and rural areas. As a consequence, not only that the cities were more develop than the rural areas in term of physical development, but it also had more facilities for public and social services. This has been one of the attractions for urbanization. However, not all of these migrants had flourished in the cities, most ended up in poverty. The "new poor" has colored the Indonesia's development in the 1980s. The "new poor" has created city *slums* -or *kampung kumuh* in larger cities in Indonesia.

The collapse of the Indonesia's economy in the late 1990s made the situation worse. According to data from the World Bank shows the number of people in Indonesia who live in extreme poverty (under $ 1 per day) has increased to more than double in 1999 (The World Bank 2004). The connection between the increasing numbers of people living under the poverty line and the emergence of street children is evidence by the reality that more than half of street children were reported as "new entrants" since the beginning of the Asian economic crises in 1997 (West 2003: 29). It has somehow strengthened the assumption that the number of children who live and work on the street has grown simultaneously with the growth of poverty (West 2003: 28; Sauve 2003: 13). A research by the Atma Jaya University in 12 cities in Indonesia in 1999/2000 showed that around 47% of the street children have been on the street for less than 2 years (The CRC 2002).[3]

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3 The Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Poverty is still denounced as the main factor that has driven children to work or live on the street.[4] In Indonesia, poverty can further be linked as one of the impacts of the urbanization process. Another factor can be "psychological problems" at home, which include physical or mental abuse and neglect (the CRC 2002; De Moura 2002: 353; Veale in Panter-Brick and Smith 2000; Taylor and Veale 1986: 91).[5] Additionally, Volpi and Sauve say that political conflict; social turbulence, war and displacement can also become possible factors (Volpi 2003: 6; Sauve 2003: 2). For example, political conflict in some districts in Aceh has contributed to the emergence of street children in Banda Aceh, the capital of the province (Kontras 2001). Equally important, many street children made their own choice and decision to move to the street, even though their choice or decision is a forced one (Taylor and Veale 1986: 94).

Definition and Categorization of Street Children

In Indonesia, the practical definition of street children is given by the *Dinas Bina Mental dan Kesejahteraan Sosial (Disbintal Kesos)* or the Department of Mental and Social Welfare Assistance, which define street children as, "a child whose life is unorganized and spends most of her time outside a home to earn money on the street or other public places." (*Republika* 2004). Nonetheless, this definition is rather vague since living on the street does not mean that someone's life become unorganized. Besides, earning money is not the only activity that a street child does.

Any attempt to give a definition to street children, as De Moura (2002: 356) argues, has created "imprecision" instead of making it clear. There is no "fixed" (De Moura 2002) and "universal" (De Benitez 2003) definition for the term street children. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this article, it is useful to give at least general explanation to the term "street children" as a children[6] with "a special relationship to the street"

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4 Oscar Lewis (1966) created an interesting debate, when he wrote that generational poverty would create a strategy and "adaptation" of these poor regarding their marginal position. It would also influence how their children "sees the world" and "react to it".

5 Taylor and Veale characterize the push factors as micro-level factors and macro-level factors

6 Western theorists such as Panter-Brick categorizes street children as 'abandoned children'; a term which is used for the purpose to gain sympathy and 'rescue' them. Panter-Brick, above n 10 at 1-2.

(Glauser 1997: 146; De Benitez 2003: 1) whether they are working or living on the street. According to much research, most of the children working or living on the street are boys (Van Beers 1996: 197). Yet, in Indonesia, street girls contribute quite a large number. Most of the children started to work on the street usually as young as 7 to 12 years old (The CRC 2002: 113).

For practical reason, street children in Indonesia are usually divided into two types. These are children who *work* on the street and children who *live* on the street (Humana 2004). This division is basically made according to the degree of connection of the children with their parents or other family members. Children who work on the street usually maintain a connection with their family, while children who live on the street either have no family or have not had contact with their family for some time. The group of children who still have a connection with their family can be further divided into children from rural areas who work in the cities, and sometimes go back to their home village; or children of poor family, who live in the city slums. Both types usually called as *anak kampung* by their street children's peers (Humana 2004).

