

The 'Brutal Freedom' of Street Life

Challenges in Assisting Street Children out of Street Life



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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of Master of Social Anthropology

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January 2009



Front page illustration: Raul, 10 years old (www.chicosdelacalle.org, CAINA web page)
“Kid/friend, I was born on the streets”
“I don’t recommend it”

Preface

Finally! The last two years of fieldwork and writing have put me up to many tests; it has probably been two of the most challenging years of my life. I am grateful to a range of people who have guided me through my frustrations, joys and spelling- errors, and I owe them all my gratitude.

First and foremost I wish to thank my informants; the children attending CAINA and the staff working there. Thank you for letting me be curious, and for answering my questions and providing me with new ones. I think about you often.

I thank my academic supervisor, John Andrew McNeish, for feedback and advice.

A special thanks to my family for supporting me, whatever I do!

Thank you Tord, for reading through the draft and helping me get back on track. Thank you Espen, for helping me with the technical layout; the thesis ended up looking just the way I wanted it to. Thanks to everyone on the 8th floor, especially those in room 840; for making these two years interesting and enjoyable. Finally, thanks to all my friends, especially Gro, Wenche and Kim. Thank you for being supportive, but most of all, thank you for being you!

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Cristian (18) has made a great effort getting his life together lately; he has come regularly to the day centre and tried to stay out of trouble. After 5 years on the street, he wants out. The problem is, he has a sentence hanging over him, armed robbery, *and* he ran away from the last home¹ he lived in. Today is his big chance; Cristian, some coordinators and I are going to the Tribunal where Cristian is hoping the judge will give him another chance at staying in a home. He is excited, but very nervous. He is afraid they will arrest him right there. He says he is so glad we are going there with him.

The meeting is a success. Cristian has a huge smile on his face. This is the first time I have ever seen him this happy. He hugs all of us, saying that we helped him, he is sure it wouldn't have gone so well if we hadn't been there. He is so happy that, when crossing the eight-line road outside the Tribunal, he loses the paper he just received from the judge and has to run between the cars (eagerly waiting for a green light) to recollect it. The coordinators tell him to prepare himself; there might not be room in the homes he wants to stay in. Cristian however, is optimistic.

Back at the day centre, Cristian and I eat lunch. He has not eaten all day; he was too nervous earlier. The coordinators come down after making some calls, and tell Cristian that unfortunately he only has one option; he has to go to a place outside of the capital, housing a couple of hundred children. Cristian does *not* want to go there. He has heard about this place. He asks about some other homes, but the coordinators say that all of them are full. The excitement disappears from his eyes and he loses his appetite. He becomes quiet. The coordinators encourage him to be positive; maybe it won't be so bad. Maybe he can stay there for some time, and then get a transfer, as time passes. Cristian says he would rather stay on the streets until there is room in another home, than go to that terrible place. His eyes become tearful; he gets up, and leaves for the streets without saying another word.

Alejandro (9) has not been at the day centre for weeks. Alejandro left his family a couple of months ago after somebody robbed him and took his schoolbag. Since he was too afraid to go home, he left for the streets. Shortly after, his brother Raul (11) left too, and they reunited on the streets. A boy they had met on the streets told them about the day centre, and they came shortly after. Their mother has been searching for them since the beginning, contacting the day centre and asking for them. The children say their mother beats them and that they will never go back home. They hate living on the streets; they are constantly hungry and they want to live in a home. The staff has tried to be a mediator between the mother and the two brothers, asking her to give the children some time alone, telling her she would create more problems than she would do good if she did not calm down. Her continued interference might have the opposite effect on the two boys, and the staff was worried they might stop coming to the day centre, fearing they would be forced back home to their mother.

The staff tried to act fast; the children were young and were still new on the streets. The sooner they could help them find a place, the better. After a lot of searching, they managed to find a home the two boys could stay in together. This institution, however, was not adequate for kids with street experience, but it was the only option for the children at the time. The institution staff had difficulties reaching out to and connecting with the boys and Alejandro ended up trashing the kitchen. In a short amount of time, they both left. Raul went back to their mother and Alejandro left for the streets. The last time Alejandro came to the day centre, he had scars on his stomach, after fighting with some other kids on the streets.

Main argument

Cristian and Alejandro are two out of several hundred children I met during my fieldwork where I worked as a volunteer at a day centre (CAINA)² for street children in Buenos Aires.

They were some of the children who shared with me their feelings and perceptions of living

¹ Even though the word *home* means both (family) home and (institutional) home, I have decided to use the same word in both cases, as this turned out to be the most preferable alternative. At times I use other words (such as e.g. *institution* for institutional home, or *paternal home* for the homes the children leave behind), but mostly I do not. I hope that the context will clear out potential misunderstandings.

² *Centro de Atención Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencia* (Centre for Integral Attention for Childhood and Adolescence) is a governmental run day centre for street children in Buenos Aires.

on the streets, and who opened up my eyes for the complexity of street children's life. Both Cristian and Alejandro wanted to get out of street life, but not at any cost.

Initially, I wanted to do fieldwork on the streets, reaching the children who did *not* make use of the different programs available to them, to see how their everyday lives went by, but things turned out differently. I was told by people working with street children that this would not be a wise approach. They said that I should not wander the streets by myself (in areas where street children hang, especially at night) because it was dangerous for several reasons. First of all, the new drug *paco*³ made the children aggressive. Secondly, I did not know the town and I was an 'easy prey' being foreign, not fluent in the language, and a young woman. I had to find another way to reach the children, as I did not have any contacts that could potentially function as an assistant or at least a way into the street field. After being in contact with the *Dirección General de la Niñez y Adolescencia*,⁴ I was put in touch with CAINA, a governmental run day centre for street children in Buenos Aires. Two rounds of interviews later, I was given work there, as a volunteer. After getting access to what was to become my field site, my initial question (why the children did *not* use institutions available to them) was slightly modified; why *do* they use these institutions? As time went by, I realized that the children did not come on a regular and frequent basis and the initial question became relevant again. Since the children know about the centre's existence and seem to enjoy staying there, why do they not come every day? What does the street offer these children? The coordinators at CAINA try to help the children out of the street situation, but out of those who do receive assistance in the form of access to a home, many escape and return to the street. In addition, many children do not want help to leave the street in the first place. Why is there such a low 'success-rate'? Why do the children return to the street? Why are they not dependant on institutions such as CAINA?

The general aim of this thesis is to answer these basic questions. However, most of all, the thesis aims to provide an understanding of why helping street children out of the street life situation is challenging. In order to grasp this problem, a discussion around some of the dominating factors that complicate the act of assistance is necessary. The children's individual

³ Paco or 'Pasta Base de Cocaína' (PBC) is a drug extracted from coca leaves added a mixture of gasoline, kerosene and sulphuric acid. It is an easily accessible and very cheap drug. It is inhaled through pipes or metal cans or it can be smoked mixed with tobacco or marihuana. The 'high' appears only 30 seconds after consuming and lasts for around 5-8 minutes. One of my adult informants told me that after 6 months of extensive use, children who smoke paco become 'like a 70 year old with Alzheimer,' turned into a non-reversible state.

⁴ General Directorate of Childhood and Adolescence.

backgrounds are important in relation to this understanding, but it is equally important to show how the children solve their everyday challenges and how they adapt to their surroundings (street life) practically and psychologically. As I will attempt to show, the results of adaptation to street life do not necessarily correlate with the expectations the helpers have or with the norms on which homes are constructed. The encounter between street children and those trying to help them is therefore of importance; an encounter characterized by their respective (and at times, conflicting) expectations and interests. There are, on one side, independent street children figuring out how to live their lives, and on the other, adults attempting to help them, with their own ideas and perceptions about childhood and children's needs and wants. By seeing children as active subjects in their own lives, not as mere receivers of assistance, the logic behind these conflicting notions appears.

Whereas the above mentioned points are subjects of discussion in the following chapters, this chapter will deal with the theoretical background on which this thesis is based. The 'new paradigm' in childhood theory stresses the contextual nature of childhood(s) with a particular focus on child agency. The latter will be of specific importance in this thesis, and I will make use of Pierre Bourdieu's (2007) 'theory of practice' in this regard. By highlighting the structures which both shape and are shaped by street children's agency, I wish to illustrate the processes that are at work both when the children enter, and potentially leave, a street life situation. Through seeing street life as a social field where particular interests are at stake, this thesis will show how the children's greatest strength in one setting can become a considerable weakness in another, and how this affects the process of assisting street children out of street life. The second part of this chapter highlights the incompatibility between the street child situation and the contemporary childhood ideal, as well as the definitional challenges that exist in relation to the street child phenomenon. The final section of this introductory chapter will introduce the field site; CAINA, a day centre for street children in Buenos Aires.

Theoretical developments and clarifications

Childhood(s)

The study of childhood has only recently been given thorough emphasis in anthropological research. Whereas previously treated as a mere subcategory (where children were seen as

appendices of their families), the subject is now acknowledged as a topic of research on its own.⁵ Some anthropologists *have* conducted child-centred studies in the past (including the use of child informants), such as Margaret Mead (1967) who did pioneering work with her research on (childhood and) adolescence in Samoa as early as in 1928. Mead set out to question the universal existence of the conflicting nature of adolescence. Her conclusion was that adolescence was not universal at all; rather the social environment provided the decisive framework for the understanding and living of life. This has also been the key point in new developments of childhood research; childhood is not universal in nature, but socially and contextually constructed.

Before the formal establishment of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), childhood theories were based on ideas of children being “natural, passive, incompetent and incomplete” (James & Prout 1997:x). Children were seen as “a defective form of adult, social only in their future potential but not in their present being” (James, Jenks & Prout 1998:6); they were rendered complete social human beings through adult influences and the process of socialization. Children were thought of as a natural phenomenon with primordial characteristics, developing and maturing through set stages. In the 1990s, James and Prout (1997) introduced a ‘new paradigm’ in childhood theory, based on a series of approaches. First of all, the ‘new paradigm’ aims to look beyond theories of socialization and basing their approach on social constructionism, they stressed a contextual view of childhood, where social, cultural and historical surroundings determine how childhood is seen and experienced (James & Prout 1997:26-28). The authors recognize the universal biological immaturity childhood entails, but specifies that the understanding of childhood is particular and contextual; it is thus more correct to talk of childhoods, rather than one single childhood. Secondly, the autonomy of children’s worlds and their own perceptions, practices, motives and assumptions are put in focus. Like adults, children live structured lives, but in a system that is unfamiliar to that of adults, according to the authors. There is thus a need to understand the structures these systems are based on, i.e. structures created by the children themselves

⁵ According to James and Prout (1997), the immense focus on socialization and development (both in childhood theory and people’s everyday conceptions of childhood) has placed the child firmly within the family, making it extraordinarily resistant to change, despite theoretical developments stressing otherwise. Child-centred research has not been a typical career-climbing topic, which has led to relatively little publishing on the topic (however, now a range of interdisciplinary outlets publish childhood research on a frequent basis, e.g. the interdisciplinary journal *Children and Society* (Blackwell) and *Childhood* (Sage). Similarly, Scheper-Hughes and Sargent note that there has been a lack of anthropological focus on domestic child abuse (until the mid 70s) due to a “naturalization of maternal sentiments” and the “strong ideologies of unconditional mother love” (1998:20). Eurocentric idea(s) seem to have overshadowed cultural relativism on these points.

(James & Prout 1997:28-30). Thirdly, children are seen as a minority group (James & Prout 1997:30-31) aiming to challenge the existing power structures between adults and children, and the influence of interactionism stresses the active status of children. Children should be seen as agents in, and products of, social processes; as active subjects in their own lives. Finally, children must be acknowledged as a constant feature of all social worlds, as are adults. Children are not seen as incomplete, but as a cohort of social actors who have the same rights as citizens as adults, and the same status as research subjects as adults (James & Prout 1997:32-33, see also Qvortrup 1991). The concluding remarks around these approaches in the 'new paradigm' of childhood is an epistemological break from seeing the child as 'becoming' to conceiving the child as "a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences – in sum, as a social actor"; that is "the 'being' child" (James, Jenks & Prout 1998:207).

Children are, however, still placed in a state of becoming and the term 'childhood' is still a problematic term amongst contemporary childhood researchers (Morrow 2007, Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998). According to Emma Uprichard (2008), children must simultaneously be seen as 'being' and 'becoming', since children must be studied in their own right, and since childhood must be acknowledged as a temporal concept. The dualism that appears to control and form ideas of childhood (versus adulthood), based on characteristics such as dependency and competency, must be overcome. Even though a conceptual change has occurred (focusing on the child as 'being' rather than as 'becoming'), ideas of past and future still exist, not only in the minds of adults, but also in the minds of children themselves (Uprichard 2008). According to Corsaro (1997:18), part of the problem is the term 'socialization' itself. Since its connotations are forward-centred and individualistic, the term leads to an inescapable view of training and preparation for adult life (the so-called 'state of becoming'). Corsaro stresses that socialization is "not only a matter of adaptation and internalization but also a process of appropriation, reinvention, and reproduction" including "how children negotiate, share, and create culture with adults and with each other" (1997:18). As the term contains specific connotations that overshadow its wider signification, Corsaro presents the term *interpretive reproduction* in order to capture the essence of child agency and participation, and children's contribution to cultural production and change (1997:18).

These points correlate with my view on how children and childhood should be perceived; as both 'being' and 'becoming,' and as going through processes of socialization, i.e. "processes

of appropriation, reinvention and reproduction” (Corsaro 1997:18) of their surroundings. This view acknowledges both children’s autonomy as a group, as well as including the temporal aspect of life; the children also have ideas, thoughts and dreams of their pasts, presents and futures. Seeing children as “social actors shaping as well as being shaped by their circumstances” (James, Jenks and Prout 1998:6) also matches with Bourdieu’s theory of practice (2007). Bourdieu’s theory is not a model of socialization; his theory is meant to be used as a tool for understanding social life. However, his theory illustrates the interplay between agent and structure, explaining the connections between why and how people act as they do; be it through reproducing structural frames or breaking out of them.

Agency and structure

Attempting to overcome objectivist (structuralist) and subjectivist (existentialist) reductionist approaches to scientific research, Bourdieu introduced the academic field with a theory of practice unifying the two previously mutually exclusive approaches through seeing them in a complementary light. Bourdieu’s theory of practice is based on a “*dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*” (2007:72, orig. emphasis), meaning that agents internalize the objective structures that surround them (out of personal interest and gain), and thus partake in the production and reproduction of these same objective structures (that generated them in the first place). This generative view of societal continuity is further elaborated through the introduction of terms such as *social fields*, various types of *capital* and in particular, *habitus*, which is the notion combining structure and agent. These terms prove useful in scientific research on social life and the continuity of social division in society, and as will be shown, also in relation to street children. Bourdieu has been criticised for giving greater emphasis to the objective structures than to individual agency, something that hinders his theory of practice in overcoming the gap he aimed to fill (Jenkins 1996:91). Jenkins criticises Bourdieu’s unclear presentation of the agent as somewhat ‘unconscious’ of his actions since *habitus* (generated by the objective structures surrounding an agent) repeatedly is referred to as what generates practice (1996:77). Jenkins calls for a greater emphasis (amongst other things) on human agency, since “actors are more knowledgeable about the social world than Bourdieu is prepared to allow” (1996:97). An emphasis on human agency and individual strategy could in addition provide a greater understanding of the possibility of change; a topic which will be further elaborated throughout this thesis. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of street life will be illustrated through seeing it as a social field, street life adaptation will be elaborated using Bourdieu’s terms of *habitus* and child

agency (chapter four and five), and habitus and social fields will be used in the discussion around the encounter between street children and the coordinators, which will help explain some of the complications present in the act of assistance (chapter six). The following section will define Bourdieu's concepts and clarify the manner in which these terms will be used.

Bourdieu defines habitus as "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*" (2007:72, orig. emphasis), i.e. systems of values, attitudes, desires, motivations and perceptions providing the agent with an understanding of how to perceive, think and act in any given situation (Wilken 2008:37). Habitus does not determine or control, so to speak, a person's behaviour, but works as an unspoken set of dispositions helping the agent make sense of the situations that appear, even if they are of an unfamiliar character. Habitus "arise from our particular position as members of one or several social fields", which is determined by different conditions of existence such as social status, educational background, profession, region etc. (Terdiman 1987:811). Habitus can therefore be seen as the framing for human practice whereas social fields are the arenas where practice is performed (Wilken 2008:38-39).

Later on, I will argue that street children's lives are characterized by movements through social fields. As will be shown, this move creates a disconnection and a disharmony between the social fields and the children's habitus. Habitus is often understood as life lasting, but as Bourdieu also acknowledges, it has the potential to change (when the external surroundings of a person changes), even if it happens at a slow pace (Wilken 2008:38). It is the movement between social fields (the change in external surroundings) that lead to an alteration in habitus, and I argue that this is what happens when street children adapt to street life. However, as will be shown, the children's transformation of habitus differs from Bourdieu's notion of change in habitus, in that it happens at a much faster pace.

Other writers argue that street life can not be considered a social field (as in Bourdieu's notion of a field), due to the fact that street life has no institutions of its own, that it is characterized by instability and that its autonomy can be questioned (Sandberg & Pedersen 2006:83). Sandberg and Pedersen prefer the term *street culture*, but they still see the street as a field in an analytical way (1006:83).⁶ As stressed by Wilken (2008:40), fields are not factual divisions

⁶ Whether the term 'culture' should be seen as a less problematic labelling than the term 'social field' is a different discussion. In any case, using 'social fields' for analytical purposes is really what Bourdieu's fields are meant to work as. The term 'culture' has appeared in Bourdieu's writings in relation to his theory of practice. To

in society; they refer to relations between agents fighting for distinct forms of capital. A social field must be understood in terms of its defining content (i.e. the forms of capital of relevance within each field) and each field therefore has “a different logic and taken-for-granted structure of necessity and relevance” (Jenkins 1996:834). Thus, the struggle for power (relevant capital) in one social field, say the schoolyard, does not equal the struggle for relevant capital in the street field, merely because there are different and field-specific resources and interests at stake in different fields. According to Jenkins (1996:89), there is no clear manner of delineating or defining social fields, and Bourdieu himself states that social fields and their boundaries and limits are a matter for empirical investigation. Elsewhere it has been stated that the field can metaphorically be understood as a magnet; as something that exerts an invisible but forceful influence on patterns of behaviour upon all those within its range (Terdiman 1987:806). As will be shown in later chapters, street life has a ‘magnetic power’ upon street children. When (street) children enter the street field, they find themselves in a specific setting in which particular expectations toward action, thought and behaviour are required. Based on these points, I argue that it is appropriate to see the street (or street life) as a social field to which particular forms of capital are connected.

As mentioned, in each social field a struggle for the accumulation and possession of relevant capital takes place. In addition to material or economic capital, Bourdieu introduces the following forms of capital; social capital (familial relations, networks and connections), cultural capital (legitimate knowledge, education and competency) as well as symbolic capital, i.e., the knowledge of and the ability to convert specific capital into other forms of capital (Wilken 2008:39). Street capital (a form of cultural capital) is what street children fight for in the street field, and chapter four and five will deal with the accumulation of this form of capital in the street field. Moreover, as will be described in further detail in chapter six, although street capital is a necessity in the street field might become a hindrance in other social fields.

Problems with the ‘universal’ childhood

The contemporary western childhood image is a fairly recent construction; during the last three centuries it has gone through notable transformations, especially in relation to children’s role and value in the family. Previous to these transformations, children were of greater

my knowledge, however, only when referring to the concept of ‘habitus’ (not when referring to ‘social fields’). See e.g. Terdiman, Translator’s Introduction to Bourdieu (1987:806), Jenkins (1996:92) and Wilken (2008).

economic and practical value to the household, through their roles as financial contributors to the household economy. In the contemporary (western) world, children are no longer expected to work. Work is now something children must be protected from (as stated in the CRC, article 32). There has been a shift from children being of practical importance to being “priceless in terms of their psychological worth” (Scheper-Hughes 1987:12).⁷ As living standards in Europe improved and people gave birth to fewer children, a change in people’s perceptions on the significance of the individual human life appeared (Scheper-Hughes 1987). Before this shift, uncertainties of individual survival (due to hardships and low living standards) led to a greater focus on collective survival (family, lineage etc.). Parents had to be emotionally distant to their children out of necessity, in order to psychologically protect themselves.⁸ As a result of the lowered mortality rate, parents could afford to get emotionally closer to their children. The bettering of living standards thus led to a greater emphasis on ideologies of individualism.

Ideas of children’s place and role in the family have therefore not gone unchanged in Europe over the latest decades, despite being treated as such (especially in relation to the ‘priceless’ emotional worth of children). It may seem that the contemporary western middle class childhood has been chosen as an ideal and universal childhood, which preferably should look like the following; children should be sorrow-free and protected, live in a nuclear family, go to school while their parents are at work and live in a safe suburb, with plenty of time for play and recreation. Innocence, protection and safety are key words in the description of the ideal childhood. The western image of childhood is however, far from the reality of most of the world’s children, both in the ‘west’ and the ‘rest’ of the world. There are, on the one side the differences that exist between wealthy countries in the industrialized world in relation to those in poor ‘industrializing countries.’ However, also between culturally and geographically close countries, the notion of childhood can vary significantly.

The notion of childhood is strongly connected to the notion of family. Like ‘childhood,’ the term ‘family’ is used uncritically, both as a method of measurement (e.g. in statistics, see Qvortrup 1991) and as a way of thinking. The family unit is seen as the preferable place for a

⁷ These ‘categories of value’ should not be thought of as exclusive, but rather as ‘transformations of focus.’

⁸ Scheper-Hughes (1987:2) points to the contextual interpretation of the birth and the death of a child, based on a comparison between the ‘developed’ and the ‘developing’ world. In the ‘developed’ world the birth of a child is seen as ‘new life’, whereas it is experienced as a ‘threat to premature death’ in precarious areas in the ‘third world’. Consequently, child death is seen more as a misfortune than as a tragedy, in the ‘developing’ world.

child (article 9 in the CRC). However, the notion of family, in the same way as childhood, also differs according to context (and also within the 'same context'). The nuclear family containing mother, father and child(ren) is the way family is thought of in an orthodox Norwegian context, and the rest of the relatives is seen as the extended family. We might have close emotional bonds to our extended family, but they are often separated from the nuclear family in terms e.g. of place of residence. Elsewhere, however, a family is not thought of as complete unless the parents of parents are included. In addition, single-parent families are of an increasing presence in the Norwegian context. What about homosexual couples with children, challenging the notion of same sex parents? Should not all these be considered 'a family'? Family can mean different things to different people, at both global and local levels.

Through the international community's ratification of the CRC, with the exception of USA and Somalia, all countries are held responsible for their children's welfare. The convention is a western construction, and is therefore based on western ideas and perceptions of children's needs and rights. The western middle class ideal of childhood has thus become a template for what childhood is and should be, in every country. The CRC is both universal and contextual in nature; it states that all children should have equal rights and simultaneously stresses children's individual value. It is open for cultural and contextual interpretation, through the principle of 'the best interest of the child.' This raises additional issues, such as that of definitional power; who is to define what is best for the child? Human rights legislation is thus problematic, due to the contextual understanding of life and the possibility of conflict and (mis)interpretation of these universal rights (Shepher-Hughes & Sargent 1998). This criticism was set forward due to the realization that perceptions of terms and categories vary according to context; notions e.g. of childhood, family and parenthood vary in different societies. The CRC can thus be said to be ethnocentric in itself; being based on the western idea of childhood and the western ideology of individualism.

