

Children of the Streets: Socialization and Formation of the Self in Rapidly Urbanizing Contexts

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DESCRIBING FILIPINO socialization processes, Shimizu (1986) notes that Filipino children are "brought up in a many-peopled environment beyond the nuclear family with complicated dynamic relations and various parenting figures." He argues that within the bilateral kinship system the Filipino child is reared by many parenting figures and taken cared of for a long time. Filipino children then grow up with very little stress or feelings of frustration. Moreover, the child is informed early on of the need for acceptance by family and kin which "nips an aggressive attitude...and orients the child's development and character formation toward getting along and cooperating with others." Because of these features, Shimizu concludes that the socialization process of the child in the Philippines is extremely dependent. From this perspective, the child "assumes the world of adults little by little in accordance with his physical growth and gradually enters the adult world."

Although Shimizu was describing the socialization process in Central and Southern Luzon (Tagalogs), his charac-

terization reflects what others say of Philippine society in general. The literature on the socialization process is replete with similar accounts of growing up and becoming an adult (e.g., Arellano-Carandang, 1979; Domingo, 1977; Guthrie and Jacobs, 1976; Jocano, 1968; Manalang, 1974; Quisumbing, 1964). These accounts tend to portray growing into adulthood as a smooth banking process, where socially defined roles and norms are transmitted by parents or surrogates, and learned and internalized by the children. This portrayal also reinforces the image of the ideal, unchanging monolithic family and ignores variations in family forms across classes and through the life course. Underlying the view that socialization is a smooth process is the assumption of the primacy of the family as a cohesive social unit where the needs and perspectives of individual members/actors are downplayed. This view ignores the fact that socialization in day-to-day reality is a contested, negotiated process by the participants and downplays power as a critical dimension informing sets of social relations.

Furthermore, it seems to view the individual child and his/her family and extended relations as a self-sustaining unit, independent of changing contexts that they are part and parcel of. Moreover, it overlooks the fact that the family that shapes the self is, in turn, being transformed by broader sociopolitical and economic factors. Within this context, the self attempts to make sense of the various forces impinging on itself and makes choices. It is through these processes that identity of the self is crafted and developed.

More significantly, the conventional child-adult dualistic conceptions fail to recognize youth as a package of transition and ambiguities, straddling between child and adult attributes, capabilities, and responsibilities. Tension in social relations between adults and young people is rooted in these ambiguities. Underlying this tension is the element of power and control which adults assume as their prerogatives. The youth's social and cultural experiences/expressions are then relegated or labeled as deviations from the dominant adult perspective.

Using data and narratives on the lives of children in the streets of Metropolitan Cebu and Manila, this paper argues that instead of a smooth banking process, the socialization process is more appropriately viewed as entailing a series of negotiations between parents and children. These are further shaped and constrained by the larger contexts of neighborhood, peer relations, community and the larger society. This perspective subscribes to the transformative capacities of the members of the family unit, while sets of family relations are themselves being transformed by larger processes. Finally, this paper points to the need to broaden child-youth conceptualizations beyond the bi-

nary definitions and conceptions anchored on biosocial capacities and responsibilities. Based on the narratives and life stories of streetchildren, the paper attempts to show that the socialization of the city's poor children is much more complex than suggested by conventional socialization perspectives—this as a result of highly fluid and dynamic forces impinging on city environments and on streetchildren and their families.

The Cultural Construction of Childhood/Youth

A defining characteristic of childhood/youth is chronological age. UNICEF defines children as those aged 18 and below. The experience of people in these ages is further divided into three developmental stages: (1) early childhood (0-7 years old), (2) middle childhood (8-12 years old), and (3) late childhood or adolescence (13-17 years old).

Childhood thus is a generic category used to denote the experience of all children under 18 years while youth pertains to the experience in middle and late childhood.

Age is used as a defining characteristic since this is closely associated with the development of biophysical characteristics, and with the assumption of social roles and attributes.

Additionally, developments in the youth are closely identified with the enjoyment of certain rights and assumption of increasing responsibilities. For example, one has to be at least 18 years old to be able to vote in elections or to be eligible for employment (the latter being an important dimension or defining characteristic of adulthood).

The above definitions and interpretations of child/youth are constructed as opposed to that of the adult. Thus, youth and childhood are associated with dependency, innocence, vulnerability, and malleability. Able adults, on the other hand, engage in sustained economic activity and are seen as independent, responsible, capable, and knowledgeable of life and the world.