Glauser (1997: 147), as well as Panter-Brick and Smith (2000, 2-3), argue that categorization of street children does not persistently apply in practice. The boundary between children, who live on the street, and those who only work on the street is very thin and fragile. Children who only work on the street can be heaved to the life of the street any time. The boundary lies only with their relation with their family. *Anak kampung* or those who still have relationship with their family usually spare some of their earned money for their family. Yet, there are also times when they spend all the money by themselves and not returning home for that. Another 'blurred' boundary to differentiate between children who live and who work on the street is that they usually share the same way of street life.

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERS OF STREET CHILDREN IN INDONESIA

Street children are not like other children. Street children have experienced things, which from an outsider's point of view, are deemed as an 'unusual' experiences for a child (De Moura 2002: 358). Research has shown that there are similarities in the characteristics of street

children, such as lacking formal education, being vulnerable to abuse, having no formal identity, independent and favoring free life. However, media coverage on street children has highlighted only part of the street children's life such as their "deviate" behaviors or crime, or their vulnerability against violence. These pictures have created a vague and unbalanced perception of them. The actual concern is suppose to focus on how they are "different" from a child at home; and how they have formed their own identity based on their life experience.

Street children are mostly homeless (Ennew and Swart-Krueger 2003: 5).[7] For them the street or other public spaces are the main places where they do daily routines, such as eating, working, sleeping and playing. Besides their daily places, street children are also noticeable for their distinct appearance, whether their physical appearance or their 'body language'. Their appearance has become part of their way of life, which distinguishes them from the dominant society. The way street children dressed or talked or walked are different from 'ordinary' children at home. An observation of one aid workers, members of the Humana Foundation[8], describes that:

> "There [at the intersection] we can see a lot of street singers aged between 8 and 10. One of the children is wearing a purple t-shirt and brown shorts which are already caked with dirt. His hair is curly red (dyed) and his skin is dirty dark brown. In his pocket we can see "*kecek-kecek*" (bottle covers tambourine) with a wooden handle. Whereas another one has an untidy punk hairstyle, with an oversized sleeveless undershirt and white shorts, which are also already caked with dirt."

The types of activities street children usually engaged in are also different from children at home. Among many other activities, the most important one for street children is working. Working for street children is a survival strategy. They have to work in order to be able to eat and to earn some money. Yet, they rarely worry about whether they can eat or not, if they do not have any money to buy food they can always find leftover food from the garbage or from the backdoor of restaurants.

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[7] Judith Ennew and Jill Swart-Kruger, define this homelessness as a "key descriptor" for children who live or work on the street which "stigmatizes" them as street children.

[8] The Humana Foundation is a non-government organization which was established to help street children in Yogyakarta in particular. The Humana Foundation is the backbone organization of the *Girli* Family, an association of street children made by street children in Yogyakarta.

Working and earning money on their own is a kind of autonomy, which they would not find at home. As Beazley (2003: 10) asserts, "[s]treet children take enormous pride in earning their own money and in the fact that they are not dependent to anyone."

Street children in Indonesia do not necessarily work or live on the street; there are also other public spaces such as the markets, railway stations, or bus terminals. The types of work they are usually engaged with are street singing, hawking, begging, scavenging or shoe-shining. The table below explains the types of activities of street children in 12 cities in Indonesia, based on research carried out by Irwanto in 1999/2000.