Academics have touched upon the fact that globalization processes are spreading the western childhood image, in particular to the elites in 'developing' countries. Through human rights legislation (CRC) the childhood ideal has been implemented into the national social policy in these countries. Stereotyped images of children as innocent victims or deviants have been exported to countries in 'the South' from industrial countries in 'the North' (Boyden 1997:197). Further, Boyden (1997) speaks of how child welfare and childhood is connected to the individual and the family; the wider social, structural society and political and economic

factors have been downplayed by the idea that the closer family unit is responsible for child welfare, where parents are to blame for eventual problems. This places an impossible responsibility on parents in poor parts of the world; on the one side because child-rearing practices vary, and on the other side because, even if ideas of the ideal childhood were present, these groups might have scarce resources and scant possibility of following this ideal. The structural violence of poverty has also been used in order to explain maltreatment in shantytowns, something that gives an extended understanding of the strategies people make use of, e.g. in child-rearing, as these strategies are seen in relation to the economic and social realities their lives are part of.

Anchored in the CRC and contemporary ideas of childhood, several NGOs and various programmes are developed to help children in need all over the world. These aims can be based both on feelings of responsibility and of possibility. The ‘west’ is out to save the ‘underdeveloped rest’ in the light of the CRC, thinking they have the knowledge and financial possibility to do so, and also seeing their approach as normative (this can be illustrated in the name of organizations, such as *Save the Children*). However, sometimes this helping hand has done more harm than good due to not realizing what consequences actions can have, not seeing phenomena in their context, as well as neglecting to confer with the people in question (seeing people as passive receivers). The following project, carried out on the basis of good intentions and the CRC, are examples of projects leading to unwanted and unexpected results: In 1982, UNICEF launched the ‘child survival campaign,’ based on the use of several technological innovations, with the aim to decrease infant and child mortality (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998:4-6). In Brazil, where they have done years of research, they saw how breast milk was replaced by Nestle bottles of milk, and how, as time passed, breast milk was seen (by mothers) as non-pure and bad, leading to children receiving less nutritive food. Scheper-Hughes and Sargent found that instead of saving children’s lives, these ‘technological fixes’ (which was a subject of suspicion for anthropologists from the start) rather prolonged children’s deaths (1998:4).

Street children’s childhoods – an oxymoron

Anthropological research on street children has, amongst other topics, focused on the ethnocentric views on childhood held by western academics. Not only have street children’s lives been compared to the ideal western middle class image of childhood, instead of the children living in their own countries, cultures and socioeconomic contexts (Aptekar & Adeb

1997), but this ethnocentric view has also led to misguided theories of ‘abandonment’ (Panter-Brick 2000). Several studies have discussed reasons for the origins of street children (Rizzini & Lusk 1995, Aptekar 1994), attempting to understand why these children experience such heavy mistreatment (Hecht 1998, Aptekar 1991, Leigh Tierney 1997).

Street children form a group of children in great contrast to the ideal childhood image, in every way. The great majority of the children frequenting CAINA are sole providers for their own survival. In addition, they reside on the streets, they engage in sexual and criminal activities, they are exposed to influences seen as dangerous and ‘corrupting,’ as well as not attending school. Furthermore, they move around in the urban landscape with no adult control, another factor situating ‘street childhood’ outside the realm of the ideal childhood. Not only are these children without parental guidance and protection, they have responsibilities and partake in activities that are seen as highly inappropriate; activities that are part of the ‘adult world.’ The term street child can be seen as an oxymoron, as two incompatible words; words that are seemingly contradictive.⁹ Similarly, ‘street children’s childhoods’ can be read as an oxymoron; not only because street children stand in great contrast to the ideal childhood image, as will be discussed below, but because these children are sometimes portrayed as having no childhood at all.

The fact that innocence and protection are what ‘western’ beliefs of childhood are based on could be why theories on abandonment are turned to in order to explain the street child phenomenon.¹⁰ Children who are not living with their families and protected by their parents, are seen as abandoned since they are denied the proper place of childhood, and since their parents are not acting in accordance with their responsibility. Panter-Brick (2000) argue against the international ethnocentrism and misconception of children in marginalized situations, such as refugee and street children. The idea of abandonment is incorrect, as evidence seems to suggest that this rarely is the case. Abandonment was similarly never mentioned among the street children coming to CAINA as the reason for why they were on the streets. The great majority of children at CAINA left their parental homes by their own choice.

⁹ Child soldier and child labour can also be read as an oxymoron for these same reasons.

¹⁰ See Veale, Taylor and Linehan (2000) for an analysis on the psychological processes that may operate in the conceptualization of ‘abandonment’ in relation to street children.

According to Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1998:367), street children do not choose to leave their families, nor do they run away. They are rather *driven* from their parental homes, due to a variety of reasons, such as chronic hunger, neglect, physical or sexual abuse. In relation to these factors street life is seen as preferable. I would rather, contrary to Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1998), use the word *choose*, as I believe *being driven* evokes a rather inactive view of the children. Several researchers have emphasized the conscious choice made by both street children and children in other 'extreme' situations in response to dire circumstances (Reynolds, Nieuwenhuys & Hanson 2006:292, Boyden 1997:197, Evans 2004:70). At CAINA, there were several push and pull factors involved in the children's decisions to leave their families, including those listed above (by Shepher-Hughes and Hoffman). One could call the action of leaving home 'a force of circumstance,' but child agency must not be overlooked. Many find it similarly hard to believe that some children would themselves enrol in military service (Rosen 2007), or to accept children agency in relation to the labour industry (Nieuwenhuys 1996).

The lack of acknowledgement of child agency is related to parental responsibility. Parental wrong-doing was always referred to as the reason for why children were on the streets amongst the general public, who were not involved in street child assistance. The children's 'lack of education,' both formal and at home, was seen as the main explanation (some also spoke of 'a lack of culture'). Implicit in this belief is a firm idea of children's position in a family, and that parents are to protect and direct children's actions.¹¹ Without underestimating or opposing this belief, I wish to lead the discussion over to child agency. I do not mean here that parents play no part in the process of entering street life. Domestic abuse and mistreatment in the family was often mentioned among my informants as the reasons for why they were on the streets. However, I see that turning the attention towards agency is important, for several reasons. First of all, it is in line with the developments of childhood research and it reflects a more nuanced and accurate picture of reality. Secondly, it challenges the preordained assumptions many have towards children's active participation in their own lives, and it is useful in this regard, because it can prevent the creation of misguided ideas of what kind of people they are. Thirdly, a possible outcome of neglecting the idea of child agency,

¹¹ Another example of parental blaming is found in a more familiar context, in the realm of Norwegian asylum policy. In relation to unaccompanied minors (asylum seekers) coming to Norway, the anchor child theory is of frequent use (Engebretsen 2002). This theory is based on the idea that cynical parents send off their children to rich countries, in order to ask for family reunification. This act strongly contradicts the intense emotional value of children, and could be a reason for the creation of these ideas.

especially when seen in relation to crime and violence, might be that children are perceived as ‘evil’ or ‘lost,’ without attempting to understand what motivates children’s actions. A child over whom parents do not have control is seen as not only ‘wrong,’ but also dangerous.

Children in ‘extreme’ situations, such as exploitative child labour and child soldiers, are like street children, seen as children who have been *deprived* of their childhoods. In several books and articles on street children, phrases such as *deprived*, *robbed*, *stolen*, or *lost* their childhood often occur (see e.g. Leigh Tierney 1997). However, “clearly what has been ‘stolen’ or ‘lost’ is not the biological development from infancy to childhood, but rather the conditions germane to a particular type of childhood” (Hecht 1998:72); namely the western middle class childhood. Childhood is therefore seen as more than a temporal phenomenon, and using the above phrases reflect a belief that the western ideal childhood is the only valid childhood. If children are persons under the age of 18 years (as stated in the CRC), however, then street children, even if their lives are hard and horrible, have just as much a childhood as any other child simply due to their existence. If one is to see the western childhood as the only valid one, these children can be said to never have had one. The use of these phrases provokes reactions, the same way as numbers of street children have been accused of being exaggerated, or in the same way as CAINA can exaggerate in particular cases in order to get assistance more efficiently. Perhaps this is what it takes to get people’s attention?

Street child definition

‘Street children are simply poor children in the wrong place’
(Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998:358).

I open this section with the above quote for two reasons; first of all because it makes associations to Mary Douglas’ term ‘matter out of place’ (also underlined by the authors), which illustrates people’s feelings about street children. Whereas children running around unsupervised on shantytown streets are simply seen as children; as soon as these same children enter urban streets, they become street children (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman 1998:358). The street changes connotations according to location; urban streets being the ‘wrong location.’ Secondly, streets are ‘the wrong place’ not only in a practical sense, but also in an abstract way; childhood is to be lived in a family setting, not alone and away from family and adult control and protection.

The number of street children worldwide is hard to estimate, largely due to the lack of a universally accepted definition. Despite disagreements concerning the number and definitions of street children, there is a consensus that large urban cities in ‘Third World’ countries are home to most of the world’s street children. In the 1980s, UNICEF estimated that the number of street children in the world had reached 80 million, and that 40 million of these were living in Latin America (Tacon 1981, 1983 in Aptekar 1994).¹² These numbers have been questioned and said to be an over-estimate by some analysts. The anthropologist Tobias Hecht (1998), doing research on street children in Recife, Brazil, speaks in further detail of the confusion of numbers of street children in this region. Hecht sees this confusion as a process where numbers are uncritically used and treated as facts, without investigating their source (1998:99). One person cites another, who already cited another and the numbers end up living a life of their own.¹³ Hecht found that instead of an estimated 80.000 street children in Recife, the actual number surveyed by several teams of experienced street educators over the course of three nights counted 212 children (Hecht 1998:100).¹⁴ One of the reasons behind the allegedly misguided numbers of street children is said to not only stem from definitional disagreements, but also due to organisations manipulating numbers in order to receive external attention and funding for their projects (Connolly & Ennew 1996).

The term ‘street children’ has, during the last decades, undergone a long lasting academic discussion around its adequacy, and several terms have been suggested in order to portray and describe this population more accurately. Critics have argued that the various definitions proposed are either too wide or too narrow; too including or too excluding. Terms and definitions exist for a reason; they enable us to point to and understand exactly what phenomenon we are dealing with. However, constant disagreement leading to nothing but confusion is not fruitful. This section will look into some of the suggested definitions, and the ‘characteristics’ of street children in Buenos Aires will work as empirical data in relation to this discussion. Finally, my own remarks on the adequacy of the initial term used (‘street children’) will be discussed as the preferable alternative to describe this population.

¹² UNICEF numbers had reached 100 million in 2006 (<http://www.unicef.org/sowc06/profiles/street.php>) Accessed 19.11.2008.

¹³ This can be problematic for two reasons; first of all, when numbers reach such heights people might feel overwhelmed by the situation and feel that one can not do much to solve the problem. Secondly, when (or if) the correct numbers appear, projects might lose credibility and support.

¹⁴ The frequently used number of street children in Brazil (with a total of 114 million inhabitants) was 7 million, accounting for 6% of the population in 1993. Out of the 1.3 million inhabitants in Recife at the time, 80.000 would be street children according to these numbers (Hecht 1998:100). See also Hecht (2000).

In the 1980s, UNICEF introduced the terms ‘children *of* the street’ and ‘children *on* the streets’ attempting to accurately describe the street child population; the former in relation to children living on the streets without contact with their families, and the latter to children staying with their families, but working on the streets to support their families economically (Panter-Brick 2002). The prepositions *of* and *on* are meant to explain the relationship the child has to the street, but prove too rigid when put into practice; because “how often does a child have to sleep *in* the street to be *of* the street?” (Hecht 1998:103). Benno Glauser, doing fieldwork on street children in Asunción, Paraguay, found these defined categories as problematic and too rigid, as the children could not be divided into such static forms in reality (1997:146). The children made use of the street in a variety of ways; not only in relation to their homes or families (if they had one), but also depending on factors such as work (demand), climate (time of the year), the presence of other institutions, and time spent in jail (Glauser 1997). Panter-Brick (2002) sees ‘urban children at risk’ to be a preferable alternative, whereas Connolly and Ennew (1996) refers to the phrase ‘children out of place’ as an alternative to ‘street child.’¹⁵ Despite critiques and suggestions, however, children *on* and *of* the street are the most frequently used terms when referring to the street child phenomenon.

CAINA staff use a modified version of these terms, namely ‘children in a street situation’ (*chicos en situación de calle*). This puts focus on the social context (the situation) as the determining factor in the way these children live and experience their lives. Other informal terms were also used, in order to describe the levels of street experience, such as *núcleo duro* (‘hard core’) and *chicos cronificados* (‘chronic children’). These terms refer to the children who have stayed a long time on the street. The UNICEF terms (children *of* and *on* the street) were not used much by the staff, as these were not thought of as reflections of reality,¹⁶ The children, however, used the term ‘children *of* the street’ when questioning me about the existence of street children in Norway.

¹⁵ This was the name of a planned workshop on street children (in 1995), and was meant to refer to (street) children’s dislocation from the places regarded as ‘in place’ in the western ideal childhood image.

¹⁶ When discussing this definition, a woman working at CAINA told me: “These children are not *of* the street, the street did not give birth to them. They are *of* their parents!”

The term *pibe* (and *piba*¹⁷ for girls, meaning ‘kid’) was the most frequently used term by both CAINA staff and the children coming to the day centre.¹⁸ Even though this term is not directly describing street children in particular, it deserves mentioning, due to its frequent use and important connotations. Both Eloisa Martin (2004) and Archetti (1999) explore the use and meaning of this emic category in relation to self-identification amongst Argentinean men. According to Martin (2004:7), a *pibe* is a ‘real man’ whose masculinity (seen as the central value of manhood) is defined by endurance or *aguante* (referring to values such as courage, moral and physical strength).¹⁹ Also, through analyzing *cumbia villera* texts,²⁰ Martin found that “the themes played out in the *cumbia villera* indiscriminate consumption of drugs and alcohol, robbery, vagrancy, [and] unrepressed sexuality [...]” (2004:8). There is a certain legitimization of robbery and of the consumption of drugs and alcohol for the *pibe*, as long as one is in control. The connection between (*pibe*) values, consumption of drugs, and criminal activities will be discussed in further depth in chapter four, in relation to notions of morality and discourses of right and wrong.

‘Street child’ term: adequate or inadequate

Panter-Brick (2002) is of the opinion that the term ‘street children’ is an inadequate term for this population. She argues that it obscures the heterogeneity of the children’s lives and that it does not correspond to the child’s movements and experiences. Additionally, she stresses that it contains pitying connotations; that it deflects attention from other children equally struck by poverty and social exclusion (but not living on the streets), and that it can be seen as more a reflection of social and political agendas of institutions and organizations rather than of reality (2002:149). Punch (2002) argues that the phrase ‘urban children at risk’ is a better alternative.

In this thesis I argue for the opposite; for the adequacy of the term ‘street children.’ I see the term street children as a wide term, illustrating rather than obscuring the heterogeneity of the children’s lives, since it includes all children who have a relationship to the street of a ‘stronger degree,’ either as a place of work and/or residence. The term corresponds to the child’s movements and experiences, being the overall determinant. Further, I believe one *should* feel pity for these children. Feeling sad and compassionate on behalf of others can

¹⁷ Whether *piba* differs from the term *pibe* (apart from in a mere grammatical way in accordance to gender), I do not know. The terms seemed to be used in the same way, and this thesis will use the theorization around this term for both biological genders.

¹⁸ See the front page of the thesis.

¹⁹ The great majority of the children attending CAINA come from *villas miserias*.

²⁰ Cumbia is a music genre which is very popular in Argentina. *Cumbia villera* means cumbia of the shantytowns.

hardly be said to be negative? As long as one does not underestimate the strength of these children, pitying them for their rough lives is only human. Street life was perhaps preferable to staying home for many of the children I spoke with, but certainly not what they believed to be a good life. The fact that it deflects attention from other children equally struck by poverty and social exclusion (children who do not live on the streets) might be so, but this other group of children do not live on the streets and can not be called street children for this exact reason. I do agree that both street children and other poor children in urban settings can be characterized as ‘urban children at risk.’ However, the term ‘urban children at risk’ is a misleading replacement; it can be said to be placed at the other end of the spectrum, lacking what the term ‘street children’ is argued to have too much of (specifying the contextual reality of the children). ‘Urban children at risk’ obscures the reality of street children’s lives. My point is not to understate the given that children suffer in different ways. The life of a child living on the street is not necessarily worse than the life of his/her younger sibling who stayed behind, or of other children living in difficult circumstances in urban shantytowns. The point is not to create a hierarchy system of pain and suffering; it is rather to define a population as correctly as possible. Children living on the streets are in a specific situation, and is there not a need to specify this? I agree that the term can be a reflection of social and political agendas of institutions and organizations, but it does not make it inadequate. The children are street children, irrespective of the agenda to organizations. Furthermore, one must realize that street children make up a heterogeneous group in relation to the importance the street has for the individual child, as well as the particular child’s usage of the street. However, as stressed, the street and the children (persons under 18 years of age) are the common denominators. For illustrative purposes, one can say that the reasons for why street children should be called street children also apply for other groups of children, such as child soldiers and child labourers. These groups contain an equally heterogeneous population, but the common denominators such as warfare and work place these children within a setting one can not escape when referring to these groups.

Street children in Buenos Aires

It has been affirmed that a variety of childhoods exist across the globe. Street children’s lives in Buenos Aires are not equal to that of street children in London. Even within the capital of Buenos Aires, street children make up a heterogeneous population. For illustrative purposes, street children in Buenos Aires can be divided into three ‘rough’ groups; children working in the city (young children mostly) sometimes with adults nearby, (children of) *cartoneros*, and

children attending CAINA.²¹ These groups are not necessarily exclusive or static. However, I never saw children from the first two groups at CAINA, but rather on various locations in the capital of Buenos Aires. My interaction with them was minimal, but I daily observed them and sometimes engaged in conversation with them.

Young working children (3-6 years old) were often found on the main shopping streets of Buenos Aires. These children, alone or in groups, often stayed in a specific location, and would stop passers-by for money or sell items. Some seemed to be engaged in cooperative relationships with each other; they split up and got back together after a while to see what results they had achieved. A couple of children often sat in the middle of the street playing the accordion for money. At the metro (*subte*), there were often two or three children (sometimes also teenagers or young people with babies on their arms) standing next to the ticket counter, waiting for change. These children were not only standing at the central stations, but could also be found further out at other *subte* stops in the suburbs. Sometimes they asked for money, and sometimes people pushed their leftover coins over to the side without being asked. Rumours had it (from more than one source) that these children were ‘rented’ and that they had set hours standing there (even the term ‘mafia-operation’ was used).²² In the *subte* carriages, there were always a lot of salesmen and entertainers (musicians) and among these were several children, selling everything from stickers to colouring books, or juggling and singing. The families of some of these children were sitting at the end stations waiting for the children as they were selling their goods.

In December 2007, the yearly counting of street children took place in Buenos Aires.²³ They found that the majority of the children on the streets were *cartoneros* (or children of *cartoneros*). *Cartoneros* is a profession which appeared after the 2001 economic crisis, due to the newly impoverished population. *Cartoneros* recycle carton, they collect carton and paper

²¹ I am not attempting to create different categories of street children in Buenos Aires. Rather, in order to illustrate the differences that exist, and the necessity of seeing street children as a heterogeneous term, I choose to do it this way. I also observed other children on the streets of Buenos Aires that didn’t fit into these groups, i.e. older children that did not come to CAINA

²² One of my adult informants told me such a situation. Taking the train to work every morning, he observed a middle-aged woman with 24 children standing behind her, in an array. The children were of all ‘shapes and colours’, about the same ages, so he was certain that they were not all hers. He believed they were all begging money for her.

²³ The annual counting was executed by the EM (*Equipo Movil*, part of the government measures to assist street children), with the help of CAINA staff and other people working with street children. The date, 16th of December 2007, was chosen for several reasons: it was a night to a Monday (a school day) and children who go home to see their families often do it on weekends. Report: Consejo de los Derechos de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes (2007).

from the streets of Buenos Aires, which is paid for by the kilo, and shipped off to the provinces. The results of the counting gave the following picture: out of a total count of 798 children, 49,5% of the children were on the streets with an adult family member, recycling carton. These children lived in a house with their family in the Buenos Aires province, outside the capital borders, and they were on the streets working for family income. These children compose a different group than those arriving at CAINA.²⁴ The 2001 economic crisis led not only to the presence of cartoneros, and children working as cartoneros on the streets of the capital, but also to a rise in the number of street children coming to CAINA.

According to CAINA statistics, between 1997 and 2003 the amount of children attending the day centre increased by 178%, and during the period of the crisis in 2001, the number increased by 30%. This number has stabilized, and now there are between 40 and 50 children arriving each day. Amongst people working with street children in Buenos Aires (CAINA and EM staff); the children coming to CAINA are said to be the toughest street kids, those with the most street experience. Almost all of the children come from Argentinean families living in extreme poverty in the province of Buenos Aires. Lack of material goods and basic needs, and domestic violence (often including alcoholism) are reasons for their street situation. The majority of the children leave home themselves (hardly any are abandoned). Often, the introduction to street life is through siblings, other family members or children from the suburbs; many of the children coming to CAINA have brothers, sisters or cousins on the streets. Adult company on the streets is absent, but many keep in touch with their families (a sporadic connection), and visit them from time to time. The children's ethnic background is Argentinean, and almost all the children had a dark skin complexion.

CAINA – field site

Established in 1991, CAINA is the first of several governmental measures to assist street children in Buenos Aires. The centre is open on weekdays from 09:00-16:00 (most children leave after lunch at 13:00). The rest of the day/night is spent on the street or in other public spaces, such as at the subte, at train stations, in parks and city buildings. The children frequent the day centre with a high rate of rotation, and they compose a very diverse group. Some have

²⁴ During my fieldwork I only met one child at CAINA who said he was a cartonero.

years of street experience, others have only just started living on the street. What they have in common is that they come to have a meal (breakfast and lunch), a shower²⁵ and a change of clothes, to play games, and to talk to and be listened to by the coordinators working there. The children can partake in workshops (circus, ceramics, literature, music, art, school etc), get assistance in obtaining their identity papers (*Documento Nacional de Identificación*), receive health care, and help to get out of the street situation. The children attending are of all ages (0-18 years), with a majority of boys between the ages 12-17. The upper age limit is set to 18, but also after this age, they can come and visit once a month (those with small children can come Fridays for medical attention). The vast majority of the children attending CAINA live on the streets of Buenos Aires (81%), hardly anyone live in homes (1%), and 12% live at home with their families.²⁶ The children become familiar with the centre's existence through friends on the streets.

The staff's main aim is to get the children away from the street and attempt to re-integrate them with their families or suburbs. When re-integration with the children's families is not possible (either because the family is not to be found, or because the child refuses to go home), the staff alternative measures are turned to, such as derivation²⁷ to homes.²⁸ These processes are based on the children's wishes, and are never initiated by force. The staff acknowledges that the children are active subjects; they choose to come to CAINA and they choose what they want to partake in. They know that force will not lead to wanted results, it would rather lead to the children stop coming. However, the children have to follow the rules at CAINA in order to stay at CAINA. The staff consists of 30 people, and is composed of professionals with different academic backgrounds (social-workers, psychologists, sociologists, lawyers) and of people working with general maintenance (cooking and cleaning). Every day a meeting takes place where individual 'cases' are discussed. The centre can be said to work as a 'mediator'; as a contact institution between the children and the government/their families.

CAINA is one out of several governmental institutions established to assist the street child population in Buenos Aires. Two internet cafés are available free of charge (they also serve

²⁵ The possibility to take a shower is appealing to the children (hard to find elsewhere), and thus a strategic choice by CAINA

²⁶ CAINA statistics. January-October 2006. The last 6% live in shelters.

²⁷ *Derivación*. This verb is deliberately used by the staff, in order to avoid words with specific connotations of control and force (such as 'place/put' in a home).