As mentioned earlier, the normative definitions and understanding of "youth" and "child" are rooted in this juxtaposition or binary dualism of adult and child/youth.

Data resources and methods. Most of the observations made in this paper are based on narratives or life stories of children (age 7-18) and their parents from Cebu City and Quezon City, Philippines, collected between January 1990 and March 1991 in connection with a larger 'streetchildren study done by the author for the Institute of Philippine Culture (Ateneo de Manila University) and the UNICEF-International Center for the Development of the Child.

Changing City Context

Constituting the family in city streets. It is Sunday, eight-thirty in the morning. Two carts (*kariton*) are parked side by side in front of the Tree-Top hardware store along Aurora Blvd., Quezon City. A thin, sickly puppy is tied to one of the carts. The mother, sitting by the cart, feeds a six-month-old child with juice from a seemingly unwashed bottle. The father, leaning against the store's fence nearby, puffs a cigarette. The couple's other two equally bedraggled children, ages two and three, cavort with the human and vehicular traffic along the highway with

the street island as their base. The family has just finished their breakfast of chocolate rice porridge (*chamorado*) and smoked fish (*tinapa*) which they bought from a nearby food stall (*carinderia*).

This is a typical weekend morning for a highly mobile scavenger family. The parents' faces speak of neither happiness nor discontent, while those of the children glow with excitement as they hang on to moving jeepneys and jump down at the next corner stop. They are like any other family spending the weekend as they wish. What makes them different from the other families is that they do it in a public space. They come to the same spot every Friday evening and leave Monday morning. They return to their shanty abode and working place at the dumpsite near Payatas and Commonwealth where they spend the rest of the week.

The above scene depicts a family attempting to construct a "normal family" life given the absence of a physical structure and privacy of a home. It struggles to live up to the prevailing notion that a normal family is composed of a father, who is the breadwinner; a mother, who attends to his needs and those of the children; and the children who are supposed to be well-mannered, clean, and protected from the dangers of urban life. Such protection of children is inscribed in the privacy of a home.

A very pervasive ideal, this image of a family is further reinforced in textbooks, media, and everyday discourse. When people call for the restoration of the traditional family, this image serves as the framework in assessing the normality and legitimacy of fam-

ily and child/youth experiences across classes and throughout the life course. But the actual situation of most streetchildren and their families in this study presents a totally different picture from the standard notion of normal families.

Nonetheless, the narratives of the lives of streetchildren show that the search and longing for a family life is very real among urban poor children. Many recall a time in their life when their families were still intact and happy. Such happiness was short-lived, however, disrupted by circumstances beyond their control—the loss of a father's/mother's job, a father drinking with his *barkada* or taking on a mistress, or the loss of a parent through separation, death, murder, or imprisonment. Even children who run away from their homes because of abuse or abandonment by their parents still express a longing for a reunion with their families. They continue to nurture the hope that when it occurs, their families would have changed so that all could start a "normal, happy" family once again.

Hence, despite severe socioeconomic difficulties caused by biosocial events (as deaths and illnesses) and economic factors (economic recessions and the loss of jobs), streetchildren and their kin attempt to construct a family life and exhibit a certain resiliency to adjust to their difficult circumstances and sustain their families. While the sets of relations among middle class families take place within a bounded space like a home, those among streetchildren and their families take place in a "constructed" private space within a public space. Privacy of the home shields the middle and upper class families from the public's interpretative incursions into their behavior. Separate bedrooms for couples allow a presentation of family unity to the chil-

dren and to the public. However, among urban poor families and especially children who practically spend most of their time on the streets, privacy is a rare commodity. They sleep, eat, and do their ablutions before the public eye. Nevertheless, among street families and their children, privacy is constructed through various ingenious mechanisms. In Cebu City, several burlap bags pieced together or a plastic mat held steady by several stones delineate the private space for a vendor family living in a park. In the inner slum neighborhoods where five children and the parents sleep, eat, and do chores in a room three meters by four meters, the father gives one peso to each child and tells them to play, so he could shut the door and the world's cares for a moment as he shares intimacies with his wife.

Crafting the Self in City Streets

The children and the youth of city streets zoom early into adult roles as a result of the calamities and misfortunes that befall their families and communities. They enter paid work—a main differentiating activity between adulthood and childhood—at very early ages. Several children in the study began working as early as five or six years old, especially those whose families are engaged in street-based economic activities as vending, hawking and scavenging. Ever since she could remember, Marites had always accompanied her mother in the latter's place of work. When they were still staying and working in the pier, picking up fallen grains and scraps, her mother would just tie her around an industrial post or a table leg. When they moved and stayed at the back of the Sto. Niño Church in Cebu, Marites began to help her mother sell candles, candies and cigarettes. For the most part, therefore,

streetchildren are recruited and socialized into their street careers by their parents, siblings and other relatives who are themselves hawkers, vendors, laborers or scavengers.