Table 1
Type of Activities of Street Children in 12 Cities in Indonesia

City	Sex	Most common activities (in percentage)		
		I	II	III
Medan	M	Hawker (46.7 %)	Scavenger (13.1 %)	Market coolie (10.0 %)
	F	Hawker (56.1 %)	Scavenger (12.2 %)	Market coolie (11.5 %)
Padang	M	Hawker (30.4%)	Shoe shiner (14.3%)	Scavenger (8.4%)
	F	Hawker (59.7%)	Scavenger (11.9%)	Beggar (9.0%)
Palembang	M	Hawker (35.9%)	Car washer (16.4%)	Scavenger (15.8%)
	F	Hawker (53.8%)	Beggar (9.9%)	Scavenger (8.8%)
Lampung	M	Hawker	Scavenger (17.6%)	Car washer (13.1%)
	F	Hawker	Street singer (26.0%)	Market coolie (6.0%)
Jakarta	M	Hawker (39.8%)	Street singer (29.6%)	Scavenger (6.4%)
	F	Street singer (44.7%)	Hawker (15.4%)	Beggar (14.1%)
Bandung	M	Street singer (52.1%)	Hawker (33.3%)	Scavenger (3.1%)
	F	Street singer (62.2%)	Beggar (11.0%)	Scavenger (9.8%)
Semarang	M	Street singer (51.2%)	Hawker (30.6%)	Shoe shiner (5.8%)
	F	Street singer (51.6%)	Beggar (16.5%)	Situational (13.2%)
Yogyakarta	M	Street singer (71.9%)	Hawker (20.0%)	Scavenger (1.9%)
	F	Street singer (62.2%)	Hawker (13.5%)	Beggar (10.8%)
Surabaya	M	Street singer (45.1%)	Hawker (38.3%)	Scavenger (4.7%)
	F	Street singer (35.8%)	Hawker (24.2%)	Beggar (24.2%)
Malang	M	Hawker (55.8%)	Street singer (14.4%)	Shoe shiner (7.1%)
	F	Beggar (30.8%)	Hawker (23.1%)	Street singer (15.4%)
Mataram	M	Hawker (36.9%)	Parking attendant (11.0%)	Scavenger (10.1%)
	F	Market coolie (73.8%)	Hawker (11.7%)	Scavenger (6.9%)
Makassar	M	Hawker (45.5%)	Market coolie (12.7%)	Scavenger (11.7%)
	F	Hawker (55.1%)	Beggar (15.0%)	Scavenger (14.0%)

Source: Irwanto in CRC/C/65/Add.23 (The Committee on the Rights of the Child 2002: 114)

For seasoned street children there is no segregation between work and play. They work as they play, or the other way around. For them, working and playing are two kinds of activities, which cannot be separated. Another observation by one member of the Humana Foundation describes that:

> "Every time there is a red light, the girl (who later confesses working on the street occasionally) stands up and raises a copy of the newspaper with her right hand while her left hand holds the rest of the newspapers tightly to her chest. She walks slowly and carefully at the side of the sidewalk, and it seems she is careful not to step on the asphalt road. Her steps are faltering, which shows her discomfort and shyness. She does not reach any car in particular; she just seems to be doing what she thinks enough to let drivers know that she sells newspapers. Meanwhile the boy (who later confesses living on the street) does not offer his newspaper every time there is a red light. Most of the time, he just plays and draws something on the ground. Sometimes he goes down the asphalt road with light steps, moving from one car to another. If there is a green light, he goes back to his drawing, while the girl waits for another red light sitting straight on a bench near the traffic light." (http://www.Humana.20m.com/Jbab4.htm> at 10 March 2004).[9]

Street children do not look like that they are working. They are rarely serious when they work, and once they get money they spend it right away, to eat, drink or to buy cigarettes. Meanwhile, children who are occasionally on the street may seem uncomfortable with their being on the street. In relation with this work-play connection, Beazley asserts that, "[a]lthough street children may in some ways have lost their "innocence," I would argue that they have not lost their childhoods, but that they are merely experiencing them differently." (Beazley 2003: 17)

Once we get deeper into a street child's life, there are other activities or behaviors, which, for society in general, are considered as 'deviate' behaviors, particularly for a child to be engaged with. Firstly, one of the common behaviors among street children is substance or drug abuse. The Atma Jaya University's research found that almost 33% of the street children surveyed were drug users or at least were once users of drugs (The CRC 2002: 113). However, since most of them find narcotics or other drugs are very expensive, as a substitute they use other strong

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[9] The Humana Foundation, *Jerat Budaya: Chapter 4* (in Indonesian) retrieved from <http://www. Humana.20m.com/Jbab4.htm> at 10 March 2004.

scent substances such as glue or paint thinner for their enjoyment. Glue sniffing or *ngelem* in their language is done by sniffing -or more precisely inhale- a strong scent of glue or other substance such as paint thinner. One of the street children admits that, "no drugs, then glue will do it." (YCAB 2004) In the lightest form of addiction, almost all street children addicted to smoking.