²⁸ *Homes*. Two different homes exist: therapeutic homes, *homes terapéuticos* (for drug misuse or psychological problems), and homes where the children can live together with other children (*comunidades convivenciales*). It is hard to find space for the children in both these homes, especially in the latter.

small meals and show movies). A mobile team (EM) operating 24 hours a day all year, both reach out to the children on the streets and respond to calls from neighbours, families or the children themselves. In addition, an office in contact with the different available homes (state-owned, church led and NGO) is part of the government program. Finally, shelters (*paradores*) and two day centres for children of cartoneros have been established. These different operators can contact each other when specific cases are discussed (e.g. to know more about the whereabouts of a specific child). The children are often familiar with several of these (in particular CAINA, the EM and the internet cafés).

Structure of thesis

The second chapter will deal with the methodological advantages and challenges I encountered during my fieldwork. Furthermore, it will deal with the implications of doing research as a volunteer and in an institution. The establishment of the 'new paradigm' in childhood theory, in which children must be seen as social actors (both being shaped by and shaping their surroundings), has led to the appearance of some methodological and ethical dilemmas, which will also be discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, some ethical considerations which are of importance when doing research with children, and in particular, with children in a vulnerable situation, will be of focus.

Chapter three aims to provide an ethnographic insight of the setting in which I met the children. Even if no two days were the same, I will attempt to portray an idea of the daily activities taking place at the day centre through 'A day at CAINA.' I aim for this chapter to portray the children as I saw them; as human beings with their own feelings, joys and frustrations.

Chapter four will deal with the psychological adaptation to street life, analyzing the processes of identity formation at play. This chapter will speak of the changes the children go through after entering the street context, and I will argue that entering street life leads to an alteration in the children's habitus. I will give room to a section on the children's backgrounds (from shantytowns), arguing that their backgrounds can be said to constitute a form of 'brutal knowledge' which enables the children to cope with street life. Furthermore, street life

brutality will also make out a part in this chapter. Street children live brutal lives on the streets, and simultaneously, freedom is expressed as the most valued aspect of street life for these children. As emphasised in the title of the thesis, and as will be elaborated throughout the thesis; this contradiction in terms is an expressive and appropriate manner of describing street life for these children. The general treatment the children receive from the larger society and how this affects the children's self image will be dealt with in further detail. Focus will also be given to the children's idea of right and wrong (morality), and to the necessity of being 'street smart.'

In chapter five, I suggest that street children can be seen as urban 'hunters and gatherers.' Even though street children's lives differ radically from foraging groups e.g. in the Kalahari Desert in south-western Africa, they are also surprisingly similar in many respects, in particular in relation to strategies for resource procurement and social organization. Furthermore, the place of drugs in the street setting will be dealt with. Emphasising child agency, I argue that these strategies make out the children's practical adaptation to street life.

Chapter six will deal with the challenges that exist in relation to assisting the street child population. On the one side, street children sometimes do not want help, due to a variety of reasons, for example previous experiences in homes, not wanting to lose their freedom, scared of or lacking trust in the people who are there to help them. On the other side, emphasising street life adaptation, and using Pierre Bourdieu's (2007) theories on social fields, habitus and capital, this chapter aims to explain how challenges exist on *both* sides (both for the children themselves, and for the coordinator trying to help them). Furthermore, the encounter between the street children and the coordinators, and the purpose and consequences of CAINA as an institution attempting to help street children, will be of focus. Finally, in the last section I will argue that, what one must acknowledge is that what one is really asking from these children (in the process of leaving street life), is actually another round of adaptation.

The final chapter, chapter seven, will bring together the previous chapters in order to illustrate the complexity of street children's lives.

Methodological concerns and ethical considerations

Anthropology provides an advantageous methodology and perspective for doing child-centred research; with a critical basis in cultural comparability, child worlds can be studied and understood contextually in the same manner as adult worlds. Using the qualitative research method involving participant observation, the anthropologist comes close to the everyday life of people. This closeness provides the researcher with unique knowledge, and allows the worries, needs and joys of the informants to become understandable in a new and distinct way. As a result, the anthropologist understands and observes connections that might otherwise not come to light. As will be illustrated, the ‘new paradigm’ of childhood research poses new methodological and ethical questions, and these will be dealt with in this chapter. Furthermore, the methodological challenges and advantages which I encountered in the field will be dealt with.

Fieldwork with (street) children

In accordance with the CRC, children not only have the right to be protected, but also to be heard and to express their opinions in matters concerning them (article 12 in the CRC). Similarly, following the ‘new paradigm’ in childhood studies (James, Jenks & Prout 1998), a child-centred research, with child participation on all levels of the research process, has been discussed as the preferable approach to childhood studies. Some social scientists have stressed how children should be included in the whole research process, including having access to the research outcomes, or participate in determining how they should be (Young and Barrett 2001, Van Beers 1996, Dallape 1996). In my case, the children have not been included in the process to the degree that they have seen my field notes or discussed any findings with me. This, as will be discussed in further detail below, happened for several reasons; constant movement in the field, my position at the day centre was that of a volunteer (I could not do my own projects), as well as that the children showed a varied interest in my project. I did, however, talk with the children about my aim with the project and about my thoughts on different issues, to see if I had ‘got it right.’ This always happened in a direct and forward, but respectful manner, without any attempts to hide information from them.

Punch (2002) addresses the need for reflexivity when doing child-centred research, not only on the role and assumptions of the researcher, but also in terms of the methods used to

generate data *and* in relation to the analysis of the generated data. The way researchers perceive children affect their choice of method; seeing a child as a social actor (such as in the 'new paradigm' of childhood) might lead to using the same research models with children as used with adults, such as e.g. formal interviews and questionnaires. This could be damaging in terms of ignoring the power imbalance between adult researcher and child informant (Punch 2002). In addition, seeing that children may communicate in ways adults cannot understand, these methods might lack adequacy. Seeing children as very different from adults might use ethnography in order to understand children's worlds. As Punch stresses, this method is preferable in many settings, not only with children (2002). Lastly, seeing children as competent, but still different from adults, has initiated a new range of innovative research methods and strategies. Some researchers have for example used drawings (DiCarlo et al. 2000), photography and diaries (Punch 2002) and radio workshops (Hecht 1998). Others have also stressed the spatial geography of children's worlds as being important in terms of the outcome of data generation (Barker and Weller 2003). The environment surrounding the child might affect the children's utterances, be it in school or at home, or in my case, in a day centre. Punch (2002) stresses, amongst other things, the need for the researcher to reflect upon the researcher's role and assumptions of childhood (even though we have been children, we still see childhood from an adult perspective), of the researchers use of language (adults and children might use different languages or have a varied degree of vocabulary), the use of space (adult spaces where children have less control dominate in society) and the use of appropriate research methods (in relation to children's interest, age, experience with adult interaction etc.) (Punch 2002:324-329). As will be described below, I was supportive of the idea of meeting the children in various settings, and I was open to using a variety of research methods, but my initial plans to do so did not follow through.

Participant observation was, in my case, more of a 'conversation and observation.' I did not stay on the streets with the children; I did not do drugs with them or even see them smoking anything else than a cigarette, nor did I behave like them. Hecht (1998:6) has claimed that participant observation in itself is an oxymoron, in particular in relation to fieldwork among street children. It would not be appropriate for an anthropologist to attempt to 'go native,' not only because it would feel wrong, but also because the children would find it odd and would perhaps fail to take the researcher seriously.

When doing fieldwork on street children (or on homeless people), some anthropologists have made the street their field site, either partly or on a full-time basis. I support the idea of obtaining as close a feeling of the context and the informant's lives, as possible. In my case, due to lack of contacts, limited time, scare propaganda and my personal fears, a day centre took the place of the street. I also lived in a different context than the field (or in another area than where the field site was located). Although not extravagant or fancy in any way, it became a safe place where I could reflect upon my experiences and write in peace and quiet. Living on the streets would not have made practical sense to me (and probably not to the children either). Although living in a less safe environment would give me a corporal understanding of the feeling of being unsafe, it would probably overshadow my aim for being there, as my attention would be directed elsewhere. My connection with the children was therefore not based on a common corporal understanding of the environment, but rather on interest, sympathy and respect.

Doing fieldwork in an institution

Doing fieldwork in an institution, such as CAINA, both delimited and expanded my access to data. Being connected to this institution was positive for several reasons. First of all, the children seemed to enjoy coming to the day centre. CAINA provided them with more than their basic needs; it was also a place of diversion and understanding. The staff's main aim was to get the children out of the street situation, but as mentioned, this process was never forced upon the children. CAINA was thus a place the children could come to without feeling any kind of pressure. Secondly, the fact that both they and I (as a volunteer) had a reason for being there facilitated my access to them as informants and legitimized our interaction. Thirdly, the children were not intoxicated when coming to CAINA.²⁹ Their relative soberness probably greatly facilitated my communication with them. Finally, CAINA staff stressed the necessity of continuity, and the obligation volunteers had to commit to their work at the day centre. Volunteers had to come everyday and stay from 8:30 to 14:00. I was pleased to hear this, as it meant that I had constant access to the field and to potential informants.

It can, however, be argued that the institutional frames regulated the children's behaviour and speech. In order to escape this, I initially tried to meet the children outside of CAINA as well.

²⁹ Various methods were used in order to prevent drug-use at CAINA (or preventing the provision of equipment for drug-use). Plastic bags were not handed out, milk-bags were cut in half and water bottles were mainly kept in the kitchen.

I was, however, told not to by the staff; they meant that communication with the children should take place within the walls of the day centre. Other instances (such as the mobile team) met the children on their turf, whereas CAINA was to be a place the children could come to by their own will. Planning encounters were therefore not encouraged. I understood and respected this, and all further communication with the children took place at CAINA. In addition, I was not allowed to do my own projects at the day centre. This was because CAINA was an established institution with its own routines. The coordinators expressed interest in my project and were always open to questions and discussions with me. They saw it as positive that someone with an academic background from the 'outside' became part of the CAINA work force. They felt that my questions might help them to see their work in a different light; that it could reactivate their thoughts on the approach they had to their work and to their interaction with the children (since being in the middle of something can overshadow this). They also saw it as positive that they could receive a copy of my thesis when it was finished.

A volunteer or an anthropologist

During the first round of interviews, I was told by CAINA staff that the only way of obtaining access to CAINA was through working as a volunteer. As long as I fulfilled the work-tasks in the kitchen, however, I was free to spend the rest of the time with the children. I could speak with the children as much as I wanted to, about any topic, but they would prefer that I did not take out my notebook in front of the children, as they wanted the children to feel comfortable.

I worked as a volunteer with two other European boys (doing social work instead of military service in their home country).³⁰ CAINA has employed volunteers from abroad for several years, and the children were used to having foreigners around. My presence in the field was thus easily accepted since I had a 'valid' reason for being there. It also turned out to be a good entrance point to the children, as I could interact with them both while I was doing my tasks as well as when I was not. In addition, my position as a volunteer prevented the children from seeing me as an authority figure (as opposed to how some of the coordinators were perceived). This gave me access to information I would otherwise not have been able to obtain. This was in particular related to the bending of rules and the sometimes uncensored interaction between the children, in front of me. Not being in a position where it was natural to control their

³⁰ There are never more than 2-3 volunteers at CAINA at the same time. This is a deliberate choice made by the CAINA staff. They do not want too many people from 'the outside' (i.e. foreigners) at the same time or that people 'come and go,' and all volunteers therefore had to come every day for a longer period of time.

behaviour (e.g. in making sure rules were followed) as well as not being fluent in the language (the children believing that I did not catch everything they said), allowed for this to happen.

When talking about my reasons for being in Buenos Aires (and at CAINA), I was forthright in introducing myself as a student of anthropology to both staff and children. In order to make the children understand what it meant, I explained that anthropology was about how people lived in different places in the world, and that I wanted to understand and learn about the lives of the children living on the streets of Buenos Aires; of how *they themselves* saw their lives. They seemed to accept this. Being a woman turned out to come to my advantage (the other two volunteers were male), as I quickly got in contact with the boys coming to the centre. However, the relationship I had with them became challenging at times due to their ‘gendered conduct’, attempting to act like men by trying to seduce me. I saw myself being completely caught off guard by little boys proclaiming their love for me, and of the constant questions of intimacy and dating. However, as time passed and my vocabulary expanded, as well as getting accustomed to the place, the children, and the atmosphere at the day centre, I learned how to speak back and joke around with the children in an appropriate way.

The children were curious of my person and of my background. They saw me as a student and as a young (rich) woman from Europe. Money was, at times, an uncomfortable topic of conversation. Both the coordinators (in front of the children) and the children themselves asked questions about living standards in Norway and the price of things there. Explaining that I was a student and that my education was made possible due to lent money made it less of an issue, and I was told that I was not seen as a ‘*cheta*’ (snob). In addition, the fact that the children did not place me in a ‘tourist’-category made our interaction easier, as I was not seen as ‘a rich person you could rob’ (that is: a tourist). As time passed I learned that the children enjoyed my presence because they saw me as sympathetic and interested in them for being themselves.

Movements in the field – generating data

One of the most challenging aspects in relation to doing fieldwork at CAINA was the constant movement taking place, on several levels. First of all, the high rate of rotation presented an unpredictability in terms of which children came to the day centre. The majority of the children could come for a period of time (a couple of weeks) and could then be absent for

weeks, months or years. Only a minority came more regularly. I could never be sure if the children I had better connections with would return to the centre while I was there. This was problematic for the coordinators as well, in particular in relation to follow-ups on the children (e.g. in terms of children needing medication at set days). Secondly, CAINA staff would also accompany children outside of CAINA. These outings were either related to the children's health or legal needs, visiting the families of the children or going to parks and museums. Thirdly, the children could daily choose between three different workshops at CAINA (in addition to school) and they would often move between workshops as well. Finally, the children would run around a lot at CAINA. If we were playing board games, the children would sometimes leave while we were playing, and new children would approach the table. Even though their 'fluid life-patterns' prevented stability and constancy in relation to gathering data, this fluidity is a reflection of the daily lives of street children, and is thus data in itself.

In order to obtain an appropriate relationship with the children (both in accordance with CAINA staff's and my own planned approach), I avoided all forms of formal interaction. No interviews were conducted and I rather focused on informal conversations. Initially (before getting access to the day centre) I thought of taping conversations with the children, but due to my role as a volunteer, this was not done either. Due to all the above mentioned factors and challenges, my group of informants was large and fluctuating. I did have closer connections with some of the children, but not to the extent that they told me their life-histories. The children were not always very talkative and I simply did not spend time that regularly with them. In addition, I was seldom alone with particular children. I met some of the children I will introduce in this thesis only a couple of times, but the majority were children I met more often.

Scheper-Hughes (1998) points out that a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' exists in relation to the child-centred approach. This suspicion is related to the idea that children might not speak the truth. The same, however, could be said about adult informants. Children have probably just as strong an interest in self-representation as any adult, and manipulation of information and impression-control can in any case be seen as data in itself. The belief that children's words and utterances are less valid than an adult's further underlines the uneven power relation which is present between adults and children. Both staff and children have valuable information of street children's lives, and comparison of both groups' accounts provides an

improved research outcome and a better understanding of the issues at stake (Lucchini 1996:169). My ethnographic data from the children is complemented with data from the coordinators. It proved to be a very useful combination, for example in explaining why the children sometimes would lie. Sometimes the manipulation of information (by the children) would be obvious, for example when talking about drugs and robberies. Even if they would state that they never touched drugs (in particular *paco*) or that they had ever robbed people, their body language, clever facial expression or the reactions from the other children present, would show the opposite. Other times, when speaking about their backgrounds and reasons for leaving home (or of drug use and robberies) there would be no such apparent mismatch between speech and conduct. The coordinators would then help explain why the children would present different stories. Seeing that the coordinators and I shared an (academic and personal) interest in understanding the children's lives and words, I found the information they provided to be valuable and important. However, I always tried to have a critical eye to all the information I got, regardless of the age of the informant.

In this thesis, I also make use of statistical data collected and prepared by CAINA staff. Every day, 'shower-lists' were filled out with information of the children's name, age, area of their *ranchada* (where they stay on the streets) and the place where their families have their homes. Every child coming to the day centre does an interview after some time. The information they receive is put in a journal, in order to keep track of the child's personal history and for statistical purposes (one of the CAINA staff works exclusively with statistics). Furthermore, every action taken on behalf of the children is documented in the children's journal. The quantitative side of this thesis is thus based on CAINA statistics.

Ethical considerations

With the entrance of the 'new paradigm' in childhood theory in which children are to be seen as social actors (shaping and being shaped by their surroundings), a new range of ethical dilemmas follows. For example, if children are to be treated like adults (as informants); should research be concerned with specific ethical considerations? In response to this question, Christensen and Prout (2002) calls for an 'ethical symmetry' in social research with children. The authors state that the starting point of research should be based on 'ethical symmetry', meaning that the ethical relation between researcher and informant is the same, regardless of age difference. However, this does not mean that particular concerns should be made or that

differences can arise in the course of the research. Using ‘ethical symmetry’ as a starting point is preferable merely to avoid researchers to assume ethical concerns in advance (Christensen and Prout 2002:482). Samantha Punch (2002:321) stresses that the researchers who emphasize the competency of children are often the same ones who call for new and innovative ‘child-friendly’ research methods. Punch (2002), on her side, argues that research with children is potentially different from research with adults, not necessarily because children are inherently different from adults, but because of adults’ perceptions of children and because children are in a marginalised position in adult society.

Christopher Pole (2007) stresses the need for an embodied reflexivity in research with children. Pole recognizes the positive opportunities of the child-centred research in terms of gathering valuable data, but he similarly calls for a need to acknowledge the (physical) role of the ethnographer, especially in situations where the researcher and the researched meet in intimate settings. Acknowledging the current climate of fear of child abuse and paedophilia, the ethnographer and the child informants *both* need to be safeguarded, something that can be done through complete transparency and surveillance by gatekeepers (e.g. teachers and parents). In my case, all interaction took place inside of CAINA, and in the presence of everyone else who were on the premises. This ‘surveillance’ safeguarded my presence and prevented the appearance of these types of questions.

Another topic raised in relation to having child informants is the notion of consent. If the question is related to the understanding of the research process and the possible consequences of the research outcome, this could also be a problematic issue in settings with adult informants. However, doing fieldwork using a child-centred approach poses ethical challenges, in particular when the (child) informants are in a vulnerable position. One thing is being aware of the unequal power relations between adults and children, and acknowledging its effect on the understanding and interpreting of the children’s words and actions. Quite another is when the children in question are clearly at risk of maltreatment and abuse, and where children’s rights (CRC) are visibly broken. Heather Montgomery (2007), doing research on child prostitution in a slum community in Thailand encountered several ethical dilemmas of this sort. These were related to the difference in interpretation between the researcher and the children, in particular in terms of how an adult-child relationship should be. Further focus is given to the impact these diverging views had on the research process, in relation to the role and responsibility of the researcher and issues of children’s rights. First of

all, the western contemporary childhood ideal deeply diverged with the children's way of living. Secondly, the researcher saw an adult-child abusive situation in the relationship the children had with their (white, western, adult, male) 'clients' (Montgomery 2007:416). The children (and their parents) on their part, however, had a different view of the situation. First of all, children were in debt (of gratitude) to their parents for giving them life, and they should support their parents (especially their mothers) as best they could. In the slum community, jobs and resources were scarce, and parents (mothers) were dependant of their children's income in order to make a living. Prostitution was not necessarily seen as a positive choice, but the highest paying job available for these children. The children felt they were contributing to their family income and in fulfilling their familial obligations, they saw themselves as 'good children' (Montgomery 2007:419). Seeing that prostitution was illegal, the researcher encountered evermore problematic dilemmas. She had to promise the local NGO and the children that she would not draw attention to them and their actions. Feeling a clash between personal beliefs and her role as an ethnographer, she had to make hard choices as to what to do when witnessing children suffer. What was her role and responsibilities in the field, and where was she to draw the line between being a researcher (being loyal to her informants) and a human being (acting on behalf of the children when necessary)? Would an eventual intervention do any good?

Child suffering was a factor of presence in my fieldwork as well. Street children are in a particularly vulnerable situation, being alone on the streets and part of a marginalised population. In addition, they engage in activities that are not only in the borderland of what is accepted in society, but that are also destructive on a personal level (according to themselves and society as a whole). I tried to be as open as I could when interacting with the children, and talk about events and situations on the children's terms. Sometimes they were interested in talking, other times not. This could depend on the topics raised or on what mood they were in on that particular day. Moral dilemmas occurring were in particular related to sensitive issues, such as criminal activity, drug use and sexual, verbal or physical abuse. Without judging, supporting or moralizing these issues, and letting the children know I could 'take it', made these topics less difficult to talk about. Still, I believe the children at times tried to keep information about these issues from me. In line with general ethical requirements for social

research,³¹ all names of individuals mentioned in the essay, both children, coordinators and volunteers, are pseudonyms.

³¹ My plans for conducting fieldwork have been reported to and approved by Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste (NSD) (Norwegian Social Science Data Services).

Chapter 3 'A day at CAINA'

Every day, between 30 and 50 street children in Buenos Aires come to CAINA; these children are boys and girls of all ages, some have never been there before, others know the place well. This ethnographic chapter aims to portray the atmosphere at the day centre, to introduce some of the children coming there, and to give the reader an idea of what takes place in a day centre for street children. CAINA is important for the street children in Buenos Aires, even though they do not come everyday. Not only are they provided their basic needs, legal and health assistance, they also encounter an atmosphere of friendliness and sympathy, people they can open up to and people they can trust.

Buenos Aires is a city of contrasts; a conglomerate of old and new buildings, historical places and neon signs, fancy shopping streets and garbage heaps. These contrasts are visible throughout the capital, and in particular in the city centre. Governmental offices, the main shopping streets and commercial centres, tourist attractions, and several subte (metro) and train stations are located in this area. During the daytime the streets are packed with people moving in all directions. Traffic is crazy and one has to be alert and make sure one doesn't get hit by cars or busses rushing by. On street corners people sell newspapers, flowers and candy. They shout out the prices on the items they have to offer at the people rushing by. Business men in suits walk by people begging on the pavements. *Porteños*³² sit at outdoor restaurants and street corners, having pastries and cups of coffee. There are tourists everywhere and many of them are easily spotted, walking around with cameras around their necks and maps in their hands. Parks and plazas appear between the many streets of the capital, providing some green and open spaces in this huge and busy city. Street children move around on these busy streets. They know the city well. These are areas where money can be found, earned or gained. In one of these areas CAINA can be found.

The exterior walls of CAINA are covered with graffiti in different colours. The day centre is easy to spot, surrounded by the high and plain industrial buildings that make up the block. The three story building has been placed between two larger buildings on each side, as if it

³² *Porteños* is the name for the inhabitants of Buenos Aires.

has been squeezed between them at some point. Large letters in yellow, green, black and purple forms the word CAINA on the wall. The day centre is located on one of the capitals main roads, a six-lane road with heavy traffic at all hours. Just outside the entrance door there are several bus stops and there is always a line of bus passengers standing there, waiting. In the morning, there is another distinct crowd of people on the pavement waiting, too. Not for the bus, but for the doors at CAINA to open.

Children are queued up outside the doors of CAINA, waiting for the clock to reach nine, and the day centre to open. They show up early, or spend the night outside on the pavement, so that they will be the first in line. They all know that the first ones in line will be the first ones written up on the list, and consequently the first ones to take a shower. Some are sitting with their heads in their laps with their back against the wall, tired and hungry, and not in a talkative mood. Others are standing in circles, or sitting next to each other on the floor, talking, joking and laughing. Esteban (15) is sitting alone next to the wall. He is crouched down, looking half asleep. Juan (16, looking more like 12 due to nutritional problems) is sitting next to him. Juan is a skinny boy, always looking a little worn-out. Our eyes meet as I approach the door and he gets up with a big smile on his face. The first thing he says is ‘Save me some yoghurt, will you?’, before we greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. I tell him we will just have to cross our fingers since we never know when there will be yoghurt. Juan always asks me this, and I always answer the same, every morning. Leo (15), a chubby boy, with beautiful, but very sad eyes, is standing next to the door. We greet and I ask him how he is. He looks down at the pavement for a while, and tells me he is fine, his body language and eyes expressing the opposite. I tell him I will see him inside, and if he wants to, we can play *memotest*³³ sometime during the day. He says he would like that. I greet the other children, and ring the bell.