Parents and adults in general view the work of streetchildren in positive than in negative terms, arguing that the earnings of their children contribute much to the maintenance of their families. Children themselves, when asked why they work, invariably answer that they have to help support their families and that they are doing so in their own way.

The expectation that streetchildren should work to keep their families is very much a part of the definition of family roles in Filipino (and Asian) society. Work also has always been extolled as an activity that teaches discipline, endurance and skills—the necessary attributes for adult life. Hence, in the rural areas, children provide much of the unpaid labor on farms. But unlike the children who work in city streets, rural children have the protective mantle of a family and a face-to-face community that keeps children from harm and anti-social activity.

In the cities, the work of streetchildren has both a liberative as well as an exploitative aspect to it. The earnings of children provide them and their families some temporary but immediate relief from hunger and economic difficulties. Their earnings, too, give them a measure of power over their parents and siblings and access to certain goods and services which their parents would not have wanted them to have such as drugs, inhalants, and x-rated movies and video shows. A related case

is Ben who became the main scavenger and breadwinner of his family after his mother became chronically ill and deranged thus forcing his father to spend all his time caring for the mother. His mother's illness had made him shy and irritable with other kids and according to Merto, the scrap buyer in the neighborhood, Ben also started to sniff inhalants which sometimes put him in a trance. His father began to complain about his behavior. Resenting this, Ben says, "What does my family want from me? I give them half of my earnings. I am just trying this thing. It is really nothing. I just buy this for a few pesos but it gives me a feeling of lightness which I do not normally feel. I feel heavy and sad just thinking of my situation."

The other children's narratives also show that work in city streets expose children to high risks of accidents, brawls and muggings, not to mention exploitation by sex procurers, crime syndicates and other city characters.

Gender, Work and the City Environment

As with the larger Philippine society, streetchildren and their parents alike perceive boys to be different from girls in terms of the capacity of the former to endure heavier physical activities and the susceptibility of the latter to *disgrasya* (accident, disgrace). *Disgrasya* is a euphemism for losing one's virginity through rape or pregnancy. Thus, parents prefer boys to work in the streets and the girls to stay home, because the latter is vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. The boys can roam around without adult supervision even at night because they are not likely to lose anything. Girls, on the other hand, are

likely to lose a lot if allowed to wander around the city, beyond the "safe" confines of their home or neighborhood. Moreover, the reputation of a family is also at risk if it allows its young girls to roam the streets, especially after dark or during "ungodly hours."

The life-histories of street children and the profiles of their streets, neighborhoods, and communities show a pattern of male dominance in street-based careers. Several factors account for this pattern. First, gender socialization among Filipino families defines the domain of girls to the home—private, domestic spheres of social life. As shown in the case studies, girls are in the streets because their parents, brothers, or other relatives are also living or vending/hawking in the streets or in nearby places. Areas outside the domestic sphere are considered "unsafe" and are seen as vulnerable to all sorts of potential dangers. Boys, on the other hand, can claim the streets as their territories and can frolic and run around as they wish since they face much less danger than girls. This popular perception among parents, however, is not entirely borne out by the stories of boy-children, several of whom have experienced being brutalized by drug-pushers, bystanders, and the police.

The perception of gender risks and dangers is quite different among children who grow up in the streets with their families. The street and the corner where their shack is erected or their cart is parked have served as their home and have become relatively familiar and safe. Parents thus simply admonish children to stay away from vehicles and weird-looking strangers. Ellen, who frequents the streets of Carbon and Colon, works in a foodstall for an "auntie." She has acquired friends among the vendors and *cargadores*.

Street girls are not strictly by themselves, the mantle of chaperone/adult supervision still pervades their activities. Thus, the protectiveness that surrounds females is preserved to a certain extent among street girls.

In inner city streets, where there are clusters of houses/residences, a lot of girls can be seen playing or peddling candies, flowers, and street food. Here, the risks and threats to a girl are perceived to be less compared to those in main city streets, where strangers abound and no one is likely to know and protect the child. Inner city streets, neighborhoods, and communities offer some small comfort that the neighbors/families nearby might provide a protective mantle, albeit fragile, from drunks and mean strangers.