According to their confession, glue sniffing has become one enjoying and relaxing activities in their everyday harsh life. Wanto, one of the street children in Jakarta confesses that, "with this [glue sniffing] I can sleep easily, I rarely feel hungry or want anything else, just want to relax and sleep."[10] Other children say that by sniffing glue they do not feel ashamed when they beg or sing on the street; or to give them extra strength when they have to do criminal act; if they get caught by the police and get beaten they will not feel the pain (De Moura 2002: 359).

Another "deviate" habit of these street children is having free sex. Free sex among street children is quite common (*Republika* 2001). Some even have their own partner which by other peers considers being their wife or husband and they respect this kind of relationship (*Republika* 2001). Street children have sex for comfort, mark their power over other children, initiation and they also use sex for punishment (WHO 2004). Street children usually have sex with street prostitutes, or with other street children. It is difficult to differentiate whether it is the street children who need street prostitutes or the other way around. There are cases where street children are being used by some prostitutes to get money. Some of the prostitutes said that, street children are usually having more money rather than their usual customer, while others believe that having sex with a child will bring them back their youth and power.

Sodomy is also quite common among street children. Although there are street children who see sodomy as a "terrible experience" (The Lancet 2002), others accept it as a way to get a meal or other kind of their basic need. Beazley (2003) asserts that:

> "For street boys sodomy is not conceptualized as being violent, and neither is it considered to be homosexual act.

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10 Wanto is a third grade student (age 8-9 years) whose mother is a clothes washer in West Jakarta while his father is unemploy. This story is taken from Yayasan Cinta Anak Bangsa Website, *Ibid*.

It is a normal and acceptable part of life, and an initiation process, which most have experienced and also perform. Street boys have sex with each other for comfort, to alleviate sexual frustration, to express emotion, and for protection from older boys."

The effect of this free sex behavior is that sexually transmitted diseases have spread among these children. In Bandung, according to one survey the youngest street child infected by *gonorrhoea*, one kind of sexually transmitted diseases, is as young as 8 years old (*Republika* 2001).

Street children can be very creative in creating a way to cope with their difficult situation. Some of the types of their survival strategy relate to the building of their 'distinct' identity and sub-culture (Beazley 2003: 4-9). One example is changing names, which is quite common among street children. One street children might have two alias or even more. Street children may be called according to their place of origin when they are in other cities, such as Desmon Bandung, Wanto Jakarta; or they may also be called according to their 'uncommon' physical appearance such as skinny or fatty or curly. Street children use different names for different situation. They never give the same name or their real name for safety. Moreover, they are also afraid that their parents or family will be able to find them and take them back home if they use real name. The habit of changing names according to Beazley characterize the street children's "multiple and fluid identities".

As part of developing survival strategy street children have formed "network, relationship and coping strategies" (Ennew and Swart-Krueger 2003: 5) through peer group. A group of street children often have "clear internal hierarch[y] and strong attachment[s] to a territory" (Boyden in James and Prout 1997: 196). Street children usually identify themselves according to the place they usually sleep or work, such as "station kid" or "terminal kid" (Humana 2004).

Beazley (2003: 5) finds that seasoned street children "help" to socialize newcomers with an initiation process and following by their support and survival skills. The analysis of child's socialization according to Beazley is important, "as it provides significant evidence for determining how children construct their collective identities as 'street children'." Initiation of seasoned street children to newcomers is one

form of action which can be perceived as a way for them to "share their identity" James, et.al 1998: 157)[11] to the newcomers. The seasoned street children are street-wise kids, while the newcomers are "know nothing" kids. The "welcoming" process can be beatings, serving seasoned children with food and drink, giving them all the newcomer's belongings, up to performing anal sex (Beazley 2003: 8). This might seems to be a vicious way of "helping" newcomers in the perspectives of an outsider, but most of the street children "accept" this as a way to be able to become part of the group.

There are a lot of street children who try to avoid committing crime, however, violence and criminal activities are sometimes essential for their survival strategies (Boyden 1997: 196-197). Violence in most of the interactions has become very common for street children even at their young age, whether as a victim or as a doer. As a victim they are beaten by the police, harassed by other street adults who exploit them, or rape them or are robbed by their peer street children. All of this violence has made street children suspicious of others especially adults.