I enter the building at 8:30, and start preparing breakfast with the two other volunteers. There are always several people inside at this point. The people working in the kitchen arrived half an hour ago. They are sitting at the kitchen table, having their morning cup of *mate*,³⁴ and a piece of bread, relaxing and chatting a little before they start preparing lunch. The coordinators at CAINA come during the next half hour, all entering the kitchen at some point to say ‘good morning’ to the kitchen staff. At nine o’clock, four-five coordinators go to the

³³ A memory game: the objective is to try to find two equal images by flipping the pieces.

³⁴ A typical Argentine drink: a kind of green tea (although an Argentine will strongly object to this).

door to welcome the children. They ‘joke around’ with the children as they enter, exchanging high-fives and friendly pats on the back. More children arrive during the next hour, and normally there are around 40 children in total at the centre.

The big hall has yellow walls, decorated with placards the children have helped to make. Several wall posters with drawings, poems, and writings and a schedule of the different activities taking place every day (from which the children can choose what to partake in) are hanging on the walls. A large football court makes up an own section in the back of the room. The kitchen is located to the right of the room, next to the bathrooms. The kitchen has a gap in the wall, an opening the children are served drinks and food through. In the morning, three tables are put together to form a large one, and the children sit down here to eat breakfast. Spoons, butter, bread (or *alfajores*³⁵ and biscuits), some drinks (mate and chocolate milk) and some cups have already been put on the tables. The coordinators sit down with the children while they eat, often having a bite themselves. They talk about the previous night, or if they haven’t seen the child in a long time, about what has happened in their lives since last time they came. There is a lot of movement around the table. Some of the children are chatting away with friends or coordinators, others sit quietly by themselves.

Pilar (15) is sitting down by the end of the table. One of the coordinators has put a bucket under the table, in case she needs to throw up. Pilar is pregnant, and suffers from morning sickness. I approach her, greet her carefully, and ask if she needs anything, if I can get her some tea or water. She says no, she would rather be left alone. A group of boys are already playing *metegol*³⁶ next to the football hall, screaming enthusiastically as the match goes on. One of the coordinators is playing too. Some boys sitting at the uppermost table are arguing about something, their voices are rising, and it seems like they will end up in a fight. A coordinator approaches them, but they don’t want to tell him what it was about. The coordinator leaves them after a while, sits down at a table with some children playing a board game while keeping an eye on the boys, in case a violent situation develops.

The children go to the kitchen opening for fill-ups. They often hang out for a while, talking with the kitchen staff and the volunteers. Juan is already in front of the kitchen opening,

³⁵ A little biscuit-like cookie, made up by layers of biscuit and *dulce de leche* (caramel), often with a chocolate spread. A popular biscuit in Buenos Aires, sold at every kiosk and store.

³⁶ Fozzball.

asking for yoghurt. There is none today. He becomes a little disappointed since he likes it so much, but he hangs around and jokes with the main cook (who, according to Juan, roots for the wrong football team). He hangs halfway into the opening, smiling and shouting out that River is a shitty team, curiously awaiting the cook's response. The cook looks at him, shakes his head and smiles as he refers to the little River poster he has hung up next to the stove. Juan laughs and shakes his head. The other children are anxious for fill-ups and tell Juan to move on. Someone smacks him on the head; he is annoyed, but leaves the opening to sit down and eat breakfast.

A lot of new faces appear in the opening everyday, and today is no exception. Some boys I haven't seen before, seemingly around 14 years old, ask me what my name is. I say my name is '*Ida y vuelta, pero sin la vuelta*' (lit. transcr. 'round trip, but without the return').³⁷ The boys laugh and start spinning around, expressing my name with body movements. They ask me if we serve beer. I tell them I'm afraid we're out of beer today, but that I can offer them some hot chocolate instead. They tell me they would like some; that I have beautiful eyes, and that they want to go on a date with me, all in the same sentence. I smile at them, tell them that they can have the drinks, but not the date. They say that I really should go after an Argentinean, that I will not regret it. It doesn't matter if I already have a boyfriend; he is probably out with a bunch of girls anyway, doing god knows what, back in Norway. After trying to convince me for a while, they leave the opening and sit down to eat.

There are a lot of children shouting out, at the same time, what drinks and refills they want. Some get annoyed that I can't work faster. Others wait patiently. Pablo comes over to say hello. We kiss on the cheek through the opening, I ask him if he wants anything to drink, but he says no, and goes to eat breakfast.

A boy I haven't seen before is standing outside the opening with a packet of margarine in his hand. If he wanted to hide it, he could have; the opening is high up on the wall, and often I can only see children's heads when I stand there. He looks at me, smiling. I ask him if that is my packet of margarine he has there. He says he bought it himself. I ask if he was really sure about that, and he tells me he is. I say that was quite a coincidence, because I have the exact same brand of margarine in the kitchen. He agrees, nodding at me: Quite a coincidence. He

³⁷ I always introduced myself this way, as it turned out to be a fun way to approach the children, and they often remembered my name due to this association.

asks me where I got my packet of margarine, and I tell him that one of the kitchen-women bought it so that I can give it to the children at CAINA. He yells at the woman, who is standing further away in the kitchen preparing *milanesa*³⁸ for lunch, asking her if it is true? She says it is. After some friendly bargaining, we decide that I can give him a cup of tea, and in exchange he will give me the margarine. We are pretty content with the trade, both of us, and he leaves shortly after.

Esteban (15) shows up after a while. He seems somewhat 'fragile' today, a little different from his normally confident and outgoing appearance. After we greet through the opening, he takes up his shirt to show me his back. 'Ida, look' he says. It is covered with huge red bruises. I ask him what has happened and he tells me the police beat him. I ask him why they did that, and he says they just went after him, hitting him like madmen, for no reason. I ask him if he is ok, if it hurts, but he says it is better now. He tells me this in a matter-of-fact way, as if this happens often, simultaneously expressing his negative feelings toward the police. Leo (15) is standing next to him, overhearing our conversation, and after Esteban leaves, Leo tells me that the police normally don't go after the children without reason. Normally the children did something, tried to rob someone, or something like that, he says. Leo has been alone on the streets since he started sleeping rough. When asking him why he prefers this, he says he has just always been by himself. He thinks it is easier that way. He knows other children on the streets, but he does not want to stay with them. Leo hangs out at one of the train stations in the city centre. He has been there for some years now, and he knows most of the security guards and some of the street vendors working there. The fact that he spends time with these guards has created a distance between Leo and some of the other boys at the day centre. He is often teased by the other children; they pick on him and call him names. Leo prefers talking to the coordinators when he is at CAINA.

After Leo leaves, Pablo returns. He wants to say hello. I ask if he wants to say hi one more time? He says, what do you mean, one more time? If I don't want to say hello to him? I say, of course I do, but if he doesn't remember that we already said hello? He doesn't remember. He becomes annoyed, saying that I don't want to say hi to him. But I convince him to say hi one more time, trying to avoid him being angry at me. Pablo doesn't say hi like the other children do; he is a lot more 'intimate' always wanting to kiss a lot. Some of the other female

³⁸ *Milanesa* is a popular dish which can be purchased in many restaurants. A thinly cut slice of meat covered in breadcrumbs and fried in the oven.

coordinators also experience this, and feel unease about his insistence to kiss. One kiss on the cheek is never enough for Pablo.

After breakfast, the children hang out in the big room until the workshops begin. Somebody start showering (according to their place on the list); others play board games or *metegol*. Others again have gone upstairs with coordinators to do an interview (for the children's journals). Four-five children are standing in the football court, smoking cigarettes. Maria (17) is one of them. She brought her two year old son today. Normally Maria leaves him with her mom, who used to stay with her on the street, but who now has found a house to stay in. Her son is running around, playing with some of the other children.

I sit down at one of the tables, and shortly after some children come and join me. We decide to play domino. One of the boys, around 8 years old, ask me if I smoke. 'Once in a while,' I tell him. He asks if he can have a cigarette, and I tell him I don't have any. He wants to know if I say that just because he is little, or if I am really out of cigarettes. I tell him I'm afraid I don't have any, but he can ask one of the bigger boys who were standing there smoking, maybe he will give him one? He tells me he already asked him, so he can't ask him again. Esteban comes by, takes a chair from the neighbouring table, and joins us. He pushes all the domino pieces all over the table. The other kids shout out some phrases, angry because he messed up the game, but it soon passes and he continues to sit with us. Esteban has a red thread around his wrist. I ask him why he has that, if it means anything in specific (thinking perhaps Kabala? I have seen several people on the bus in the morning with the same ribbon). He tells me it is to prevent jealousy. (Another boy, sitting there tells me it is for protection). Suddenly the children leave the table, to smoke or play other games, and I take a walk around.

The teacher at the day centre arrives. Every day the children can have classes with her if they want to. She tells one of the coordinators that she saw three children lying on the ground in one of the nearby parks, looking completely unconscious. She thinks it could have been Alejandro (9), his brother Raul (11), and a friend. Some of the coordinators leave CAINA to check it out.

I see Silvia (20) sitting with her four year old boy lying on her lap down by the cupboards where the children lock in their belongings every morning. She nods her head and smiles at me. Silvia used to come to CAINA when she was younger, when she was still living on the

streets and sleeping at train stations, but now she lives in a house in the province with her son, Bruno. Bruno suffers from some kind of disease. He is hardly ever awake, and he doesn't know how to speak, nor walk. I have met them a couple of times at CAINA, but I have not seen his eyes yet. She tells me he reacts to her though; that he smiles, and that he clearly expresses what he likes and dislikes, especially when it comes to food. The last time we spoke, Silvia told me that she was pregnant again with her ex-boyfriend. For the first time in years they only had one night together, and she got pregnant again. She doesn't want the baby.

Her ex-boyfriend is going to give her money today. That's why she is here. She needs the money to buy pills, in order to induce an abortion. This is the best way to do it, she says, since having an abortion is illegal in Argentina. She will buy the pills at the train station, pills that are really meant for bone-disease, but they work for her purpose too, she says. I ask her how she takes the pills, how it works; she says she has to take 8 pills in total; one in her mouth and one in her vagina, every other hour. Then things will take care of themselves. She has done it before, so she knows that it works.³⁹ She explains to me in detail about what happened. She was three months pregnant back then. 'It was horrible,' she says. 'Disgusting.' She did it herself, took the pills, and she could see it when it came out. She had to look at it, to make sure that she really got it out. She said it was bloody and weird looking. It was horrible afterwards. She had thought a lot about the fact that she had killed her own child. But, 'you know', she said, looking down at Bruno, sleeping on her lap with his head and legs hanging loose in the air on each side of her thighs: 'The way things are now, with my son being sick, and since I am not together with the father, I just have to do it.'

She tells me she tried to get rid of it already, only a couple of weeks back. She only took a few pills, thinking it was enough since it was still early, but when she went to the hospital to see if it was gone, it was still there. The hospital nurses had said it was healthy and growing well. So, she will take some more pills this time. She only has to wait for her ex-boyfriend to show up with the money. She tells me that the pills are expensive, 35-40 pesos a piece.⁴⁰

³⁹ Silvia has been pregnant three times before. The first time she had a miscarriage at a police station; the second she had her son Bruno; and the third time she had an abortion.

⁴⁰ The next time I met Silvia, she told me that she had taken care of it. Everything was fine, and the baby was gone. She was happy. And the pills were only 15 pesos. She said she would be more careful next time, use protection, so that she would not have to go through this again.

A coordinator comes over to talk to Silvia. A boy who is sitting at the neighbouring table next to Sebastian (one of the volunteers) calls me over. I sit down with them. The boy tells me he has a few things to tell me. He starts by saying: 'Sebastian tells me that he jacks off.' He laughs a little, awaiting my response. I don't really know how to respond to that, so I just say 'Oh.. really,' looking at Sebastian, who just sits there shaking his head. The boy then says: 'And he also says that you have the face of a penguin'. He then gets up, takes out a cigarette from his pocket, and tells me that I should find a penguin to have a baby with. He laughs a little before he goes to the football court.

The workshops begin, and the children can choose what they want to partake in; literature, art, school, ceramics or other things, depending on which day it is. Today is Tuesday, so the art and literature workshops are on the agenda. School is also an alternative, and the teacher goes upstairs (where the classroom is) with two of the boys. Leo is asked if he wants to go too, but he doesn't want to today. The coordinators put two and two tables together and encourage the children to partake. There is no music workshop today, so the loudspeakers send out a stream of different music; *cumbia*,⁴¹ tango songs, pop and *rock nacional*.⁴² The children sing along. The art workshop attracts a lot of children. The tables are filled with paper in different colours, scissors and glue. Today the children are supposed to make covers for a pamphlet (for a CAINA newspaper) which will be distributed at the annual art exhibition. There are varied responses to this activity. Some of the children think its boring and leave the table. Others start cutting and gluing, making trees and clouds out of coloured paper. While we sit there working, Alejandro and Raul enter. It was them, lying in the park.

Alejandro (9) came to the street around two months ago. He ran off by himself. A month later his brother Raul (11) came too. They found each other at a train station. The coordinators have been trying to find the boys a place to stay for a little while now, but it is hard to find a place where they can stay together. The boys want to leave the street. They say it is horrible staying there. Alejandro has come up to me at several occasions, to show me cuts on his feet and stomach that he got from fights with other children. He is tired of this life. The boys are not as energetic as they normally are today. They get some water and *alfajores* to eat, and sit quietly together while the workshops take place.

⁴¹ *Cumbia*. Music genre.

⁴² *Rock nacional*. 'Argentinean rock'.

In the literature workshop, the children are doing different things. Some are writing Mother's Day cards. One girl is writing that she loves her mother, that she misses her, and that she really wants to see her again, but doesn't have the money to come see her. Suddenly she bursts out in tears. The coordinator sitting next to her comforts her, stroking her back.

One of the boys is writing a poem. Next to the poem, he has made a decoration using a red piece of paper. It looks like a snow crystal, one of those you make out of folding paper and then cutting out the shapes, making a mirror image. I ask him what he has written, and he shows it to me:

'Entre porros me crié,
entre porros moriré,
pero te juro mama mía,
que nunca te olvidaré'

'Amongst marihuana I was raised,
amongst marihuana I will die,
but I swear to you mommy,
that I will never forget you'

Some of the boys and a girl are teasing him, because he has a lot of spelling errors. He says 'ok, so I had some mistakes,' trying to make the situation go away. But the teasing continues. The other kids start to draw on his face with a felt pen. Some pushing occurs. A couple of coordinators see it happen, and approach the table. They take the children who caused the incident away from the table, to talk to them. New children approach the table, wanting to partake.

Nestor sits down next to me. He starts pouring water into the mate-cup which belongs to the coordinators.⁴³ He looks at me while doing it, with a clever smile on his face. I say nothing, but he is soon stopped by the coordinator sitting at the end of the table. Pablo, standing next to the table, asks me if he can have some of that mate. I tell him I don't think he can, and he calls me '*policia*.' I say 'I'm not a police,' but he continues to call me one. I tell him that I don't make the rules, and that I have to follow them too. He says 'no, you are a police' and tells me that he will shoot me in the head with a gun. But then, in a matter of seconds, he sits down and starts to draw. He draws a picture of a 'cool guy' with a joint in his mouth, signs it with his name and gives it to me as a present. Nestor is then suddenly behind my chair and start rocking it, simulating sexual movements. I tell him to please stop, but he pays no attention. I

⁴³ The children and the coordinators have separate mate-cups. They also have separate knives, forks, spoons, and drinking-glasses. The coordinators made this rule in order to prevent the spread of diseases.

tell him again, 'stop it, Nestor, I don't like it when you do that,' and he stops. We continue to draw.

There are many things happening simultaneously during the day. Today, one of the coordinators has been with one of the girls at the health centre. They were there to take a pregnancy test. Another one has been at the hospital to check up on a boy who often comes to CAINA, to see if his condition is getting better. Minor injuries are taken care of by the coordinators themselves. Two young girls, sisters at the age of 7 and 9, have been upstairs all morning doing an interview. They came to the street very recently. Their two older sisters (12 and 16), and their older brother are already on the streets. The two girls took the train all by themselves, and found their older sisters down at the main train station.

There is another new girl at CAINA today as well. She is sitting alone at the end of one of the tables in the big room. I sit down with her and ask her how she is. She tells me she is waiting for her boyfriend Diego (15) who is taking a shower. Celia (15) has one week of street experience. She came to the street to stay with Diego. She says she has everything she needs at home, but she doesn't want to go back. She wants to stay with her boyfriend. The room is full of sounds, children playing football, singing and playing games. Celia speaks with a low voice. I move closer in order to hear what she is saying. It's her first time at CAINA. She does not know anyone here. Celia is wearing a big sweater, with long sleeves covering her hands, and a hood covering most of her head. She is lying over the table, leaning her head on her arm, looking at everyone. After hearing that she has only been a week on the street, I ask her what it is like, if it is tough on the streets. She tells me the other children are nice to her, and that her boyfriend wouldn't let anything happen to her. She says they love each other, and that when he was in jail, she called him every night. Every night for seven months, she was the only person who called him. She doesn't know how she managed to come up with the money to call him, but she did. She tells me she doesn't like the life on the streets, but that she will get used to it. The worst thing is not being able to take a shower and to change her clothes. A couple of days back, she started begging for money for the first time. It was embarrassing, but she will try again. She only has to get used to it, she says.

The workshops last until 11:30, and the children meet up in the big room to play games or talk to each other. Pablo suddenly stops up in front of me and stares at me. Pablo is a little unpredictable, I often feel uncertain about him, because I don't always understand what he

wants. I say hi to him, and he asks me what my name is. I have told him many times before, and he is one of the children who are most eager about the 'Ida y vuelta'-thing, but I tell him again. He says 'What an ugly name,' turns around and leaves. Shortly after, he comes back. He asks me if I can give him an *alfajor*. I tell him I can't since we're going to eat lunch soon. He becomes annoyed. He says I am saying no because I *want* to say no. I say its not, I tell him I also have to follow the rules, or else they will kick me out, and I want to stay there as a volunteer. He says I am being stupid, and leaves.

The children queue up outside the kitchen opening for lunch at 12:00. There is always a lot of action going on in the line. The children tease each other, try to open the window from outside and get yelled at by the kitchen staff or the coordinators. Esteban decides that he wants to make out with Laura (15), and suddenly throws himself after her from behind. Normally she shoves him away, but today she agrees. Esteban is all over her, and she is letting him, with her eyes wide open and a look on her face saying 'oh, just get it over and done with.' Laura is a tough girl; she does not take crap from anyone. The other children find her a little unpredictable, never knowing when she might explode. She often has problems at CAINA. Then again, frequently, she approaches the different coordinators, to ask for a hug.

The children receive their food through the kitchen opening and find themselves a seat at one of the tables. Water and bread has been put out at all the tables. The children often sit with their friends, or next to a coordinator they like. There is always at least one coordinator or volunteer at each table. I am sitting with Juan and Esteban, another volunteer and some other boys today. Esteban and I talk about living on the streets. I ask him if there are any good things about living on the streets, or if it's all bad. He tells me there are some good things, for example that no one tells you what to do, how to behave, where to go, things like that. He likes that. Juan is leaning over his plate, eating very quickly, throwing the food into his mouth. Esteban gets annoyed and tells him to slow down, saying that it looks bad when he throws it in like that. Juan ignores him. The coordinator tells him to be careful, not to eat so quickly because he might feel sick afterwards. Juan does not want to hear it, and keeps throwing food into his mouth, before going back to the opening to get a fill-up. He is soon back at the table and eats another portion, just as fast. Suddenly he gets up, his chair falls backwards, and he runs from the table into the bathroom. After some time he comes back, exhausted. It all came in return.

After lunch, most of the children leave after greeting the coordinators goodbye. Pablo, Leo, Esteban and the other children come up to me before they leave to kiss me goodbye. We exchange pleasantries: 'see you later' and 'good luck' (*suerte*). The clock reaches 13:00 and the coordinators get together in the meeting room upstairs to discuss the day. Sometimes they have workshops after lunch as well, but not today, so all the children leave at this point.

The reader might be left with an impression of CAINA being something like an after-school-activity institution. In a way, it is. Only, the children attending this institution are children who live hard and brutal lives on the street. The day centre is a place for them to relax and to be stimulated, as well as providing them with their basic needs and an escape from street life. CAINA is an important place for the street children in Buenos Aires, but it is also used as only one out of several places the children spend their time. The next chapter will speak more about what the children do in the street context. It will deal the children's psychological adaptation to street life and the many hardships they encounter on the streets.

Chapter 4 The ‘brutal freedom’ of street life

This chapter will set focus on processes of adaptation to street life, as these processes are essential for street life survival. Street children’s backgrounds are of importance in this regard; due to an early trained independence street children have developed a ‘toughness’ prior to street life (Aptekar 1991, 1994, Schepher-Hughes and Sargent 1998). This ‘toughness’ is necessary for urban survival, and without it the children probably wouldn’t have left home in the first place. However, when the children turn to the street they find themselves in a new setting in which they face new challenges and dangers, and these new experiences has an effect on the children’s ways of thinking. I will argue that the children go through psychological processes of adaptation in order to cope with, make sense out of, *and* in order to justify (the negative aspects of) street life. Being ‘tough’ makes street life more manageable and has a ‘modifying’ effect on the children’s idea of morality. Through seeing the street as a social field to which particular forms of capital are required, and through emphasising the process of accumulating (street) capital, I argue that the children’s adaptation to street life leads to an alteration of habitus. The above mentioned ‘toughness’ is part of the street habitus, and as will be dealt with in the next chapter, it is also linked to the notion of *aguante* (see chapter one).

The children’s backgrounds

Argentina’s economic situation in the last decades has been unstable, resulting in several economic crises and an evermore stratified society. Between 1983 and 1991, the shantytown population in the capital of Buenos Aires increased by 300% (from 12,500 to 50,900), and since then the numbers have increased continuously (Auyero 2000:104). The number of shantytown dwellers in the province surrounding the capital is equally overwhelming, counting 300,000 in 1981 (Auyero 2000:104). Similarly, poverty rates in these same areas have skyrocketed; in the capital of Buenos Aires from 1993 to 1996, poverty (those living below the poverty line) increased from 16.9% to 27.9%, whereas in the province surrounding the capital the numbers in the span of 15 years from 1980 to 1995 increased form 11.5% to 25.8% (Auyero 2000:101). Following the continued unstable economic situation since then, in particular after the economic crisis in 2001, the numbers grew tremendously. According to Grimson and Kessler (2005) the percentage of people living below the poverty line in Buenos Aires was heavily affected by the economic crisis in 2001; rising from 35.4% (in October

2001) to 54.3% (in October 2002). The Argentinean sociologist Javier Auyero (1999) has done extensive research on the marginalization and increased isolation of the Argentine slums, squatter settlements and other poor neighbourhoods in the Buenos Aires Province. Despite a betterment of the infrastructure in these areas over the last decades, the experience of living in the slum is pervaded with a feeling of hopelessness and despair. Previously, however, life in the slum was experienced as a transitory phase with the hope of upward mobility, and despite economic hardship and lack of basic material needs, kinship and friendship networks of cooperation made life manageable. Life in the slum also provided entertainment in the form of bars and dance places. Now, the slum is seen as a dangerous place. Drug traffic, violence and unsafe conditions prevail. The lack of access to schooling, an exclusive labour market, and the expanding presence of illicit activity in the form of drug dealing, robberies, and violence, has led to the Argentine slum population becoming more and more isolated from the better-off Argentine population (Auyero 1999). The vast majority (87,1%) of the street children attending CAINA come from these precarious areas in the Buenos Aires province.⁴⁴

The changing economic situation in Argentina at the end of the 20th century, as a result of privatization measures, has not only led to a rise in unemployment, falling salaries and a general rise in poverty, but according to Geldstein (1997) also to a change in family structure. The nuclear family structure previously dominant in Argentina has been transformed. Geldstein points to a rising unemployment among men, and a higher percentage of female primary income earners, as decisive factors in the increased formation of female headed single-parent households (2007:552-4). According to the author, the dissatisfaction of this change of roles may have lead some men to perform adultery, violence, or simply leave the household (2007:553). This data correlates with the children's backgrounds. According to CAINA statistics, 'domestic violence' (39%) and 'economic situation' (39%) are the two most frequently mentioned reasons given by the children for why they turn to the street.⁴⁵ The following two reasons mentioned are 'different family conflicts' (26,8%) and 'sudden deaths of family members' (17%). The children themselves spoke of families with numerous family members and broken family ties; often the child's father would be absent and replaced by the presence of a step-father. Maltreatment (in particular executed by their fathers or stepfathers)

⁴⁴ CAINA statistics (2007). The remaining percentages show the following: 8,3% of the children came from the capital of Buenos Aires, 4,3% from the interior of Argentina and 0,4% from another country.