Pinagkakatuwaan in Tagalog or *gikalingawan* in Cebuano implies a group of bystanders playing pranks or having fun at the expense of a vulnerable passerby. Children often become victims of these mean, brutal pranks. In Cebu City, a child scavenger was circumcised for fun by drunks in a cornerstore. Garbage haulers destroyed the cart of two boy-scavengers and then bumped their heads together. Another girl-scavenger reported being accosted by drunks, who forced her to have intercourse with another boy-scavenger. Still another girl scrounging for scraps near a military camp was sexually harassed by an exhibitionist.

Noel and Pidong are scavengers who have also been victimized by older scavengers, bystanders, and garbage collectors. Older scavengers from other places would run away with their collected bottles and scraps; while bystanders would jeer and throw pebbles at their faces. One of them made Pidong slap

Noel and blamed it on the former. They urged them to fight but they just scampered away. Children without the company of adults are seen as vulnerable and defenseless. They fall prey not only to naughty pranks but to the mean and brutal ways of bystanders.

In brief, many risks and threats faced by streetchildren are related to their work, age and gender. Certain areas of the city, too, pose higher risks than others. Finally, risk increases when children pursue their activities alone.

Puberty and Sexuality in the Streets

It is probably upon reaching puberty that streetchildren become most aware of their need for privacy. Ellen, 13, woke up one day in the sidewalk with her skirt soaked in blood. "*Ah, dalaga ka na! Ug magduolan ka'g butakal, delikado na!*" (Ah, you are now a woman; quite delicate if a "boar" gets near you!), her aunt-surrogate warned her. Personal hygiene was hard to maintain because she had to go to the pier in Kawit to take a bath or buy water from the nearby theater. According to Ellen, this was also the beginning of a difficult period. The older woman became strict and suspected her of having a heightened interest in boys. Ellen, on her part, admitted that she started paying attention to one guy. "*Pero sobra na sad and iyang gihunahuna sa among Allan. Ingon siya nga nibiga na kuno ko.*" (But she had wild imaginations about me and Allan. She said my libido has risen to the hilt!). Irritated by her scoldings and false accusations, Ellen deserted her aunt and started hanging-out with some girls and boys farther up in Colon Street. When she was picked up by a social worker and placed in Dangpanan Center, she did not have any misgivings. But later,

this same issue would cause friction between her and the house mother at the Center. According to the social worker, Ellen would go to the movies with her boyfriend, a streetchild who was picked up by the Community Scouts, another center. When Ellen was confronted about her absences and escapades, she escaped from the Center and joined a group of girls working as waitresses (cum "hostess") in a restaurant-night club in Colon. She particularly became close to Marilyn, a very amiable hostess who provided Ellen with the "warmth and understanding" that she wished she had gotten from her mother and teachers and other adults who had authority over her. Lisa, the social worker, alleged that Ellen got pregnant and had an abortion three months after she left the Center. Ellen argued that Lisa was fond of accusing her of things and creating stories about her.

Ellen was quite sensitive to women who were "strong, aggressive, and cruel." She described her teacher in high school and her social worker in the same terms that she characterized her mother—"isog ug maldita (strict, authoritarian and difficult." According to Ellen, her teacher's ways made it easy for her to decide to absent herself from classes and go to the movies and to finally quit school.

Nita started sleeping with Alex, the lighter-refiller, when she came back to the streets from the Center. "I have known Alex since I was three and was roaming the streets near Colon and Legaspi. He started giving me food and a little money, so we started sleeping together!" Asked if she is not afraid of becoming pregnant: "*Ah, was pa man noon ka masipyati, pa*" (Ah, I have not missed my period, yet!). Together with the other child-couples who frequent Legaspi and Colon, they sometimes go

to the movies or to the disco. The other members of their group like Tomasa and Negro (younger half-brother of Lida and Nita) engage in a number of activities like scavenging, and selling plastic bags as well as rugby (inhalant).

Protection and Abuse: Two Sides of a "Pimping Father"

Maritess was nine years old when she had "relations" with the American. She recalled how the arrangement began: "We were standing there by the park and the American was walking by. My stepfather pushed me and told me to tell the American, 'Joe, give me money, I am hungry!'. After that, the American took us (my father and my friend Annie) to his hotel room. He told me and Annie to take a bath in front of him. He really did not do anything. He just wanted me to sit on his lap and touch my buttocks." Afterwards, the American gave her one hundred pesos and bought her a dress worth three hundred pesos at Robinson's. Later when the stepfather ran out of money, he sold the dress for fifty pesos. Maritess hated him for that and for other things he always did to her, like going through the pockets of her dress while she was asleep to get her money. He would do this each time he wanted to buy a drink. Marites' number one ambition has since been "to marry an American so I could buy a car and run over my stepfather!" On the other hand, her stepfather when not drunk, feels protective of his stepdaughter and they often roam the streets together. Danny, Marites' father, once vowed to kill Boy when he heard that the latter often beat up the children and his former wife. But a couple of times, he also saw how Boy would take care of his former wife and children in the park.