Street children do not interact much with other adults from the dominant society, except with the police, security officers, the *TRANTIB* or public order officers[12], charity givers, aid workers or researchers. A lot of street children find the government officials "repressive" (James, et.al 1998: 49), not only the police or the public order officer but also those of social department. One oppressive way for local government to deal with street children is raid or cleansing or known as *razia*. Most of the time raid are done irregularly, however, if the local government are having a celebration or if "an important person" from the central government is coming, there will conduct a raid to 'clean' the street from 'unpleasant views' (*Republika* 2003). Getting caught by the police or public order officers is certainly something that street children do not want to go through (Suryanto 2003: 12-13). [13] Not only do they will usually receive beatings, or forced to admit criminal act they did not do,

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[11] In particular, James et.al. actually give example of children in summer camp who have cancer. In schools they are alienated, or specialized but in this camp, there is an unconditional acceptance by their peers for having the same experience in medical treatment.

[12] The *TIBUM* or *TRANTIB* or the *Ketertiban Umum* Officer or *SATPOL PP* is public order officer who work under the municipal government to maintain the city's order.

[13] There was a case where two street children died in the chase of security guards. They tried to escape the chase by jumped into a canal; however, they could not swim and died of drowning. It pictures how desperately street children wanted to escape from police or security guards because they don't want to get beaten or get any other kind punishment from them (in Rikah Suryanto 2003).

they will also have to pay bail out money to be released from the jail or other rehabilitation centers (*Republika* 2000).

Meanwhile, oppression and exploitation are received by street children not only from statutory bodies, but also from their own parents. The most common form is economic exploitation. In Bandung, for example, street children are forced to work and earn money which should be paid to their parents (*Republika* 2004). This problem has made any recovery program for street children to get back to schools fails. One of the children says, "What is going to school for, if we cannot earn money we will be beaten by our parents once we get home empty handed." (*Republika* 2004).

Although the life of street children is full of violence, threats and oppression which will bring misery to those experiencing this kind of life, it is amazing to see how they have survived. They have shown their resiliency. For most of the child, they describe street life as a free life, no adult rules; besides they have the autonomy to earn and spend their own money. This has shown us that the streets where they live have also "provided" spaces which enable them to strategize their life on the street (Humana 2004).

STREET CHILDREN AND "BROKEN" PERCEPTIONS

Street children are insulted, looked-down at, and even spat-on by the dominant society because they have 'broken' many 'ideal' perceptions, which have been constructed within the society. *Firstly*, they have damaged the portrait of ideal family, which supposed to protect and care for them (Beazley 2003: 1). In Indonesia, strong family structure is one of the 'ideal' types of family, which is highly prized. Children are the most vulnerable, and they need protection and guidance to be able to grow up to become responsible adults. Therefore, if parents cannot take care of their children, the extended family will, whether it is the grandparents, the uncles and aunties, or even neighbors. However, the structure of the extended family has begun to weaken, since the development process and the urbanization phenomenon have made people leaving their home-town or villages. The reality that a lot of children are homeless, parentless, or family-less have 'shocked' the society in general. This is due to the fact that the extended family ties -something they are really put proud of- have weakened.

Secondly, street children have spoiled the society's perception of a "child", which is mainly portrayed as innocent and respectful to adults. This is particularly evident in many traditions in Indonesia. Instead of staying at home, studying or playing, learning about discipline and good behavior; street children are working, smoking, drinking alcohol, gambling, and having free sex. They do all the things which are, in almost all traditional societies in Indonesia, considered to be "improper" for children. Therefore, they are denigrated by the society for their 'deviant' behavior. The views of streets filled with street children have "confront and touch" the society and win out as a reminder for the society about those unpleasant reality (Glauser 1997: 191).

Thirdly, street children have violated the use of street and other public spaces, or De Benitez's calls these children as "out of place" (De Benitez 2003: 2). Before street children filled the street and other public spaces, these places was "an adult" places; and children, not only they had little access to these places, they were also introduced to these places gradually with adults' supervision (James, et. al 1998: 48). In fact, as Glauser (1997: 153) and Boyden (1997: 196) had argued, the main concern for the society is that "their" street and public spaces have been used as a place for these "deviant" children to live and work. This use of street as a place to live, to eat, to sleep, to play, or to roam about contradicts the real, normal or acceptable purpose of street or other public spaces (Glauser 1997: 152; Panter-Brick 2000: 9).