⁴⁵ CAINA statistics (January-October 2006) 'Motive for why the children turned to the street' (replies from the 50 children who attend CAINA with the highest frequency).

and alcoholism were other frequently mentioned points.⁴⁶ The children's backgrounds do vary and their stories and reasons for entering street life are peculiar, but some aspects are repeatedly mentioned; in particular poverty, abuse and parental neglect.⁴⁷

Romina (17) has 7 siblings, and she has lived on the streets for two years. She left home because she was abused by her step-father (her biological father left the family 12 years ago). Romina never speaks of her mother, but according to her journal at CAINA she is alive, living with the rest of the family in the provinces. Romina has told a lot of horrible (and at times conflicting) stories about her step-father. Apart from the sexual abuse, she claims that he killed her child some years back. The coordinators are unsure of how to deal with these stories; there are a lot of them, and Romina at times tells diverging versions of the same episodes. Romina is one of the 'toughest' girls at CAINA.

Luana (16) left her family when she was 13 years old. She has 5 siblings whom live with her mother and father. Luana left home due to a complicated family situation. At the time of her leaving, she had a miscarriage. Without ever saying anything more about this, there is reason to believe her father caused this pregnancy. Luana says she was sexually abused and maltreated by both her father and uncle, and that was why she left for the streets. After some time, Luana's boyfriend told the coordinators another secret of Luana's past; her biological father is not the man she calls father, but her biological grandfather.

Out of all the girls at CAINA, Maria (17) is the one with the most street experience. Maria's father is dead, and she says that she started sleeping rough due to the bad relationship she had with her uncle and stepfather. She has been on the streets since she was 9. Maria has, since then, had several family members on the streets. Her mother stays with her from time to time, and her older brother also lived with her on the streets some years back. Due to a serious accident involving a train, however, he had no possibility to fend for himself anymore, and moved into a home. Maria also has a two year old son; he stays with her or with a woman working as a maid with a '*cama adentro*.'⁴⁸

Santiago (17) left for the streets when he was 11 years old, and he has lived in a couple of places in the capital since then; he now stays in a street not far from CAINA together with three or four other boys. His mother, step-father (he does not know anything about his father except his first name) and 8 siblings all live in the province, except one brother who also stays on the streets. He does not remember the name of two of his youngest sibling as they were born a long time after he left for the streets. His mother is now pregnant again. He says he left home because he was severely beaten by his step-father. Santiago does not want to leave the street; he says that if he goes home, his stepfather will kill him. Santiago has never lived in a home, and he does not want to either. He has been incarcerated one time due to a robbery he committed two years ago.

Esteban (15) has been living on the streets for several years, after his mother and stepfather died when he was 9 years old. Esteban left home due to an argument he had with his brother concerning their late parents' house. Esteban has a 'substitute' family in a small city outside of Buenos Aires. He got to know this family through a friend on the street. He does not like to go there, however, because he says they make him 'do things' (I don't know what kind of things he is referring to).

⁴⁶ Extreme poverty, extensive corporal punishment, female headed households, the presence of step-parents and/or family breakdown has been mentioned elsewhere as reasons for why children turn to the streets. See e.g. Evans (2004) on street children in Tanzania.

⁴⁷ According to Scheper-Hughes (1998:23) parents maltreating their children in shantytowns (Brazil) should not primarily be seen as 'perpetrators' neglecting their children, but also as victims of social and political processes. Donna Goldstein (1998) similarly addresses that there is a certain 'logic' to maltreatment, when informants are seen in relation to social and political circumstances. Her informant, a single mother of 13 children (not all hers by blood) was "cruel in order to be kind" (Goldstein 1998:411). She saw harsh discipline as the only way to raise the children so that they would keep in line and not end up dead. Goldstein attempts to explain how the "necessity for a survival orientation contributes to a mother's rationalization of sometimes cruel and unusual behaviour" (1998:398). I include this information in order to stress the need to see maltreatment in a contextual light and on a structural level, *not* intending to free parents from responsibility.

⁴⁸ '*Cama adentro*' literally means 'bed inside.' Some work, especially as maids in people's homes, but sometimes also in different shops, the employee is provided a room with a bed.

Juan (16) suffers from chronic malnutrition and looks five years younger than his age. He has a minor brain injury and a neurological disorder, and he is often tired when he is at CAINA. The children are not supposed to sleep at the day centre, but Juan often dozes off in the corner. Juan has been on the streets for five years and he stays with a group of boys in one of the streets of the capital. Juan has been living in a couple of homes, but he has not stayed for long in any of them. He has 8 brothers and sisters, and they all live at home with their mother. CAINA staff has been in touch with his mother and she tells them that despite their scarce resources, she is able to provide for them. She has told the coordinators that she wants Juan to come home, that she loves him and that she does not understand why he leaves home all the time. Juan himself, however, says that in the past when he has wanted to come home, his mother has always tried to send him away. Juan was interned in hospital for some time, some weeks ago, because he had taken a lot of drugs and passed out a sidewalk not far from CAINA. The police had found him, and he had been sent to hospital. After some days he had managed to escape, but the police had found him again, and sent him back to hospital. Juan did not want to see anybody from CAINA while he was interned. He was angry at everybody, and especially with CAINA staff, because they had not found him a home earlier. While in hospital, CAINA staff had been in contact with his mother again. They were left with the impression that she had the resources and the possibility to take care of Juan, but that she was not interested in him. She did not seem to care about him. After some time he managed to escape from the hospital for the second time, and he was soon back at CAINA asking for yoghurt.

All the children mentioned above come from homes of scarcity, with the exception of Juan (16). Juan's mother might in fact have had the resources to feed her children, but lack of care was his greatest obstacle for returning home (according to Juan himself and CAINA staff). More often, however, extreme poverty was the overall determinant. Both Romina (17) and Luana (16) spoke of domestic abuse as the reason for why they left home, and in the girl's case, the abuse was of a sexually brutal character. All these children tell of a brutal past.

Street children make a break with their backgrounds when they turn to the street and they do this in a twofold manner. First of all, they make a conscious break with their patterns of living in the shantytowns. Despite that most of these children maintain sporadic contact with their families and visit them from time to time, they do not live at home with their families anymore (on a regular basis). Secondly, they also break out of the adult-child power relation in that they leave home, escape their parent's control, and become their own bosses. These actions can be seen as manifestations of the children's agency. Using Bourdieu's (2007) terminology, it can be tempting to say that the children are *heterodox* dissenters, breaking out of the *doxa* of shantytowns. Doxa is the mechanism that reproduces every established order through a dialectic between the objective structures and the agent's aspirations; a dialectic resulting in undisputed and self-evident natural truths, i.e. knowledge which is "taken for granted" (Bourdieu 2007:164). Doxa is of relevance within the boundaries of each social field (Wilken 2008:43), and is only ever disputed (or its truth revealed) when competing discourses are put forward in the 'field of opinion'. These competing discourses can be seen as *heterodox* discourses of opposition (or opinion) which may be attempted fought back with *orthodox* proposals, with the aim of restoring the 'natural order' through a renewed naturalization of

doxa (Bourdieu 2007:168-9). Orthodox and heterodox beliefs therefore imply an “awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs” (Bourdieu 2007:164), or said differently, these beliefs question the natural order of things. Street children’s movement from the home to the street can in a way be seen as a heterodox proposal; an action questioning the place of children by the children themselves. However, considering the vast amount of street children from the provinces who have left home to stay on the streets of Buenos Aires, the theory of street children as heterodox dissenters does not hold. The children *know* of the possibility of leaving home; many of them follow either siblings or other children from their neighbourhoods, into the street situation. Leaving home is therefore not knowledge which is ‘taken for granted’ in the shantytowns. The children’s upbringing in the shantytowns (and their reasons for leaving) can, however, be said to constitute a brutal form of knowledge, already a part of the children’s habitus. This knowledge is what builds up a strength to leave home and to cope with street life. Brutal knowledge is also something they are further exposed to on the streets.

The street field

Seeing the street (life) as a social field is useful in order to grasp the distinctiveness of street life. Through emphasising this distinctiveness, it can be separated from the life the children lead in shantytowns before they enter street life (as explained above) and from the life they eventually enter when/if leaving street life (as will be explained in chapter six). Giving an exact definition of what constitutes the ‘street field’ is challenging. A social field appears in relation to empirical data and its boundaries are where the field ceases to influence the behaviour upon those within its range (Jenkins 1996:85). As will be argued below, the children go through processes of adaptation when entering street life which modifies their habitus and which makes them ‘do things they never thought they would do.’ The children, as will be argued, also act and behave differently as they gain street experience. This is the result of a process of adjustment to the objective structures of street life; the result of a “dialectical relationship between collective history inscribed in objective conditions and the habitus inscribed in individuals” (Jenkins 1996:80).

Street life requires street capital. The longer the children stay on the streets and the more street capital they possess, the better equipped they are to confront challenges on the street, and at the same time (as will be dealt in following chapters), the harder it is to leave the street. Social fields and forms of capital are mutually dependant on each other. Within each field

there is a struggle for power leading to a hierarchical system of power and status within this same field (Terdiman 1987:808), because the different agents fight for, accumulate and possess different levels of capital. As stressed earlier, the struggles taking place in one field is not the same struggle taking place in all fields. For example, struggle for power within the academic field might be related to academic position, educational background, amount of publishing of books and articles, whereas in the street field, it might be related to e.g. knowledge of the access to and use of drugs or to have a criminal or violent reputation. These qualities might elevate a person's status on the street; e.g. knowing how drugs work, what they do to you and where to obtain them, not only gives the beholder control, but also gives him/her status in relation to the other children on the streets who might want, but do not hold, this knowledge. Similarly, having a violent reputation might avenge eventual assaults out of respect or out of fear for the person. An agent's position in a social field is determined by two factors; the overall volume of capital s/he possesses and the composition of the capital s/he possesses (Bourdieu 1985:724). These factors are necessarily related to experience; a newcomer will have less embodied knowledge (street capital), than a child who has been living on the streets for a longer time.

Street capital is in particular related to Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, i.e. legitimate knowledge (e.g. competency, education) of some sort (Jenkins 1996:85). In street children's situation, legitimate knowledge is related to what is needed in order to manoeuvre within the street field, both in terms of practical organization of groups and shacks and in terms of psychologically coping with the dangers and challenges of street life. Economic and social capital of street life (as well as practical knowledge, cultural capital) will be in focus in the next chapter, whereas the psychological impact of the street setting, the toughening up and getting street wise (being competent in the street setting) will be of focus in the following. According to Sandberg and Pedersen, the cultural capital of the street should be called *street capital*, because it is distinct from the cultural capital portrayed by Bourdieu in that it does not contain the quality of conversion into cultural capital of other social fields (2006:82). Street capital only makes sense in the street life setting; it is a field-specific form of capital. According to the authors, competency linked to criminal activity, drug use and violence can elevate your street capital (Sandberg and Pedersen 2006:83-84), and is thus what struggles in the street field are about. As will be argued, street capital is more than criminal activity, drug use and violence. It is also the knowledge of how to get goods, where to get goods, how to find shelter and how to behave in a given setting. However, the street capital the children have

acquired on the streets does not necessarily elevate their status in the greater system of social fields, it is not seen as legitimate knowledge in the greater system of social fields, and is therefore not easily convertible. In fact, embodied street capital, when appearing in other social fields, might become excluding and stigmatizing (as will be described below). This difficulty of conversion (of cultural capital, i.e. street capital) across social fields helps explain some of the challenges the children encounter when trying to leave the street field.

In the following, several negative aspects of street life will be dealt with. However, it must be mentioned that some aspects of street life were portrayed as positive by the children. These were in particular related to the possibility of obtaining money (which is harder in the shantytowns because people have less of it there) and the fact that they can spend the money on themselves (on food, drugs or other things). The initial period on the streets was for some of the children emphasised as exiting and full of adventures, especially in terms of experimenting with drugs. The *freedom* of street life was, however, mentioned as the most valued aspect of street life. This is freedom of a limited form; the children are frequently exposed to dangers on the street and due to stigmatization and exclusion, not all areas of the city are available to them. Some are taken advantage of by other children or by adults on the streets and some get involved in various forms of addictions in order to cope with the hardships of street life. This is freedom at the cost of the children's safety and well-being, and can therefore be characterized as brutal form of freedom.⁴⁹ The brutal aspects of street life and how the children dealt with these will be in focus in the following.

Stigmatization

Observing the way children were treated when begging on the streets or on the subte gave an idea of the daily rejection the children were subject to. On several occasions I witnessed small children being completely ignored or hushed away when trying to approach passers-by. A person's identity is not created independent of his/her surroundings, and the expressed thoughts the 'general public' have towards street children probably influence the children's self image. According to a CAINA produced documentary, the 'general public' has a polar view of the street child population. On the one side they feel sorry for the children residing on the streets. On the other side, if it comes to reaching for their own money or if these children

⁴⁹ I thank my academic supervisor, John Andrew McNeish, for introducing me to the idea of the 'brutal freedom' of street life.

are to play with their own children, the picture changes. Street children evoke strong and contradictory emotions, and are portrayed as both victims and as perpetrators. City streets are spaces 'normally' used for movement and transition (especially in large urban centres), and are not seen as spaces that are adequate for living. The street is dirty and dangerous, and is perceived as the opposite of home. The words 'home' and 'street' (in Brazil, but could also be true in an Argentinean context) are not just spatial and social categories; they also contain moral connotations (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998:360), further separating those 'pertaining' to the two entities. In this context, 'home children' are the proper children of substance and quality, whereas 'street children' are dangerous and impersonal (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998:360).

In the routines of everyday life, when people meet in social settings, people place expectations and demands on others (Goffman 1986). If the person in front of you is different, less desirable than the normatively accepted or anticipated, the person is reduced to a lesser person who is stigmatized (Goffman 1986:3). Goffman lists three types of stigma, namely physical deformities, blemishes of individual character (due to weakness, dishonesty, treacherous beliefs turning individuals into addicts, imprisonment, homosexuals etc) and tribal stigma (race, nation, religion – stigmatizing whole families through generations) (1986:4). Street children can in a way be said to attribute all three stigmas, something that makes it very hard for them to avoid stigmatization. Many of the children, especially as they gained street experience, looked like the 'stereotypical' street child, with ragged clothes, dirt on their skin and a blurred look in their eyes (as a result of drug use). Getting access to showers was practically impossible for the children (outside of CAINA), and they could go for long periods without showering and changing clothes. The street environment is dirty and the children sleep and play on public floors, benches and on the ground. In addition, several of the children had cuttings and beat marks on their bodies. These were either self-inflicted, due to fights with other children or a result of encounters with the police. These visible marks made them easier to identify, and therefore more easily a victim of stigmatization. The (negative) feelings people have towards street children is connected to the next two points; marks of individual character and the tribal stigma. The children were brought up in villas miserias, suburbs of great poverty. Escaping from this reality is seen as practically impossible, and children being brought up in these areas are, in a way, trapped in these areas; it is a stigma going through generations. Attached to this is the stereotypical image people hold of poor people, and especially 'desperate' poor people. Auyero (2000) also speaks of the

stigmatization the child population in Argentinean shantytowns experience from those living outside these areas, and how the children are used to being called ‘*villeros*’⁵⁰ and ‘*negros*.’ Stigmatization is thus something the children are subjected to also before they enter street life.

The children would attempt to emphasise or minimize their stigma in relation to what situation they were in, and what they needed or wanted out of it. For example, when Cristian went to the Tribunal to get another chance at staying in a home (see chapter one), he took of his cap and left it at CAINA. Cristian (and the coordinators) felt that it would be better to leave it behind, and that Cristian should try to present himself as a ‘proper young man’ (not as a ‘badboy’), so that the judge would get a good impression of him. Other times, however, the children would actively play upon their stigma (or stereotypical image). This happened, in particular, in situations where the children confronted passers-by asking for money. One of the children who sometimes came to CAINA, a boy of around 14 years, often spent his time running around the day centre playing and joking around with the coordinators or the other children. One day I saw him walking up to some people in a café, asking for money, with a very sad look upon his face and barely opening his mouth when speaking to people. He didn’t see me at first, but when he did, there was a radical change in appearance. He looked a little surprised, and then smiled and asked me for a cigarette, before he left. Portraying this ‘needy’ image enhances the possibility for financial aid from people. The children thus actively used strategies of under and over-communicating their ‘stigma’ in relation to specific situations. Similarly, Davies (2008:313) reports how his informants (street children in a rural town in Kenya) also used strategies of communicating specific images of themselves. Through reaffirming people’s stereotypes of them, the children actively used the stigma to make it work *for* them. The children played upon the public’s fear of the ‘street roamers,’ creating “the myth, or threat, of an ability to act beyond the controls of normal society” (Davies 2008:313). Sandberg and Pedersen (2006) similarly speaks of this form of empowerment in relation to the majority of their informants; a marginalized group of young, male African immigrants selling hashish along the riverside of Akerselva in Oslo. This group of adolescents are excluded from the Norwegian society, all unemployed and in lack of a support network (some also without a residence permit). In the encounter with buyers (especially when they were rich Norwegian adolescents) this group of young men have the possibility to reverse the power relation for a split second; in this meeting between ‘two worlds’ the ‘underdog’ is in

⁵⁰ ‘*Villeros*’ is a derogatory term for the inhabitants of *villas miserias* (which also is a derogatory term for shantytowns).

power. The adolescents have something the group of buyers wants; and the location of the sale is located in the ‘underdog’s’ territory. This group of young men have learned how to manipulate the situation and the image other people have of them. Through creating fear they gain respect. Since they were already on the margin of society, they used the margin in order to obtain what they wanted and needed. This is part of the ‘street smarts’ of street children, and can partake in explaining why street life can be seen as attractive for street children.

The stigmatization the children experience from their surrounding, and the toughness of living on the streets, are parts of what creates, or demands, a street smart mentality. The following section will describe how the children modified their idea of morality in order to adjust it to their new life circumstances.

‘Never say never’

The children coming to CAINA have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong, and what is morally good and bad. Taking drugs and performing criminal acts are seen as morally wrong, but are still activities that are present in the children’s daily lives. Not all of the children partake in these activities, but overall they are seen as acceptable traits of street life. Their life situation can in a way be seen as preventing them from acting in accordance with morality.⁵¹ As noted by Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1998:367), Brazilian street children think that stealing is wrong, but they see it as unfair that they do not have anything. The unfairness of street life justifies criminal behaviour. Hecht’s (2000:154) informants similarly see street life as ‘that life’ where you just have to do things that are ‘no good,’ because as one of his informant stated “If I don’t steal, I don’t eat.” Some of the children did brag about drug consumption and stealing. This was often related to stealing from tourists; they were seen as packed with money and were therefore appropriate targets. Tourists were not only easier to rob, they were also portrayed as having enough money ‘to spare.’ The children also bragged about stealing cell-phones, selling them, and spending the money on hotels, good food and drugs/partying. More often, however, crime and drugs were spoken about in a ‘matter-of-fact’ way. This was expressed as something that was a necessary act for street survival, but not something they were proud of (See also Scheper-Hughes 1998).

We are talking about ways of obtaining money, and Juan (16) says he collects newspapers which he sells to people. He says that if he does this for a while, he can make a little sum of money. Esteban (15) says he can

⁵¹ Javier Ayuero (1999) and Eliosa Martin (2004) talks of the presence of drugs and crime in the *villas miserias* (shantytowns) of Buenos Aires, and how these activities are seen as a natural part of life in the shantytowns.

make a lot more money in a day. 'Doing what?' one of the coordinators ask. '*Cosas malas*' (bad stuff), Esteban replies, smiling briefly. 'What sort of bad stuff?' the coordinator asks. 'Drug-dealing,' Esteban answers.

Esteban speaks of drug-dealing as something bad, but at the same time he is not trying to avoid the subject, nor is he embarrassed in any way by talking about it. Drug-dealing is an efficient way of making money, both in terms of work effort and time. In a similar manner, Julio speaks about robbery:

Julio (17) and I are eating lunch at CAINA I ask him if he works on the street, and he says no. I ask him how he obtains money, and he says he begs and opens taxi doors. Earlier, I have been told that it is not easy for the older boys to beg, as people will rather give money to smaller, more innocent-looking children, so I ask him if it is hard to obtain money that way. He says it is. I ask him if a lot of the children rob people. He asks me if I am talking about him? If I meant him?, as if I was accusing him. Afraid I have crossed a line, I say I did not mean him in particular, but that I have been told that robbing is one of the ways some of the children obtain money. Julio seems to enjoy that I am feeling a little nervous, and he wait a little before he tells me that he used to rob people quite a lot before, but that he does not rob that much now. I ask if he robs people with or without arms, and he says he uses '*arma blanca*' (white weapon, knives etc). I ask him if people get scared when he robs them, and he says yes. I ask him if he robs specific people, if he perhaps does not rob pretty girls? He says he robs anyone; men, women, young, old, he robs all of them. He tells me that if you need money bad enough, you just have to do it.

Crime, drugs and violence are a part of everyday life in the areas the children come from (villas miserias), and it is hard to say to what degree the children have been directly part of these activities before they turn to the street. However, as Esteban tells me, he never thought he would partake in criminal acts before he came to the streets.

In the literary workshops at CAINA the children often bring up the topics of drugs and crime themselves. Today, the children are given papers with such phrases to fill out. The paper reads: 'In the future I want to ...' Most of the children write that they want to stop doing drugs and stop stealing.⁵² Esteban is not very interested in writing; he rather draws a picture of a person with breasts and a big penis. I ask him who it is, he says it's me. We joke around for a while, and I ask him if he doesn't want to fill in the phrases. He agrees, but he wants me to write them for him. I tell him I'm sure he can do it himself, but he insists. If I don't write, he will tear the paper into pieces. We keep talking about street life and stealing, and he tells me that (in fact): "You can never say never. I said I would never steal or rob anyone, but I have... So, you can never say never."

The next section will go into a further discussion around the changes the children go through when starting a life on the streets; changes affecting and changing their habitus.

⁵² Whether the children wrote this because they thought this was what the coordinators wanted them to write, is another question.

'Getting used to it'

A change in habitus is related to changes in the exterior surroundings of the agent (Wilken 2008:38). When street children gain time and experience on the street, their behaviour, thoughts and practice go through a transformation; i.e. an alteration in habitus. As mentioned, however, adaptation to street life and consequently this alteration in habitus, happens faster than that portrayed in Bourdieu's theories. Whether this is due to them being children (children adapt more easily to new surroundings and challenges e.g. language acquisition), a force of circumstance (if they don't adapt, they will encounter greater obstacles) or because they chose to be there (embracing the negative with the positive), is hard to say. Whether adaptation to street life should merely be considered *a part of* the formation of the children's habitus, since it is a process taking place while the children are of such a young age, is another question. Seeing children as 'adults in the becoming' would suggest the latter, whereas seeing children as complete human beings, would perhaps not. In any case, the children go through a transformation after entering street life, and a visible change could be detected in the children after a short amount of time on the streets. In addition, the coordinators always attempted to reach the children with little time on the streets, as it would be easier to help them out of the street situation.

As mentioned above, street children have developed a 'toughness' prior to street life. However, the children still had to adjust to the dangers and challenges of street life. 'Getting used to it' (*acustombrarse*) was the way the children spoke about street life adaptation. One of the girls who were new to street life during my fieldwork, Celia (15), spoke a lot about the process of 'getting used to it.' As mentioned (see chapter one), she left home in order to be with her boyfriend. She was not interested in returning to her family or in getting help to find a home. She told me several times that she had everything she needed at home (her own room, nice clothes etc.), but she was going to live on the streets to be with her boyfriend, because they loved each other. As time passed, she told me about how she had tried to beg for money, that she did not like it, but that she just had to get used to it. Celia did perhaps have a distinct starting point in relation to the great majority; she left for the streets to be with her boyfriend, not because of domestic abuse and extreme poverty (at least, she never mentioned this to me). However, like other children, she had to find a way to make sense of this new life situation, which she saw as something that would eventually happen, and further that time and experience was what would get her there.

A visible transformation could be detected in children who were in the process of 'getting used to' living on the streets. The children developed a more visible 'toughness,' not only on the exterior (dress), but also corporally (behaviour, speech and appearance). Celia (15) and Alejandro (9) were two children I particularly observed going through this transformation. The two children had different ways of being and behaving to begin with, and they were both affected in their own ways by street life. Celia was very cautious in the beginning; she often sat quietly at one of the tables, observing the other children and talking mostly to her boyfriend. She spoke with a low voice, and seldom initiated contact with anyone. As time passed, she became 'harder.' She started coming to the day centre without her boyfriend, and she was quicker to respond to people. She was less talkative about her life, and instead of talking to me or the other coordinators she would joke around with some of the girls. Alejandro was very energetic in the beginning. He used to run around at CAINA, joking and playing with the coordinators, and he also used to come and hug me all the time. After some time, he became less happy and active, and he also spent more and more time on the streets. When he did come, he usually sat by himself or with the coordinators. These two children were in the beginning phases of street life, and perhaps for this reason, it was easier to detect a clear transformation in their behaviour and appearance. Change in the children's appearance and behaviour was made visible through the children's bodies and language. The following section will speak of the codes and conducts I see as pertaining to the street child population coming to CAINA.

Appearance, body and language

The degree of street experience was often reflected in the child's way of being and behaving; acting tough and not accepting crap from the others became a way of expressing themselves. Individual children behave differently, but in general, the 'hard-core' children (according to CAINA terminology, see chapter one) acted differently compared to the new ones; they were 'louder,' more 'corporal' and 'violent' in their behaviour, and they ended up in trouble more frequently at the day centre.

One aspect was the expressed behaviour of the children; another was the visible marks on the children's bodies. Several of the children attending CAINA had scars on their bodies. Some were inflicted through arguments and fights with other children on the streets (or from their pasts), but many had self-inflicted scars on their wrists (in particular). A coordinator at CAINA explained to me the multiple reasons for why the children would do this. At times,

this form of self-inflicted cutting was done in order to get out of 'a high' (on drugs). Other times it could be seen as an act of protest among children who were incarcerated, or as something the children did in jail if they were harassed by other cellmates, in order to get out of the cell (move location). A final reason could be the act of exchanging inner pain with outer pain. Taking control over ones own body in terms of having a tangible and visible pain instead of an inner and invisible suffering. This exterior manifestation of pain can be read as a coping mechanism where the children's inner conflicts are dealt with practically. Some of the children also had additional visible signs on the bodies in the form of tattoos. Most of these were letters of the child's name or nickname, and they were often located on their hands, fingers, and arms. To my knowledge, these tattoos did not express a specific group membership or a particular mark of street identity.

The children's language was particular in that they used words pertaining to a so-called 'prison language.' This idiom contains words related to topics of power and domination, punishment and hierarchy. The phrase '*gato mio*' (my cat) is one of these. The person who calls the other '*gato mio*' is in position of authority to make the other person do whatever he wants, as his servant so to speak. Other words pertaining specifically to street life are words related to drugs; *flashear* (hallucinate), *merca* (paco) and to theft and the police; *isa* (shout of alarm that the police is coming), *lancha* (police vehicle), *pungista* (pick-pocket), *rastrero* (he who robs a friend) and *hacer bondi* (to fight). The children's language, appearances and bodies are parts of what constitutes them as a group; part of what builds up their street identities.

Conclusion

Becoming street wise is linked to the mastering of street life, when adaptation leads to a harmony between the street field and street capital. The children are all new to street life (except those born on the street), and they all need to 'get used to' living that life. The challenges appearing for the children require a skill and a will to adapt, both psychologically (as shown above) and practically (as will be in focus in the next chapter). Living on the streets and experiencing hardships and maltreatment leads to the establishment of street capital. The children know well that not every act they do is morally right, but street life justifies this behaviour. As will be argued in the next chapter, there are additional aspects of street life adaptation; how the children practically organize themselves, how they provide for their subsistence, and the usage of drugs; these factors are also street capital for street children.

Chapter 5 Urban hunters and gatherers

Street children are unmistakably a part of the contemporary Argentinean society; they listen to rap music, talk on msn and play computer games online, like other children in the capital of Buenos Aires.⁵³ They do, however, like several hunter-and gatherers such as the Dobe ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari Desert and the Inuit of the arctic circumpolar region of North America (and unlike other Argentinean children, especially those pertaining to higher social classes), inhabit territories that no one else wants (Bates 2005:68/75); territories considered uninhabitable. As this chapter will illustrate, there are several resemblances between this human adaptive strategy and the life led by street children.⁵⁴

Hunting and gathering, also called foraging, has been the most dominant human adaptive strategy in the course of human existence. This strategy of adaptation is based on the collecting of wild plants and roots, and on the hunting of animals; in other words, effectively using what the local environment has to offer. Their form of social organization, diet and settlement patterns are adjusted to annual and seasonal fluctuations, much like street children also must adapt to their changing environments. Like hunters and gatherers, the children on the streets of Buenos Aires organize themselves into groups and actively construct units and systems of protection, cooperation and support. The social relevance of these groups must be seen in *addition* to the children's families,⁵⁵ as the notion of 'family' is still important for street children, despite the fact that they choose to leave theirs (both keeping in contact with ones family and, for some, creating a family for oneself). The children make use of a variety of strategies for resource procurement; they develop a thorough knowledge of the possibilities present for them and learn where to obtain resources and services suiting their needs and available resources (CAINA can be said to be one of these places). Another coping strategy which can be viewed as an adaptive strategy is the consumption of drugs. Drug-use is an established part of street life and a widespread activity among street children. Taking drugs

⁵³ Hunter and gatherers do not live in isolation from the larger society in the contemporary world either. The information used in this chapter is based on general traits of this ancient subsistence strategy, not claiming that forager groups today still live strictly by these particular traits. I use this data for illustrative purposes in order to show how street children, much like hunters and gatherers, manoeuvre in an inhospitable habitat.

⁵⁴ Taylor and Hickey (2001) also mention the similarity between hunters and gatherers and street children. Through their fieldwork on the 'tunnel kids' (street children) in the underground drainage tunnel connecting the Mexican and the U.S. borders, they began seeing the children less like a gang of children, and more like a "clan of hunters and gatherers [...] finding a way to survive in a particularly harsh environment" (Taylor and Hickey 2001:33). Tobias Hecht has also recognized this comparison (2007).

⁵⁵ In Davies (2008:315), the street children claim their peers on the street to be their families, despite that most of them had parental contact and that some also slept in a parental home at night.

not only partake in creating a street child identity, but also work for other purposes; i.e. for entertainment and also for keeping hardships, hunger and the cold weather away. In the following, I will describe how street children's subsistence and survival strategies are shaped by their local environments; how their adaptation to street life also requires flexibility and change, and how the children deal with this.

Resource procurement

Street children move around in their surroundings and take, incorporate and use what the street has to offer. After actively observing and learning from other children on the streets, they develop a knowledge of how and where to obtain money and resources. This knowledge extends merely getting access to basic resources, such as food (and drugs); the children also know which areas are preferable when searching for specific items and services. Leo (15), for example, knew where to get the cheapest haircut in town. He had his hair cut at one of the train station markets, costing him 10 pesos. Pato (16) told me that the best place to buy hair dye was in a specific area, where these products cost less than half of the price in the city centre. As mentioned (in chapter three), Silvia also knew where to get the pills she needed for her abortion. In one of the train stations in town you could find a variety of pills (on the black market) for a lot less money than what you would pay in a pharmacy.

Street children, like hunter-gatherers, exploit the resources present in their habitat. The way the Dobe Ju/'hoansi in the Kalahari Desert know where to dig for roots or set up snares to catch animals (Bates 2002:70), street children in Buenos Aires know where to find food or how to rob tourists for money. The children make use of a range of techniques in order to obtain what they need and want. Begging, robbing, selling items (often gift-cards they have bought or newspapers they have collected), opening taxi doors for money and washing car windows, are some of the activities the children perform in order to provide for their own subsistence. A few boys also spoke of drug dealing as a good way to make money. Prostitution was never mentioned by the children (to me), but the CAINA staff told me that some of the children were involved in this. Several children also have connections on the streets facilitating obtaining food and finding a place to stay; some are in contact with street vendors and others have agreements with restaurants (restaurant staff putting out leftover food outside the restaurants at night for the children to eat). Street children seldom have the possibility to acquire large amounts of economic or material capital, and if they do, it seldom lasts long.

Several researchers have emphasised street children's contribution to the family income (see e.g. Rizzini & Lusk 1995, Dallape 1996). The children coming to CAINA, however, mainly work for their own subsistence. However, they always bring something with them when they visit their families.⁵⁶ Several explanations were given (from the coordinators) of why bringing goods home was of such importance for the children. First of all, the children might feel a need to show their parents that they have the ability to contribute. Secondly, the children might not want to be a burden to their parents when they come home. Thirdly, the children might feel that bringing something home is a demonstration of survival skills; a way of showing their parents that they have 'done good.'

Social organization - *Ranchadas*

The form of social organization applied by groups of hunters and gatherers is similar to the way street children in Buenos Aires organize themselves. Due to harsh environments with scarce and highly dispersed resources, hunters and gatherers typically organize themselves in small groups, often in camps with related families (called bands), and the size of these groups are limited to the supply of natural resources in the particular areas (Bates 2005:63). Their social organization is characterized by great fluidity, flexibility and equality; however, when food resources are particularly scarce and there is higher competition for goods, disputes may lead individuals and their families to move apart (Bates 2005:66). On the streets of Buenos Aires, there is a constant scarcity of resources. Constant competition for goods, as well as disputes between the individual members of groups (most often concerning drugs or maltreatment), lead to *ranchadas* frequently expanding and contracting. Contrary to populations of hunter-gatherers, there is a constant entrance of new members to the street child population, resulting in further competition for goods.

The children's form of social organization is the creation of *ranchadas*. A *ranchada* is, in short, a group of children which is connected to a particular area. These areas are more than places the children sleep; they are areas where most of their activities are performed. Most of the children coming to CAINA are part of *ranchadas* which are located in three particular areas (two train stations and a street). These places are representative for *ranchadas* in general, i.e. areas of movement, with a lot of people (in particular tourists), shops and restaurants.

⁵⁶ Similarly, when CAINA staff make family-visits with the children, they always assist the child in bringing something to their families, be it food or sweets.

Hunters and gatherers tend to be nomadic, depending on the availability of resources and annual and seasonal fluctuations as well as storage availability and transportation systems (Bates 2005:67). Street children are in a way also 'nomadic' since their ranchadas are only semi-permanent.⁵⁷ At times the children move, either alone or with the other children in their group. The children make use of the city in the creation of ranchadas. Some spend their time at train or subte stations; others stay in parks, outside public buildings or on pavements, bridges, or parks. The children collect cardboard, plastic, mattresses and other items in order to create a cover from bad weather, or a shield separating them from people walking by. In the winter time, all the street children in Buenos Aires sleep in the subte and train stations, as it is too cold to stay outside.

Children that have recently entered street life have different needs than those who have been on the streets for a long time. The newcomers need knowledge and protection in order to learn the survival strategies necessary for street life survival. Old-timers, on their part, might need or want younger children in their groups for various reasons. They might, on the one hand, want younger children to beg for them, since smaller children are said to have better luck obtaining money that way. On the other hand, the older children might feel an obligation to protect the younger children, since they know of the dangers these children are exposed to. Others again might want continuity, to stay within their already established group, not wanting new people to enter.

The children pair up with other children they meet on the streets, either through earlier friendships (or kinships) or through new acquaintances. Several of the children had siblings who were also in the street situation. They did not, however, always stay in the same ranchada or know of the whereabouts of their siblings. The groups are of different sizes; they range from smaller groups of 5-6 to as much as 25 children (the larger groups generally had a larger age-range than the smaller groups). Although this is rare (I was told by CAINA staff), I met three children claiming to stay alone on the streets. When asked about why they preferred to stay alone, the answers were simply 'I like it better,' 'It is better, in case I meet a girl' (for romance) or 'I don't like groups.' The coordinators thought that some children preferred to stay alone because they did not want to be controlled by others. Leo (15) (see chapter three) is

⁵⁷ Aptekar (1991) compares street children in Colombia with the Qalander nomadic group in Pakistan in order to find similarities in subsistence activities (as nomadic entertainers) as well as in order to portray the remarkable similarity in how these two groups were treated by their respective societies.

one of the children who prefers staying alone on the streets. Leo is particular in relation to many of the other children, in that he has good connections with the security guards in the train station where he stays. Seeing that security-guards are seen as belonging to the same 'group' as police officers, some of the other children at CAINA (especially the 'hard-core' boys) had problems with accepting Leo (as one of them) and he was often teased.

Reciprocity, the systematic sharing of foods and goods, is an important element in hunter and gatherer groups (Bates 2005:63). These bonds of sharing are crucial to some groups of hunter-gatherers, as workload is scattered more 'evenly', and thus providing safety in times of need. Sharing of goods is also an important aspect of the ranchadas. In addition, these groups provide social and practical support, e.g. cooperation (in order to obtain resources), friendships, as well as protection from dangers. These are some of the positive aspects of staying in a group, and are perhaps something the children can not find elsewhere. The social capital for street children in the street field, are thus their peers in their ranchadas.

In groups of hunters and gatherers, there is no institutional power, although some members will have more power than others (Bates 2005:66). CAINA staff told me that the larger ranchadas always have a leader and that there is a hierarchical order within these groups.⁵⁸ Although I got the impression that there were some strong personalities at CAINA, the children never referred to any of the children as their leader (this might be explained by the fact that I spoke more to children staying in smaller groups where the hierarchy was less visible or less functioning). It was clear that some of the children had more authority than others, but entire ranchadas were seldom together at CAINA (either because the children did not want to come, or because they had been told they could not come all together by CAINA staff).⁵⁹ As stated, the larger ranchadas have a larger age span, and the members have a varying degree of street experience. Maria (17) belongs to a larger ranchada consisting of around 25 children. For a while, Maria's mother stayed in the group as well, but she left the street to live in a house during my fieldwork. Maria's two year older brother also used to stay in this ranchada, but he left to live in a home, due to a serious accident that happened a couple of years ago. Maria is an authoritarian figure, and the other children seem to look up to her.

⁵⁸ Amongst Davies' (2008:316) informants there was one leader, but there was no formal internal hierarchy in the group; the children rather followed the principle of egalitarianism. In contrast, Aptekar (1988) cited in Davies (2008), found a strong internal hierarchy amongst his informants. Hierarchy in group compositions for street children thus differ.

⁵⁹ Some children were not allowed to come to CAINA together in a group. When they all came to CAINA they often ended up winding each other up, creating turmoil.

She was one of the toughest girls I met at CAINA, and her ranchada was one that several of the newcomers joined as they entered street life. Although group membership can provide protection and support, it can also provide the opposite; sometimes inclusion into a ranchada becomes a danger in itself. Alejandro (9) and his brother Raul (11) became part of Maria's (17) ranchada (when Raul came to the street some weeks after Alejandro). The two boys only stayed with this group a couple of weeks. Alejandro said that they were treated badly, were stolen from and beaten by Maria, her mother (when she was with them) and the other children. The brothers left and moved to a different area, to a small park closer to CAINA where they stayed for a while (before the move to the home which turned out to be a negative experience).

According to Duschzatsky and Corea (2001:55), groups such as these (i.e. peer relationships) should be seen as a sort of 'brotherhood' (*fraternidad*). It is not a replacement of the traditional family model, but an alternative way of social organization; an emerging new and possible model of reference, due to the symbolic inefficiency of the traditional family model. Two factors are of importance in relation to the establishment of brotherhoods; the issue of 'loyalty' and of choice. For the children, protection and loyalty in these 'brotherhoods' is stronger than in their respective families. Consequently, breaking the rules set by the head of the brotherhood (ranchada) is worse than breaking the rules set by the head of the children's families (Duschzatsky & Corea 2001:56). As mentioned in the previous chapter, street children in Buenos Aires use a distinct term illustrating the value of loyalty associated with friendships, namely 'he who robs a friend' (*rastrero*).⁶⁰ Friends share what they have and protect each other. However, friendships on the streets do differ; some children say that they have no friends (only acquaintances) and that one can not trust anyone on the streets. When I asked Cristian (15) who wanted to leave street life and who was given a new chance by the judge to stay in a home (chapter one), if he through his friends would miss him when he left his ranchada, he was surprised at my question. He asked me sharply if I wanted him to live on the street? Then he quickly added that it was not a problem. His attitude to his ranchada (a group of boys he had stayed with for several years) was divided in two; on the one side his feelings towards his peers was strong since they had stayed together for a long time through both good and hard times, and on the other, that in the end he was on his own. Another factor of importance in relation to the brotherhood is the issue of choice and authority. The traditional family model automatically places parents as the rule-makers and as those in

⁶⁰ The adjective *rastrero* means (someone who is) low, rotten or villainous.

authority. In the ranchadas, however, the law is not what the father (or mother) decides, but rather what the 'elected' leader decides (Duschzatsky and Corea 2001:57). Children who disagree with these rules might choose to move to another, or create their own, ranchada (like Alejandro and Raul). These brotherhoods (ranchadas) and the values that the peers follow (especially the value of *aguante*) are constituted and created through experience (Duschzatsky and Corea 2001:58); they appear in the interaction between group members. Experience is what separates old-timers from newcomers, and what creates a hierarchy (and a leader) within the groups. *Aguante* (mentioned in chapter one, in relation to pibes) is the supreme value transmitted in these brotherhoods, according to the authors (Duschzatsky and Corea 2001:58). *Aguante*, as a value and a preferable individual character trait (in street life), is similar to what I have previously termed 'toughness' (chapter four); i.e. an important aspect of street habitus.

Despite the significance of ranchadas, however, the notion of family is still relevant to these children. Even if they have left their families, I will argue that both family contact and family creation are factors of importance in their lives.

The importance of family

The children attending CAINA spoke about their families, in particular their mother and siblings. Many of the children had sporadic contact with their families and went home from time to time to visit them.⁶¹ When I asked the children if they were looking forward to seeing their families, most of the children were not very enthusiastic and often replied in an indifferent way. However, this indifference always changed when talking about their younger siblings; playing with them was always mentioned as something positive.⁶² According to CAINA statistics, the children see their families fairly often. Out of the 50 children who attend CAINA with the highest frequency, 42% had seen their family less than a week before asked, and 38% had seen their family between a week and a month before.⁶³ Alejandro (9) and Raul (11), the two brothers with a short amount of time on the street, can shed a light on the ambiguous feelings children have towards their parents. As mentioned, the brothers refused to go home or to have anything to do with their parents, in particular their mother. The boys said their mother beat them and they did not want to hear of her when the coordinators told them she had called CAINA in search of them. However, they still called her from the

⁶¹ CAINA staff made family visits to the children's homes if the children wanted them to.

⁶² Similarly, whenever (street) children brought their children and babies to CAINA, the other children were always excited to play with them.

⁶³ CAINA statistics (January-February 2006)

home on Mother's Day. Several of the children also wrote cards for their mothers in the literary and art workshops for Mother's Day.⁶⁴ One of the girls wrote in her card that she missed her mother and that she wanted to visit her, but that she couldn't because she did not have any money. This same girl broke down crying, and was comforted by one of the coordinators. Family *is* of importance, despite the fact that the children chose to leave them.

Boyfriends and girlfriends was a constant topic of conversation at CAINA.⁶⁵ Many of the children had boyfriends and girlfriends on the streets (like Celia, who started sleeping rough in order to be with her boyfriend). Those who did not have one, especially the older boys, frequently told me how much they wanted one. The idea of starting their own family and having babies was something some of the girls at CAINA were interested in. CAINA statistics show that the numbers of pregnant girls on the street have increased from 6,3% in 2004 to 22,1% in 2007.⁶⁶ Several girls became pregnant or gave birth during my fieldwork (most of whom were around 15 years old). For some, the idea of creating a family was a way of 'getting it together'; of creating a life for themselves outside the street situation (either in a suburb outside the capital, in a hotel⁶⁷ or in a home). These girls made out the highest percentage of the children who made use of the health services that CAINA provided. It was also easier to help these young mothers financially, in terms of funding (from the government). The girls eagerly spoke about getting ready for giving birth and preparing for it.

Some of the children, especially the older ones, shared their ideas about child-rearing; especially how they would never beat their children. One of the older boys told me about his dreams for the future. He said that he had been into all the drugs he could get hold of before, but that thanks to God, he had quit taking drugs now. He was very content with his decision, because he did not want his (future) children to experience the life he had lived. His parents were alcoholics, and he was beaten on a regular basis before he left for the streets. His siblings still lived with his parents, and he thought the situation at home had improved now and that his siblings were better off than he had been. He could, however, never go back. He

⁶⁴ Whether these cards were sent or not, I do not know. In any case, writing them and talking about their mothers with the coordinators seemed to be positive for the children.

⁶⁵ The children had a specific way of speaking about their boyfriends and girlfriends, calling them 'husbands' (*marido*) and 'wives/women' (*mujer*).

⁶⁶ CAINA statistics (2007). These numbers are based on CAINA statistics, and do therefore not represent all the children on the streets of Buenos Aires (only those who come to CAINA). 44% of the girls who attended CAINA in 2007 were pregnant or mothers.

⁶⁷ There are two kinds of hotels in Buenos Aires; more expensive hotels for tourists, and hotels who function more like shelters, with short leases and a low rent.

concluded that domestic violence was a problem; he thought it was the wrong way of raising children, because it only lead to a vicious circle of abuse. He said he would be a loving parent, teaching his children to behave without maltreating them.

Not all the children, however, wanted to have babies. Unwanted pregnancies were potential problems for the children. As mentioned, since abortion is prohibited by law in Argentina, Silvia had to get pills on her own and take care of the procedure in secret (chapter three). Not only could this be damaging for her health, but the psychological impact was heavy as well. Life is hard to begin with for these children and a pregnancy could further complicate street life (let alone, not being a good starting point for the child being born). CAINA staff attempted to influence the children into thinking about protecting themselves,⁶⁸ trying to prevent that the children would end up in difficult situations.

Drug use

An activity characterizing street children's daily life is the use of drugs. Among the children coming to CAINA, the most commonly used drugs were *paco* (drug made out of cocaine leftovers, see footnote 3 in chapter one), *porro* (marihuana), alcohol and glue sniffing. Although few of the children I spoke to would admit they smoked *paco*, the coordinators said that it was a widespread drug among the children. The children would rather deny their use of the drug, and rather emphasise the negative consequences of *paco* and how dangerous it was.