Lastly, since there have been many cases where street children do criminal acts, there has been growing concern among the society to see them off the street. This is not because they are concerned about the children's life, but because they have started to feel 'threatened' by the existence of street children. As Boyden points out, "the overriding concern is not with the dangers for children associated with street life, but more the damage street children may do to the community." (Boyden 1997: 196) Additionally, Veale, et.al. (in Panter and Brick 2000: 131-132), argue that not only there are some street children who do criminal action, the dominant society feels threatened, because they think that these street children -as a result of the rejection from the dominant society- will resent this and 'oppose' the dominant society that has rejected them in the first place.

All of these 'broken' perceptions have created an assumption among the dominant society that children are not supposed to be on the street, they supposed to study, to be at home or at school. Viewing that street life is a harsh life for a child, part of the society thinks that those street children should be drawn from the street, put back in school and given shelter.

IDENTITY, SUB-CULTURE AND AUTONOMY

Identity, according to James (1993: 28) is, "a social as well as psychological experience of belonging, which allows people to mark out their sense of similarity to and difference from other people." It includes the space where someone lives and spends most of their time, how they define those places and how they are defined by them. Ennew and Swart-Kruger (2003: 3) adds that, "children actively construct their worlds and that street children's world cannot be distinguished by a simple division between "home" and "street", but rather with respect to several "domains." These domains include the place where they live, the street and other public spaces, railway stations, terminals, markets, or city gardens. It also includes institutions such as the justice or police system and the government. For street children, the similarity of fate for being on the street has created a bond. Not only a bond to the space where they spent most of their time, but also with other peers with whom they live (James, 1993: 27). The feeling of being 'different' they have is against the dominant society, which has excluded them in their social life and discriminate them in almost every way.

In social and cultural terms, sub-culture is usually used, not only to refer a part of the culture of a distinctive group or society from the dominant culture, but also to point out "otherness identity" (Hebdige 1979). Street children are considered to be "the others" by the dominant society, a perception which on most occasions creates opposition behavior towards street children. As Glauser (1997: 141) acknowledges this by saying that, "…the dominant ways of speaking about street children are discourses 'about others'; about lives, problems and situations which are not lived or shared but merely observed externally by the speaking subjects."

What are the criteria for a group's lifestyle to be regarded as "culture"? According to James, et.al. (1998: 87), a culture needs to fulfill some characteristics.[14] The first characteristic is space. A culture of a group can only exists if that particular group has some degree of "power and control" over space and time. For street children, being free on the street without adult supervision, and supported by the character of street or public space, which has no structure, has enabled them to accomplish this first characteristic. They have power and control, at least to their own body, choice and autonomy.

The second characteristic is "language culture and conversational style" (James, et.al. 1998: 88). Most of the street children use different language from the dominant society, whether it is the type of language that the dominant society 'avoid to use' such as coarse language or by creating new terms for many things. For example, the *Tikyan*[15], a group of children in Yogyakarta, have created new *slang* (Adi-Dananto 2004)*,* which is not recognized in the dominant society's language. They only used and understood among the street children and the *Tikyan* in particular. Other groups of street children in other cities also have this kind of *slang*.

Street children's way of life, networks, choices, autonomy and their coping strategies have created a distinct identity and sub-culture of street children (Beazley 2003; Ennew and Swart-Krueger 2003: 4). Street children refuse to be treated and act like 'children'. Thus, in my opinion, this is not only a kind of sub-culture but a "resistance sub-culture", which can be linked to the street children's struggle for autonomy and for space. Beazley has recognized this street children's sub-culture as, "a technique for the children to resist their social and spatial exclusion and to counteract the negative perceptions held by the state and mainstream society who view them as social pariahs infesting the street." (Beazley 2003: 4)

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[14] James, et.al., 1998 at 87-88. In this book talk about ordinary children at home, therefore they come out with a doubt that children's culture can be called a sub-culture at all. This is due to the ordinary children's limited power and control over a space or their body, choice and autonomy. Their power and language they use differently from adult are just temporal. Different from street children, where they fulfil both characteristics on what can be called as "culture".