Alejandro (9) asked me one day if I did drugs. I told him I didn't, but he didn't believe me. He said he was sure I did drugs. I asked him why, and he said laughingly that I had a 'drug-face' (*cara de drogas*). I asked him if he did drugs, and he told me he smoked marihuana and sniffed glue sometimes. I asked about what happened to him when he sniffed glue, why he liked it? He told me it was a weird and funny sensation; it was as if his eyes wanted to go up, but at the same time that his head and forehead wanted to go down. I said, 'what about *paco*?', and he told me he didn't use that, '*por suerte*' (luckily). He said it was really addictive. The other boys laughed at him, not believing a word of it.

CAINA staff distinguishes between the use and the misuse of drugs. Almost all the children use drugs on a frequent basis, mostly glue and marihuana. Marihuana is thought of as a drug, but not seen as that damaging. Stronger drugs were those that made the children loose control over themselves. Cristian (18), who wanted to get away from the street (chapter one), told me about how he only smoked marihuana. He had quit doing the harder drugs when he felt ready to leave the street. Other children who wanted out of street life also tried to cut down on the heavier drugs.

⁶⁸ During my time at CAINA, the staff hung up a condom-supply machine in the bathrooms.

The children portrayed drug use as something fun and exciting, especially in the beginning phases of street life. Getting high made them forget hardships, and it made them do ‘crazy things.’ However, as they kept doing drugs over a longer period of time, and experienced the downsides, it was not experienced as exciting anymore. Doing drugs was also something the children would do to keep hunger away, or to keep the cold away. It was easily accessible for the children, and cheaper than food.⁶⁹

Introducing newcomers to drugs was the closest I came to finding an initiation process for the street children attending CAINA.⁷⁰ Experimenting with drugs, as well as running errands for older and more experienced street children, are two aspects of street life that many newcomers go through.

Conclusion

I have, through the two latest chapters, argued that street children psychologically and practically adapt to street life. Child adaptation leads to the development of a street habitus which, as will be argued in the following chapter, may work as an obstacle in the process of assisting street children. In this chapter I have chosen to present street children as urban hunters and gatherers. Both the practical adaptation to street life, as well as the social aspect of living in the street setting, shows how the children adjust to the local environment and make use of the resources and possibilities that are present. The children must be flexible in groups and simultaneously strong on their own. Moreover, the comparison gives an adequate view of these children and their lives in that it indirectly underlines child agency, and emphasises their creativity and competency. Furthermore, the following chapter will deal with the street children and their encounter with CAINA staff at the day centre, and the issues complicating assistance in relation to this encounter.

⁶⁹ Leo (15) explained to me another positive side of marihuana; that it cures cancer.

⁷⁰ Teigen (2008:104-5) reported that street children entering street life in Boca Chica in the Dominican Republic were forced to have sexual intercourse with streets adolescents. This was a way of admitting the newcomers into a group of street children and of introducing them to street life.

Chapter 6 Why is it challenging to assist street children

As I have argued in the previous chapters, street children go through practical and psychological processes of adaptation when they enter street life; processes which are necessary for the child's survival on the streets. This acquired knowledge is valuable in the street life setting, but can become a hindrance in relation to leaving street life and adapting to new surroundings (e.g. in homes). The child may therefore experience *receiving* assistance as challenging.⁷¹ Simultaneously, one must take into account the challenges in *providing* assistance for the coordinators who are trying to help street children. These are challenges of a practical (lack of resources) and a psychological character (ideas of what childhood should be like). What we know is that there is a fairly low success rate in terms of how many children who return to the street after receiving assistance, *and*, as I learned during my fieldwork, not all street children want help to get out of street life in the first place. I wish to discuss why there is such a low success rate. Why do the children prefer the street and its dangers over a return home or living in an institutional home?

I will make use of Bourdieu's (2007) theories throughout this chapter in order to show that the process of entering and leaving street life for street children can be seen as a movement between social fields, and consequently as an alteration in habitus. This alteration partly explains why the children might experience difficulties in receiving assistance; a *disharmony* appears between the children's habitus and the new social field they find themselves in. An additional factor complicating the situation is the difference between the coordinators' and the children's backgrounds, and consequently their different (and, at times conflicting) actions, thoughts and behaviours (i.e. habitus). I want to emphasise that I do not want to create a larger distance between these two groups than the (unavoidable) distance which already exists. I argue that this distance is present, but I do so in order to explain the challenge in the encounter, *not* seeing it as a challenge (completely) hindering assistance. The relationships between the children and the coordinators are not static; they vary from person to person and they do not form two mutually exclusive categories of people. An acknowledgement of their differences will explain the underlying mechanisms that I believe are present in any encounter where a 'less fortunate' group of people are provided assistance, and consequently

⁷¹ I stress the active status of children despite using the verb 'to receive.' I choose this verb because it illustrates what the encounter (between street children and coordinators) is based on; the main goal of CAINA is to give the children assistance and help them out of street life.

subordinated, by a 'more fortunate' group of people. It is a complex picture, but through this chapter, my intent is that the logic behind these intricacies will appear.

Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, I will use comparative theoretical and ethnographic material of a slightly different topic, i.e. of refugees. I choose to make this comparison despite its apparent incoherence, a refugee being 'a person who has been forced to leave their (sic) country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.'⁷² Street children can hardly be placed easily into this definition. However, if one compares these two life situations on a somewhat different level, placing the focus on the escaping from an unwanted life situation, several resemblances do appear. My inspiration for making this comparison is based on the writings and theoretical positioning of John Knudsen (1991, 1995, 2005) and his work on Vietnamese refugees (commonly referred to as 'boat-people'); their flight and their long and complicated road to (and *in*) exile (in Norway). Even though Knudsen's work and research take place in a completely different contextual setting (with specific actors and their particular subjective experiences) than my own, his ideas do in some respects make sense in relation to street children in Buenos Aires. The main issues of comparison include the effects an alteration in life circumstances has on a person, feeling a lack of control over the future, as well as being in a position of subordination (posing specific reactions) in relation to another group of persons attempting to help them (who in some ways have control over the 'subordinate' groups' futures). Both street children and refugees find themselves in new surroundings where completely new and unfamiliar expectations were pressed upon them; expectations that with their acquired knowledge they could not fulfil (Knudsen 2005:87).

"We want to compete with the street"

Countries with a high percentage of street children are typically those facing serious economic challenges, as well as containing highly stratified and polarized populations. Poverty is a key word in relation to the street child phenomenon; although not the sole reason for the existence of street children, it is an important partaking cause (Rizzini and Lusk 1995), it is partly a reason for why the numbers keeps growing, and as will be shown, a contributing factor to the lack of success in assisting this population. Argentina is a country of wealth, but also of extreme poverty. The rise in the numbers of street children in the 1980s and 90s alerted the government and resulted in the establishment of several institutions attempting to assist this

⁷² http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/orexxfugee?view=uk Accessed 10.06.08.

population (CAINA being one of these). In my view, the government has attempted to form a good foundation for trying to deal with this problem as they try to reach the children from different angles. Some of these institutions are out on the streets (such as the EM), whereas others are providing services the children themselves want and are for this reason places the children actively seek out themselves (such as Ciber and CAINA). In addition, the different institutions have the possibility to be in contact with each other to exchange information.⁷³ Most importantly however, the government realizes that they must attempt to reach the children on their own terms. The quote “*We want to compete with the street*”⁷⁴ reflects the recognition that street children are active subjects and that the children must view the governmental programs as a better alternative than street life, and choose to participate in them. Unfortunately, however, there seems to be a gap between (governmental) theory and practice.

Some of the main problems for the coordinators in their work are that there are not enough resources; i.e. not enough money and not enough homes.⁷⁵ Some years ago, the children could visit and consider different homes, meet the people working there and the children living there, before deciding to stay.⁷⁶ The children do not have this option anymore; if they are lucky enough to find an available place, they have to accept it (the alternative would be no home at all). An even worse consequence of this lack of homes is that when children who want out of street life and who ask for assistance to find a home (especially boys around 15-18 years),⁷⁷ are told by coordinators to be patient and wait until there is an opening. Their main aim is to provide the children with an alternative to street life, and if the child finally wants out and is willing to give a place a chance, they have to let him/her down. This is hard to deal with for the staff, as the whole point of their endeavours seems lost. Another point relates to the frequency of trade union disagreements. Several times during my stay at CAINA there were strikes, and consequently the children met closed doors. In addition, the day centre was closed

⁷³ Information exchange did happen at times, but most of the time during my fieldwork, trade union disagreements (within institutions and between them) put a damper on this type of cooperation.

⁷⁴ ‘*Queremos competir con la calle*’ (Phrase from the Buenos Aires governmental web pages, under the section for the General Directorate of Childhood and Adolescence, and their particular work with street children). http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/des_social/ninez_adolescencia/chicoscalle/?menu_id=19454. Accessed 21.01.08.

⁷⁵ During the latest years (at least) two homes for street children were closed down. One was bad-functioning and ‘old’ and the other went through a fire (in which two children died). Despite the need for available homes, however, new ones have not been established.

⁷⁶ CAINA-produced documentary from 2005 (as well as information from CAINA staff).

⁷⁷ Boys between the ages 18-21 are in a specifically difficult position, as they are not considered children or adults. Homes for children are only accessible for children under the age of 18, and you have to be 21 to be permitted entrance in a home for adults. There are very few offers available to this group.

on weekends and holidays. This was, however, a strategic choice made by the staff; they felt that the centre not being open at all times would prevent a sense of dependence. When CAINA was not an option, the staff hoped that the children would go home to their families. In other words, both due to circumstantial incidents and strategic choices, CAINA did not provide a 100% stable offer to the children.

The CAINA staff is dedicated to their work. According to individual staff members, they differ from other altruistic institutions in the capital in that they see their work as exactly that; work (in contrast to a calling). They have a personal interest in what they do, an idealistic motivation, but they stress a professional approach and the necessity of separating work from leisure (in order to keep it going). The wages the coordinators receive are low,⁷⁸ and many of the coordinators at CAINA have two jobs in order to sustain what they felt was a decent life. Working at the day centre is tiring, both mentally and physically; having two jobs doubles the constraints. Furthermore, the day centre is a place of constant movement and the coordinators face many challenges on an everyday basis. In addition, the psychological impact of working with street children can be severe. The children live tough lives and are constantly at risk on the streets, and the coordinators must relate to this and to the possibility of losing children in the process.⁷⁹ These incidents make the work even harder. The coordinators would normally work 3-5 years at the day centre, and very few stayed longer than that.⁸⁰ When leaving CAINA, however, most kept working with the same topic (either administratively with street children or doing other child-related work on welfare or education).

Different groups – different (coping) strategies

Both street children and the coordinators have knowledge of each others ways of living (to a larger or lesser degree). However, in many respects, their lived realities and ways of viewing and experiencing the world are different due to their specific backgrounds and experiences. In order to sketch out the differences existing between the street children and the coordinators, Bourdieu's theories on social fields and habitus again prove useful. My aim with this chapter

⁷⁸ A worker at CAINA earned around 1000 pesos a month (at the time, about 1700 NOK), depending on workload and seniority. In contrast, the workers at an orphanage I also volunteered at earned 400 a month.

⁷⁹ A coordinator at CAINA told me that three out of four boys he had tied particularly close bonds with during his time at CAINA (4 years), had passed away on the streets. One of these boys had fallen asleep on a train rail and had been run over by the train, the other had killed himself while he was staying in a home, and the third had been killed by another boy on the streets.

⁸⁰ Only one of the coordinators had stayed at CAINA for more than five years (whereas some of the people working in maintenance had been working at the day centre since the opening in 1991).

is to provide an understanding of the various factors affecting assistance, and the distinctiveness and difference between these two groups are part of this understanding.

According to Bourdieu (1985:723-724), “the social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions) constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active within the social universe in question, i.e., capable of conferring strength, power within that universe, on their holder.” The agent’s (or group of agents’) position in the larger social space is defined by her/his position in the different social fields, and furthermore, an agent’s position in a social field is determined by the overall *volume* of the capital s/he possesses, as well as the *composition* of her/his capital (Bourdieu 1985:724). The different forms of capital (economic or material, cultural, social and symbolic) are, as mentioned, what the agents within each social field fight for. However, the struggles are only relevant within each social field; what is at stake in one field is not necessarily the same in another. Then again, some forms of capital are relevant in various social fields and may be legitimate and wanted capital within the larger social space. Thus, these struggles, as well as various agents accumulating and possessing various degrees of capital, leads to a hierarchy of social fields within the social space, as well as a hierarchical relation between the agents within each social field.

If one is to see e.g. the population of Buenos Aires as a social space in which several social fields can be found, one can say that the coordinators at CAINA, in terms of their volume and composition of capital, are situated in a social field of more power than street children. The coordinators come from the middle class; they all have a higher education and a good job (CAINA is considered a prestigious workplace in relation to work with street children); they possess cultural capital which is legitimate in the larger society. Most of the coordinators, although having two jobs and going through their own struggles, live a fairly decent life (at least compared to street children). The coordinators have accumulated corporal knowledge of childhood through their own upbringing, as well as academic knowledge of childhood through their higher education. All the coordinators had academic backgrounds from sociology, psychology, law or education, and they all had a firm knowledge of the CRC and the legal aspects of child welfare. They have a clear idea of what they wish for the children attending CAINA, and what childhood should be like for every child. However, without underestimating the coordinators work and knowledge, I wish to point out that they lack shared experience and embodied knowledge of street children’s lives. The coordinators *have*

set foot in precarious areas and they *have* seen misery, but they have never lived in a shantytown, nor been street children or lived on the streets as adults (to my knowledge). On the other hand, however, the coordinators can offer the children something of importance. CAINA staffs' academic backgrounds provide the coordinators with the language and codes (e.g. the cultural capital of the juridical field) needed in order to interact with, and manoeuvre within, the bureaucratic field. They have the ability and possibility to give the children a voice in social fields the children have no access to; in particular to social fields where power (in terms of access to legal papers, health assistance, and entrance to homes) is executed. One example is Cristian (chapter one) who obtained an audience with the judge, with the help of CAINA staff. Had CAINA staff not opened these doors for him, Cristian would perhaps still be living on the streets.

Street children, on their side, have a less fortunate starting point than the better-off *porteño*⁸¹ children, in terms of accumulating cultural (economic or symbolic) capital which is seen as legitimate in the larger society (social space). Brought up in areas where resources are few and hardships are many, and where the entire population are on the bottom of the hierarchical power division in society; they manoeuvre within a social field with limited possibility of elevated status. The children lack a stable network, few of the children have finished primary school, they come from homes of scarce resources and several of the children have been maltreated verbally, corporally or sexually. When they turn to the streets, they do not experience a move of upward mobility. The children are further marginalized in the street field.

CAINA is the institution where coordinators and street children meet and the two groups are there for different reasons. Simply put; one group is there to help, and the other to 'be helped.' The reason behind the existence of this institution is clear to both coordinators and street children. Consequently, if both sides are aware of the premises the encounter is based on, why does this encounter not lead to more children leaving the street? Do the children merely take advantage of the day centre and use it for what it is worth? Can this, in any case, be considered negative, or only understandable? I will return to these questions further down. First, however, in order to illustrate the mechanisms and strategies that take place in the direct encounter between street children and the coordinators, the following section will make use of

⁸¹ The population of Buenos Aires are called *porteños*.

Knudsen's (1991, 1995) theories and empirical data from his fieldwork with Vietnamese refugees. The comparison relates to the ways that street children and refugees escape an unwanted life situation, their strategies for survival and coping in these new circumstances, and the effect these strategies may have in the encounter with relief workers attempting to help them. I begin with an explanation on the reason behind this comparison.

According to Daniel and Knudsen, "the event or set of events that triggers a person's decision to become a refugee is the radical disjunction between this person's familiar *way-of-being* in the world and a new reality of the socio-political circumstances that not only threatens that way-of-being but also forces one to *see* the world differently" (1995:1, orig. emphasis). For refugees, these socio-political circumstances are war and unbearable conditions which they must flee from. For street children, the decision to leave home is generally a result of long-term abusive conditions, but it often takes abrupt incidences (such as the death of a family member or domestic fights) to trigger the child's decision to turn to the streets. They too flee, as do refugees, from unbearable life circumstances. This escape from an unwanted life situation leads to an alteration in life-ways, in which the protagonists use different coping strategies in order to deal with new challenges; strategies such as silence, withdrawal and mistrust.

The need to control your life and your story, knowing that you have little control over the future and trying all you can to make it work to your benefit; these are factors that bear resemblance for both street children and refugees. Although what is at stake for these two groups are very different issues, both groups make use of similar coping mechanisms in order to deal with hardships. Both coordinators and relief workers need street children and refugees to open up and share information in order to help them. Similarly, both street children and refugees might attempt to hold back information. For the refugees, letting out wrong information could mean destroying your chances for entrance into a third country, and thus your entire future (Knudsen 2005:20). In addition, culturally loaded ideas concerning the sharing of personal information, and in particular personal problems, collides with the expectations and demands from the relief workers. In Vietnam, information of this sort should preferably be kept within the family or be shared with close friends (or kept within the person him/herself); it should not be shared with a stranger (and certainly not with a *paid* stranger). Another issue of importance, however, is how silence can be seen as a language of pain, especially pain of an existential character (Knudsen 2005:161). Silence might be preferable

because some things are just too hard to put into words or because one has been struggling to put these memories behind. Furthermore, perhaps “one distrust the capacity of language to express the feelings of pain and the painful” or that “one doubts another’s capacity to understand” (Knudsen 2005:161).

Knudsen stresses that words become less important when the professional and the refugee share similar experiences, but that also in these situations trust must be established before information exchange can take place (2005:162). As mentioned above, street children and coordinators do not share similar experiences to the extent that the coordinators have lived on the street, either as children or adults. Issues of trust and silence are therefore of importance in this context as well. The coordinators need the children to open up in order to help them, something that might diverge with the children’s strategies of coping. As mentioned in chapter five, street children’s backgrounds are filled with painful memories; abuse and maltreatment are words characterizing their upbringing in the shantytowns. The children escaped from this life and many do not want to go back; therefore, they might hold back information so that the coordinators would not know their identities. Some of the children were scared they would be sent back home or that a process of return would be initiated. Again, not sharing information from their pasts (in detail, at least) was perhaps done because these topics are too hard to talk about; silence might feel better than sharing. Furthermore, the children might think that people would not understand what they have gone through, or perhaps the children were ashamed (e.g. in cases of sexual abuse) or think that people would not be able to deal with these stories. Cristian (18) (see chapter one) for example, never spoke in detail of hardships, his past or his dreams for the future.

Cristian arrives in front of the opening to the kitchen. He leans his arms in the opening and we greet each other. I ask him how he is, and he tells me he is not doing so well. I ask why, and he mumbles, telling me that the police beat him. He does not want to speak in detail about it. He does not want to explain to me why, or what had happened, but when I ask him if he did anything beforehand, he says no. He just stands there looking at me, wanting to communicate, but without saying anything. I tell him that I think it is sad and wrong that the police just start beating children when they haven’t done anything. Cristian’s eyes become teary; he tells me he got something in his eye, and leaves the opening.

Similarly, Facundo (16) never speaks of the troubles in his life. Facundo and I used to spend a good deal of time together the days he came to the day centre. Facundo enjoyed doing puzzles, and we often did that together. Facundo often had problems finding matching pieces, so I would place often place the pieces in strategic places on the table, so that he would find them when he needed them. Despite the amount of time Facundo and I spent together, I do not

know much about him. He was not very talkative, and we often used to do the puzzles in silence. Despite this silence, Facundo enjoyed these moments, and every time he came to the day centre, he would ask me to come play games or do puzzles with him. When I asked him questions, or attempted on small-talking with him, he would answer politely, but always in short sentences and never in detail, especially not concerning topics such as his past, his dreams or hopes or his hardships on the street.

Facundo and I are doing puzzles. Somehow, we begin talking about girlfriends, and Facundo tells me he wants one. Facundo is pessimistic about the possibility of getting a girlfriend; he thinks that he is doomed and that he will never have one. I try to encourage him a little and tell him that he has all the time in the world; he is still young. He tells me it is his birthday shortly and that he is turning 16. He does not see that age as very young. He presents it as if having a girlfriend is the only thing he needs, but that it is impossible for him, as if the world is working against him. I ask him what he wants to do for his birthday, and he says that he won't do anything, because he has no money. I tell him that there are perhaps things he can do without needing money, like going to the ecological park? He asks me if he should go alone to that place - on his birthday? He needs to bring a girlfriend there, he says. I suggest taking his friends, and perhaps his dream girl will stand there, in the park, waiting for him? He smiles a little, but says nothing. I ask him if he has any other wishes, apart from a girlfriend? He waits a little before answering, and looks out into the air for a while. He says 'I have a lot of wishes...' The sentence disappears in the air; he does not want to talk anymore about that.

These strategies (of silence) hinder the 'purpose' of the encounter; street children's coping strategies works against the coordinators need for the children to open up and share information. Knudsen (1991, 1995) found that the reason for the problematic relationship between the Vietnamese refugees (in detention centres) and the relief workers (employed there) was the result of diverging strategies, such as these, used by both parties. Both groups based their strategies on expected responses and misguided assumptions, and the encounter between the 'therapeutic strategies' of relief workers and the 'coping strategies' of refugees turned out to be a mismatch (2005:87-88). Both groups contained their own ideas of how interaction should be executed and of what kind of people the other group were, based on an image of 'the other' as a uniform group. However, an additional factor was the many roles relief workers had, something that confused the refugees as to how they should relate to this group of people (Knudsen 1991). For the refugees, the 'helpers' were also the 'controllers,' something that complicated the possibility of cooperation. The groups ended up working against each other, due to lack of understanding of each others backgrounds and strategies. At CAINA, a similar mismatch of strategies takes place. In the same manner as relief personnel in refugee camps, the coordinators work (and are perceived by the children) both as helpers and controllers. The children sometimes expressed negative feelings towards the coordinators when they felt they were acting like controllers. The children disliked situations when people

acted as if they were ‘above’ or ‘better than’ them, and the children would react to these incidents by calling the coordinator a ‘police officer.’⁸² This particularly happened when a tried to create order when things got out of hand or when the children felt they received unjust treatment. The negative relationship the children have to the police is also reflected in the general feeling towards this profession in the shantytowns.⁸³ Two of Auyero’s informants, shantytown dwellers, had the following to say about the police: “You can’t trust the police” and “The [drug] dealers ... the police ... same thing” (2000:106). The children saw the police as corrupt (as do the shantytown dwellers) who are merely ‘out to get them.’ According to CAINA staff, this notion is perhaps not far from the truth. According to some of the coordinators, the police might maltreat the children merely due to their appearance (looking drugged, dirty or simply dark-skinned).⁸⁴

The life-worlds of street children (in relation to these refugees) are not to the same degree controlled by outsiders. Street children are not placed in detention centres or camps, unless they have been caught or accused of something by the police, in which they (by force) are placed in institutions, jails or youth centres. These children rather spend most of their time moving around in the urban landscape of Buenos Aires and are not under constant control by their surroundings, in the same way as refugees in detention camps. There are restrictions though, but of a different form. Street children are under a constant exposure to dangers on the streets, and they experience exclusion and stigmatization on a daily basis. However, the children know that an eventual escape from street life (if they want access to a home) would depend on the help of others (or at least certainly facilitate the transition). In that sense, their potential futures are in the hands of strangers, and controlled by another group of people.

CAINA staff has years of experience in working with this population and they have a clear understanding of the children; how to reach out and communicate with them, and in what ways they differ from them. CAINA staff emphasise the individuality of the children, and try to find the best possible way of helping each particular child. Despite this effort and knowledge, however, the coordinators’ efforts do not always pay off. The mismatch of

⁸² The children had tense feelings towards the police, even if this was not a frequent topic of conversation. In fact, one of the volunteers I worked with told me that he had never heard the children complain about the police. I did, however, on several occasions hear stories about the police, and was given ‘evidence’ of their treatment in the form of beating marks on some of the children’s backs. See chapter three for an example of when I was called a police officer.

⁸³ Some of the coordinators also expressed their distrust in the police, characterizing their presence as a ‘force of repression,’ in contrast to protecting their inhabitants.

⁸⁴ The coordinators called this ‘portación de cara’ (lit. carry, here: take away/remove due to face/look).

strategies is a contributing factor to the difficulties of helping street children out of street life. The following section will discuss the institutional challenges in the encounter, emphasising on the one side what CAINA wishes to be and to do for the children, and on the other, how this can be perceived by the children.

CAINA - purpose and consequence

The aim of CAINA is to (re)integrate street children with their families or suburbs, and when this is not an option, into homes. Individual staff members expressed to me, on several occasions, that their aim was not 'damage reduction'; they did not want to make street life easier for the children. However, the day centre might have this effect. CAINA is seen, by the children, as a good place to be. It provides things the children need and want (in addition to being a possibility for them to leave street life), something that is illustrated by the high number of children who come there each year (1051 children in 2006).⁸⁵ At the same time, CAINA is one out of *several* places the children spend their time.⁸⁶ Bjerkan (2003:4-5) argues that institutions for street children in Cartagena (Colombia) as places the children would 'charge their batteries.' These institutions were used temporarily for relaxation and for getting a break from street life. I believe that the institutions (homes) in Buenos Aires are more than 'battery chargers,' without ruling out the possibility that some children used them as such. I heard children speak more frequently of shelters (*paradores*) as places they would use for this purpose. CAINA might, however, be one of these places the children would go to in order to gain energy (both practical and emotional).

A topic of frequent conversation and concern at CAINA was when the children brought their younger siblings to the day centre (children followed their siblings to the street), or when children living in areas nearby started coming to the day centre (children who lived at home with their families and who skipped school to come and play). The danger was that this could lead not only to an increase in the number of street children, but also to a higher percentage of younger children on the streets. Realizing that the longer the children are on the streets, the harder it is to help them out of the street situation, the staff paid extra attention to these children and tried to help them get in contact with their parents or other people in their

⁸⁵ CAINA statistics. January-October 2006.

⁸⁶ Ricardo Lucchini (1996) has written about the plurality of locations street children alternate between (family, school, closed institutions, assistance programs, street etc.) and how this (not solely the street as a location) characterize street children's lives.

families, as early as possible. As the following example shows, however, the efforts of the coordinators are not always enough.

The two young sisters, Eloisa (7) and Mirna (9), mentioned in chapter three, are a difficult pair of girls to assist for the coordinators. Eloisa and Mirna has two older sisters with street experience (one at 16 who left home two years ago due to a pregnancy who now lives in a home, and the other at 12 who has live on the street for a little under a year) and a brother who partly works as a cartonero and partly just stays on the streets. The two sisters took the train by themselves from the province. They were extremely lucky to find their sister in the huge capital. The CAINA staff did not let the children inside the day centre at first, as they were hoping that the kids would go back home if they did not allow them there. However, through attempting to create a bond between the girls and their mother, they were let in now and then. Sometimes the girls were very tired at CAINA, and when asked why, they would say that they had been very drunk the nights before. CAINA staff had been in contact with the mother of the girls, asking her to come in to town so that they could talk with her (and she with her daughters), but she could not come. Some days later, two of the coordinators went home with all three girls, but the next day Mirna and her older sister had left for the streets again. They were going out to buy something for their parents, but never came home again. Two days later, all three of them came to CAINA. When they came, some coordinators took the girls to a park nearby, bringing some food, to talk to them. Both girls told them that they have lost the possibility to continue their schooling this year, since they have been away from school in three months. Eloisa and Mirna say that they do not want to be home, they want to be with their older sister on the streets instead. The girls have not said anything about abuse in the home, but they like that they can get money on the streets. The coordinators think that boredom at home (to some degree) and poverty could be the reasons for why the girls do not want to stay at home. The coordinators who went with the girls to their home say that there might be going on things there, even though they did not see it. During the family visit, the parents had been annoyed and said 'they will probably end up like their older sisters.' It is a difficult case. CAINA staff talked about how they could perhaps provide a connection between the girls and their parents, so that they do not lose contact with them completely. They felt it was better to have some contact, than that everything is about the street.

The coordinators are well aware of the asymmetrical power relation between themselves and the children. CAINA staff both underplays and overplays this gap. On the one side, they attempt to create an egalitarian atmosphere within the four walls of CAINA, placing focus on the relationship with the children being one of equals, of respect, and of mutual interaction. They try to create an atmosphere where words can flow easily; an area of openness, where the distance between the adults and the children is as little as possible. Furthermore, they stress the necessity of not having too many adults around, but not too few either.⁸⁷ On the other side, the staff strives to present themselves as good adult role models, and at the same time, let the children know that they can speak on behalf of they children if they need it. The uneven relationship is thus underlined in order to give the children self esteem and a possibility to open up and guide their future in the direction they want, with the help of CAINA staff. At the same time, this gap is underplayed in order to establish an open atmosphere for interaction and well-being.

⁸⁷ There would never be more than three volunteers at the same time at CAINA.

In order for the day centre to function to its fullest potential, there are some rules that the children need to follow; no drugs, no fighting and have respect for one another. At a day centre such as CAINA, where between 40 and 50 children come on a daily basis, some order is required. The coordinators are the ones who must ensure that the children follow these rules, and who must react and sanction the children, if they break them. Incidents of rule-breaking at CAINA happened frequently. The children were well aware of the rules and potential consequences of rule-breaking, but they often tested the limits of these rules (the same way that the children knew that criminal activity was morally wrong, but did them anyway, as shown in chapter four). More often these incidents were harmless (like smoking while sitting at the tables), whereas other times they were of a more serious character (like smoking marihuana in the bathrooms, stealing items or hurting somebody).⁸⁸ If caught, the children might lose access to the day centre for a period of time, depending on the seriousness of the act. These rules of behaviour not only exist in order to make the day centre function properly; they also work to show the children alternative ways of behaviour and communication.⁸⁹

The children coming to CAINA compose a marginalized group in the Argentinean society. Not all public or private places are open to them, and CAINA is therefore thought to be an area entitled for them in particular. However, a topic of discussion among the coordinators was that sometimes they felt they were excluding the ones they wanted to include. Many 'doors are locked' for these children in society and since CAINA is to be a place particularly for street children, closing the door on the children sent out the wrong message. In addition, the door to CAINA was closed at all hours, and a coordinator had to come and open it for the children to enter. The door became an area of conflict; a border marking the inside from the outside (and consequently, the included from the excluded). However, in order for the day centre to be a functioning place, the coordinators were forced to exclude particular children at particular times.

Ramon (12) had been sent out of CAINA due to fighting with a boy inside, and was outside the door, banging on it in fury, trying to get in. There was garbage everywhere in his proximity; he had found a bag of garbage and thrown it around on the pavement. He had also broken a glass bottle, and he was standing with the remains of it in his hands. He screamed that he wanted to beat up and kill the boy who was still inside, demanding the coordinator to open up the door. The situation was tense and he was trembling with anger. One of the coordinators and I came back to CAINA while he was standing there, banging. We had accompanied Pilar (15) to the health centre for a pregnancy test. The coordinator tried to calm him down by talking to him, using a calm

⁸⁸ During my stay a camera, some money, some clothes and 'juggling balls' were stolen from CAINA there were also incidents when the children brought illegal artefacts to the day centre, such as arms (knife and a gun).

⁸⁹ CAINA documentary from 2005.

and soft voice, but this did not seem to work. Pilar then told him to 'quit it', 'calm down', and 'put the bottle away', in a direct and somewhat condescending way. I thought to myself that this would probably be the first time I would get hurt, while doing fieldwork. Any minute now, he would explode, and start waving his arms uncontrollably, letting his anger out on us. The situation did, however, end smoothly. The door was opened, and we went inside, and another coordinator went outside to speak with Ramon.

The coordinators felt that they had to set an example to the children, making them realize that disrespecting rules and 'bad' behaviour did not go by unnoticed, and that there would be consequences for their actions. Leaving these children outside the door, and consequently excluding them from the day centre (in addition to explaining the children why they did this), was one way to do this. The door could also have another function, however, namely that of providing a sense of security for those inside.⁹⁰

Just before Christmas, a boy who hadn't been at the day centre that much, came to CAINA. He had run away from his family, and had no intention of going back home. His family had been trying to find him, and his sister had shown up at CAINA, trying to get hold of him. She had been standing outside the doors of CAINA the entire day, but he refused to see her. The CAINA staff had not let her in, due to the boy's reluctance to see her. Out of respect to him they left her out of the premises, but they still tried to encourage him to speak with her, but with no luck. After lunch, when the children left CAINA, the boy was desperate. He did not want to leave, since his sister was standing on the outside of the door, so he ran upstairs. The door to the rooftop terrace, which was normally closed, was open. He ran out the door and over the roofs of the nearby buildings. Where the block stopped, due to a crossing street, he jumped. There were a lot of old trees close to the street on the pavement, and he jumped on them, trying to ease the fall. The branches broke and the boy fell to the ground, with serious injuries. His sister was scared, and came into CAINA to call her mother, and explain what had happened, crying. The boy was in hospital for a long time.

Running a day centre for street children poses several challenges, but despite setbacks (in terms of children returning to the streets) and difficult episodes on an every day basis, the coordinators know that the job they are doing is important. Even though the children do not come every day, the day centre is an important part of their lives. Furthermore, even though the day centre might unintentionally result in 'damage reduction,' CAINA is not the reason why children initially come to, or return to the streets (after living in institutional homes), or why they hesitate on staying in homes to begin with. As will be shown in the following section, there is an additional reason behind the challenges in assisting street children. Keeping in mind the processes of adaptation the children go through when entering street life (chapter four and five), I will argue that there is another logic behind the long lasting and difficult process of leaving street life; namely, that what one is asking from these children is yet another round of adaptation.

⁹⁰ Another security measure was having police officers by the door. Some years ago, a group of older boys (15-20 years old), had broke into CAINA, carrying knives. These boys had scared the children and staff and beaten up several staff members. The boys had been coming to CAINA, but were expelled from the premises after this incident.

Adaptation revised

If one considers both the shantytowns, the street and the homes (the children enter after living on the streets) as three different social fields where different forms of capital are required in order to master the expectations to behaviour, it is easier to understand the challenges that appear for the children when leaving street life (especially those who have several years of street experience). Since habitus needs time to adapt and change, and since different social fields require and shape different types of habitus, the need to give children several chances and the need to see these movements between fields as a time-consuming process, is made apparent. The coordinators at CAINA have realized, through experience, the necessity of giving the children time, and of making sure the child really wants out of street life, before they try to help them.

An aspect we must return to is the *freedom* of street life. Even though dangers and difficulties appeared on the street, the children were in charge of their own lives; they decided when to get up in the morning, what to do during the day, if they wanted to sniff glue etc. This freedom would be reduced when the child entered a home, and often resulted in that children who were fortunate to get entrance to a home would leave after some time. Luana (16), for example, left the first home she was staying at because she was not allowed privacy or to have as much contact with her boyfriend as she wanted to. The second home she stayed it gave her the freedom she had lacked in the first home; it was more flexible and also provided her with some leisure activities which she enjoyed partaking in. However, she also left this home, and started sleeping rough on the streets again. Most of the children attending CAINA had lived in a couple of homes. Although some homes were seen as better than others, many children ended up back on the streets after some time, even though they liked the place they were staying in. Like CAINA, homes for street children have rules for behaviour that the children must follow. After adapting to street life, being expected to play by other rules was perhaps too big a challenge. The children might feel trapped in these places, since the freedom they so highly valued was lost. Like a member of CAINA staff told me, when explaining why hardly any of the children coming to CAINA lives in homes; “If you stay there, you *stay* there.” Another trait of these homes is that there is not room for the type of empowerment the children might feel in the street setting (as explained in chapter four).

Street capital thus turns out to be both a strength and a weakness for the children; it gives them knowledge in the street setting, but set them back in other settings (especially in

adapting to the wider society's rules). For comparative purposes we will return to the Vietnamese refugees (Knudsen 2005). Both street children (either the initial period of street life *or* when entering a home after staying some time on the street) and the Vietnamese refugees (after obtaining resettlement in Norway, staying in exile) realize that their backgrounds and acquired skills are not of value in the new life situation they find themselves in. Said in other words; the new social setting (social field) and their acquired knowledge and practical sense of code and conduct (*habitus*) is not 'in harmony,' but out of sync. The Vietnamese refugees found that their social background, and in particular the importance of status in the Vietnamese hierarchal class/caste system, was not acknowledged at all in the new setting. The refugees were placed together as one big group and given a common identity with no recognition of their previous different statuses (needless to say this was seen as a lot more negative for the ones with a previous high status than the ones with a lower one). A person with less prestige in Vietnam had less ambitious future plans, plus an 'automatic' upward social mobility when arriving in Norway (Knudsen 2005). Similarly, street children were, after (mental and practical) street life adaptation, expected to live by completely different rules and regulations. The skills they had gained on the streets were perhaps not recognized in this setting.

Seeing street life as a sort of limbo-state might be helpful in understanding the characteristics of street life. The children do not want to go home where they escaped from, do not want to go to a home (has tried it many times before, and even if they wanted to go, there might not be any available places); and so, the street might be perceived as the only option, even when they do not really want to stay there either.

Alejandro (9) had not been on the street as long as most of the children I met at CAINA, but he had gone through a strong and visible transformation. He had been going in and out of homes, and had perhaps lost belief in finding a place. He had been let down by the system, twice, and would perhaps have greater problems trusting people who promised better conditions for him, in the future. Since he did not come to CAINA that frequently anymore and since he stayed alone on the streets, it was difficult for CAINA staff to help him.

Esteban (15) and Santiago (17) both have years of street experience, and belong to hard-core groups of street children (especially Esteban). The older these boys get, the harder it is for them to escape street life, because the options they have decrease as they enter adulthood (the ages between 18-21 is especially difficult as they are not considered children or adults). These boys have been part of the same *ranchada* for years, and do not seem to present any strong desire to leave the street; perhaps because they do not see it as an option to them.

As mentioned, Juan (16) in a way wants to go home to his family. However, Juan knows that despite his mother's expressed wishes to have him home, that the minute he comes home, she would want him to leave. As a second choice, Juan wants to live in a home, but CAINA staff has problems finding a place for him. Juan, due to various illnesses should go to an institution where he can receive continuous observation, but he does not want this. When he was interned in hospital, he used every chance he had to escape. Juan is, in a way, stuck on the streets.

Romina (17) and Luana (16) both have a history of sexual abuse in the home. Both are pregnant, and both want to change their lives. For Luana, the prospects are good; she and her boyfriend are both determined to start a new life off the street, and they now have the financial aid to do it. Romina has greater difficulties; her boyfriend is in jail and, according to CAINA staff, she is perhaps the only person that can help him change his life course.

Conclusion

My aim with this chapter is to say that there is logic behind why it can be challenging to assist street children. This logic is based on a combination of the children's backgrounds, their adaptation to street life, expectations for further adaptation and the encounter between street children and the coordinators. There are thus a multitude of factors influencing the issue of helping street children out of street life.

Keeping in mind the two previous chapters, I aimed to argue that street children are active agents, leaving their homes, and adapting to street life. The childhood the children leave behind is *not* the ideal nuclear family (chapter one) where mom and dad work, and the children go to school and play in the afternoon. The children tell of brutal pasts, and even though street life does not give the children a higher degree of safety or a less brutal everyday life, they still see some aspects of street life as positive. The attractive sides of street life, like empowerment, access to money, independence and (brutal) freedom, make it more difficult for the children to settle down in homes. It would therefore be naive to expect the children to thankfully receive assistance and adapt easily to new frames. However, many children want out of street life, even if they have problems in adapting to new homes, and even if they have escaped from several of these institutions in the past. It is essential to understand that getting in to and out of the street situation is a time consuming process, not something that happens overnight. Many children move back and forth, between the home and the street, both when entering and leaving street life (if they go back home).

Chapter 7 Concluding remarks

The introductory examples of Alejandro and Cristian aimed to illustrate a number of issues that this thesis has gradually touched upon. They show that street children's lives are particular and complex, and that their way in to and out of street life are not easy transitions; both external and 'internal' factors complicate the process. For example, children who want out of street life and try to do things right may find their efforts destroyed by external forces; such as in Cristian's case, when his only available option of homes was one he did *not* want to go to. Even though he really wanted out of street life and tried hard to do everything right, he was not given access to the life he wanted. After this incident, Cristian stopped coming to CAINA for a while. However, later on I was told by a coordinator that he changed his mind and went to the home outside the capital after all. The last I heard was that, two months later, Cristian was still there. In the case of Alejandro, misunderstandings and a badly functioning home (or, in fact, a home not adequate for children with street experience) led to his return to the streets, despite his wishes to leave that life. Two months later, nobody knew the whereabouts of Alejandro. As explained in chapter four and five, both Alejandro and Cristian (and the other children) learned how to make use of the streets to their own benefits. However, these benefits made out only a fraction of their experiences on the streets, and stigmatization and bad treatment made out an extensive part of their daily lives. Cristian preferred not talking in detail about these challenges, whereas Alejandro was clear on his discontent with street life from the beginning. In a short period of time, however, Alejandro had gone in and out of two homes, and experienced things that changed his appearance. He spoke briefly about being maltreated by other children on the streets and he stayed more by himself. As time passed, Alejandro stopped coming to the day centre frequently, and when he did, he was not as talkative and playful as in the beginning. I have (in chapter four) presented this transformation as a change in habitus.

The day centre play an important part in the lives for the children despite the fact the children do not come everyday. For a group of children who are marginal and excluded from many aspects of the Argentinean society, it is good for them to know that there are places available to them, as well as places that can help them out of the street situation if they want to. However, the children are not dependant on institutions such as CAINA, simply because they can not afford to be. On the one side, CAINA is only open during day time and it does not provide a 100% stable offer for the children. CAINA is furthermore only one out of several

places the children spend their time (albeit an important one). On the other side, the children have learned that they must be strong and help themselves survive and this may result in CAINA (involuntarily) functioning as ‘damage reduction.’

The coordinators had, as stressed earlier, a well thought through approach to their work. They stressed the necessity of listening to and helping each individual child on the child’s own premises, in the manner best suited in each case. Their aim was to help the child away from street life through ‘opening doors’ for them, but it had to be done in accordance to the individual child. Despite this aim of reintegration, I received some interesting replies when I asked two of the coordinators what they would have done if they were street children:

Before the *reunion* (daily meeting for the coordinators) one day, I ask two of the coordinators what they would have done if they were in the children’s shoes; if they were living on the streets. Would they want to go to a home? Both of them say it is a difficult question. One of the coordinators is a fairly new employee at the day centre, but she has years of experience working with street children. She has been working with the EM for some time, and has therefore met the children both on the streets as well as through various institutions. She is having a hard time answering my question, unsure as to what her reply should be. After thinking for a while, she says that she doesn’t know what she would have done. The other coordinator, with years of experience from CAINA, says that she would probably not have wanted to live in a home. She says that, of course, homes are different, just like the children are different. What suits one child might not suit another. But she would probably not have wanted to stay in a home.

After years of working with street children, these two coordinators know of all the horrors that can, and do, take place on the streets. Despite this, however, they would (hypothetically) probably choose street life over living in a home. Their answers illustrate an important point. Seeing that none of the coordinators have street life experience, they still have some form of understanding of the choices some of the children make, even if these choices go against what they work for; that is, reintegration.

Knudsen’s research on refugees (1991, 1995, 2005) illustrates factors that also play a part in the challenges of assisting street children. As with refugees and relief workers, both street children and coordinators bring forward their own ideas and strategies of coping with their realities, something that can result in a mismatch of strategies, and potentially, to problems of understanding and cooperation. If western ideas about children and childhood (what children want and need) forms mindset of people working with street children (also in a ‘non-western’ context due to the spread of the childhood ideal), it is be very difficult for street children to live up to this image, simply because they never knew it; they never had this ideal childhood.

Using Bourdieu's (2007) 'theory of practice,' I have aimed to argue what consequences this lack of common life experiences can have on the encounter between these two groups. Due to difference in backgrounds and experiences and being members of different social fields, street children and coordinators have different thoughts and ideas on (street) life; i.e. different habitus. Through seeing the street child phenomenon on an abstract level, I have further suggested that part of what complicates assistance is that the children engage in movements between social fields; from shantytowns to the street, to homes (or jail, or other institutions) and perhaps back again. I have argued that when the children enter new external surroundings (on the streets) they are consequently modifying and producing a street habitus. A further move to a home, especially if the child is not completely ready for it (and sometimes also when the child feels like s/he *is* ready), leads to an imbalance between the new social field and the child's (street) habitus.

The great majority of the children I encountered at CAINA chose to change their lives. The children chose to leave their parents, chose to come to CAINA, and chose to stay on the streets or to leave the street situation. CAINA staff realizes these issues; they take the children seriously and acknowledge that the children have to want to leave the street in order to initiate any process on their behalf. As shown, not all the children wanted out of street life. I have argued that this can happen when the children have tried several times to get out of street life with no success, and if they do not want to return to their family, they are stuck between bad options; street life can be seen as the only viable option. Further, as illustrated, despite street life brutality, some aspects of this life are attractive for the children.

Some might claim that I have given the children too much agency; that their street situation was not only up to them, or perhaps that their decision to leave home was not a real choice. I have no aim to present the children as the only actor in their lives. However, I have aimed to show how the children responded to their circumstances by choosing between the options present to them; staying home (receiving more maltreatment) or leaving for the streets. And later on; staying on the streets (receiving maltreatment, but experiencing a sense of freedom) or entering a home (receive food and 'safety,' but losing freedom and needing to commit to rules). What then, some might ask, about the children who follow other children (siblings and friends) to the street? For example Eloisa (7) and Mirna (9), who left for the streets to be with their older sisters? Was this act also a manifestation of agency? Eloisa and Mirna had several siblings on the streets, and the two girls did decide to take the train by themselves to the

capital of Buenos Aires to find them, without having any guarantee that they would meet their sisters there. However, in relation to the discussion on child agency, this is not the point. Focusing on child agency does not mean that any act or situation involving a child should be considered equal to that of an adult e.g. in terms of responsibilities. Neither does it imply that children no longer are “dependant or vulnerable in any sense” or for example, drawn a bit far, that children’s relationships with paedophiles are “equivalent and consensual” (Jenks 2004:6). As Jenks stresses, “the idea of child as social actor, the idea of child as self-determining and even the suggestion of childhood as a universal category are all analytical devices that have done and continue to do their work. These are not literal, descriptive constructs within some correspondence theory of truth; they are, rather, highly effective strategies for developing new ways of seeing the world – that is, the world in which childhood continues to become a meaningful part” (2004:6). Furthermore, focusing on child agency, in my view, portrays more accurately the children’s view of themselves and their own lives.

My last remarks are related to the front page illustration drawn by Raul (10). The image shows a smiling child (Raul himself one would guess) saying the following phrases through speech bubbles: “*Pibe*, I was born on the streets,”⁹¹ followed by another one saying “I don’t recommend it.” Child agency is peculiarly illustrated in this drawing, as the issue of choice is presented in a somewhat contradictory fashion. Raul does not ‘recommend’ anyone to be born on the streets, implicating that he himself tried it and that it was not a good choice. As we know, people can not choose where they want to be born. Raul could, however, choose to leave the life on the street, and when he drew this drawing he had left street life and lived in a home (Piedra Libre). As mentioned in chapter six, this is not always an option to street children. Choosing to stay in a home is one thing, getting access to one is another. The street child phenomenon, as this thesis has aimed to explain, is a complex one because these children are caught between bad options. In addition, the children are different; what suits one child, might not suit another (as expressed by the coordinator in the above mentioned example). Furthermore, as explained in the beginning of this chapter, even if the children want out of street life, external factors or their street habitus might hinder their desires to leave. Finally, the drawing illustrates in its own peculiar way and in a subtle manner, the hardships of street life.

⁹¹ See chapter one for the meaning of the word *pibe*.

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