[15] The *Tikyan* is a particular group of street boys in Yogyakarta. The *Tikyan* was the subject of Beazley's thesis on street children's sub-culture in Yogyakarta (Beazley 1999).

Adults in particular can be parents, other family members, the police and every adult in the dominant society who tries to control them. Their 'different' way of life is one form of resistance against adult control over their body, their autonomy and their choice. Street children use all the symbols of "adulthood", or the adult world, –such as working, drinking alcohol, having free sex, or gambling- as some kind of statement of their resistance sub-culture towards the adults. They want to be considered as part of the adult world (Awad 2002: 107). They refuse to be "little", because little means weak, controllable and not free.

For street children autonomy is the most important characteristic which differentiate them with the children at home. However, there is a question whether this autonomy which they possess is a rational one. Autonomy, according to Callan (2002: 121), is "the capacity critically to assess and revise one's own conception of the good". Furthermore, Callan explains 'capacity' as an "ability" or "skill" based on one's experience through an "extended period of time". Nevertheless, this definition is unclear as "the conception of good" is very different from one to another. In this case, street children have their own conception of good such as to being free and independent, being able to eat everyday and working safely on the street; although behind these 'good' lives hid a danger to their health and their future. A lot of us must have denied that this is not a conception of what is good, particularly what is good for a child.

Archard (1993: 65) proposes that autonomy should be rational. Rational autonomy, according to Archard, contains three characteristics. The *first* characteristic is "cognitive competence"; that is "the ability to think about the world, their surroundings, [and] having a relatively coherent set of desires and consequently being able, consistently to order one's preferences between alternatives possible causes of action" (Archard 1993: 65). Street children learn about their surroundings through their interaction with the spaces and institutions to which they have daily interactions. The *second* characteristic is "maturity"; that is a "fully developed, settled and unlikely significantly to change, emotionally balanced with stable and relatively invariant desires and clear plans for their lives." (Archard 1993: 66) The *third* characteristic and the last one is "independence"; that is "the capability to self-maintenance with its strongest sense of self-sufficiency, ability to sustain oneself physically by providing for one's own food, clothing and shelter." (Archard 1993: 67)

The most important part of rational autonomy is when one can act to put their choices into effect to pursue their own conception of good. This means that although street children are probably able to make choices and to self-maintain by providing themselves food or clothing, there are some times when they are still children and they need adults' help to put their choices and interests into effect. The kind of 'autonomy' street children now possess is that there are no rules, no discipline, they are free, not only because they do not have parents to protect them, but also because they have to decide their own life. They have a saying that, "my mother is the earth and my father is the sky". However, most of them never think about the future. They live for today, have no plans, not even about what to eat or what to do that night or one hour later. This kind of autonomy is more likely to be a survival strategy because they mostly lack resources to decide their future. For this matter, they will surely need adults' help to gain and strengthen their resources, and protect their interests and choices, and realize their choices an interest into reality for their better future.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For street children their harsh street life and autonomy are the most important characteristics which differentiate them with the children at home. Street children's way of life, networks, choices, autonomy and their coping strategies have created a distinct identity and sub-culture of street children. Street children refuse to be treated and act like 'children'. Thus, in my opinion, this is not only a kind of sub-culture but a "resistance sub-culture", which can be linked to the street children's struggle for autonomy and for space. Which sub-culture can be identified as, "a technique for the children to resist their social and spatial exclusion and to counteract the negative perceptions held by the state and mainstream society who view them as social pariahs infesting the street".

Street children have broken many of the society's perception on how a child "should be". They live the lives that are not at all "suitable" for a child, a harsh street life. Many street children have chosen the life on the street, which according to their consideration, is better than their life at home. They have established a certain way of life, different from the mainstream society, which is considered as unusual from

what should be experienced by a child. The life on the street has made these children form an identity and resistance sub-culture as a way to survive the harshness that surrounds them in their everyday life. Street children, not only they are more creative than the children at home; but their views and perspectives are better voiced. This has made it easier to absorb their views in any actions, which affected their lives. In order to better help these children, we first must understand their voices, what they really needs, and not what we "think" might be good for them. Forcing our views to them will only resulted in resistances, and their refusal in gaining help from the government, or from other adults. We are then have to shift our perspectives on children, and start treating them as human who are in their development and they have their own voices too.

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