Inside Prison Walls: Double-Edged Friendship and Bondage

The recruitment of streetchildren to anti-social activities like drug-sniffing, pick-pocketing, or stealing does not proceed in a clearly defined manner but begins with simple innocuous activities. This was the case of Dindo who was asked by Benjamin, two years older than himself, to join him in scavenging near a construction site. Benjamin then asked Dindo to carry the metal scrap collected at the site. Thinking that Benjamin had bought this from the construction manager, Dindo thought nothing of it until he was apprehended and brought to the police station and detained. In prison, Dindo had to befriend the "big lords" (robbers, murderers, snatchers, and pick-pockets). Part of the arrangement is for children-prisoners to learn the skills of these "experts" when children go out of prison. They must practice the trade in jail and share the fruits with their "mentors". Thus, the bonding between "mentor" and "student" could turn into a life of bondage for the child. The projected "straight, reformed life" that children would have after serving their terms in jail turns into a path marked with clear connections to the underworld of illegitimate possibilities and acts. This is the irony of an institution meant to teach the perils of wrongdoing but ending up clearly socializing the child into the world of violations and illegal activities. However, the experience of being jailed or of being just streetchildren subjects them to negative labeling, stigmatization, and other forms of victimization.

Dindo's life outside prison is still a struggle to define a "clean and straight life" but the prison walls continue to engulf

him. The snatcher who frequents Gaisano Metro visits him once in a while and demands for a "share" of his earnings, while the "Mayor" who used to protect him inside would be happy if he visits him with cigarettes and food. These connections, while providing the comfort and warmth of friendship also put him precariously standing between the "underworld" and the "straight world." The thin line dividing these can be shattered with a word, implicating him to a crime. Having a prison record, according to him, has placed him in the "suspect list" faster than those who have never been apprehended by the police. In fact, being labeled as "*gikan sa prison*" (from the prison) makes the owners of the establishments in his scavenging area wary of him. For this reason, he wants to own a cart for scavenging rather than the sack he is now using. Dindo explains: "I am more likely to be suspected of theft when I carry a sack because the contents cannot be seen compared to if I place my scavenged scraps in an open cart!"

The label, "child of the streets" ("*batang lansangan*" or "*batang kalye*") conjures pejorative meanings and images in people's minds, which in turn, informs the subsequent patterns of social relations of streetchildren. Streetchildren are credited with a lot of negative possibilities. Lida, for example, while working as a domestic helper, was accused of stealing a ring. The master's son, knowing Lida's "negative background," passed off his gambling loss to Lida rather than admit this to his mother.

Fun and Experimentation: Learning the Vices of Adults

Noel, at five years old, learned to smoke a cigarette because of his father who

usually asked him to buy and occasionally also to light these for him. After this experience, he and his cousins would also light cigarette butts thrown in the pavement. They learned some variations in doing this, like lacing cigarettes with toothpaste to give the smoke a menthol flavor. Noel remembered his excitement seeing the smoke curl out of his nostrils, which made him cough. Later, he learned to inhale and control the smoke inside his throat so he wouldn't cough. He could not remember any of the adults resenting his smoking. His grandfather told him he would get TB but Noel did not know exactly what was wrong with TB so the admonition did not make him quit smoking. Most of the time, his parents did not notice what he was doing.

Negro, Lida's younger half-brother, learned to sniff rugby at four years old. His father was selling these and he would see the children get "high". Negro wanted to try this too, so his father gave it to him thinking that nothing was wrong with it, if taken once in a while. But Negro soon discovered that the "high" from sniffing the inhalant would soothe his hunger and he did not have to worry about food.

Deng-deng, Negro's younger brother, at eight, also already knows how to drink beer or gin. He used to climb his father's lap while the latter was drinking with his friends late at night or in the afternoons. He remembers the sips his father allowed him as "cooling" and making him sleep. His father sort of liked it that he became quiet with the drink.

At other times, learning vices like sniffing offer streetchildren and their families a means of escape and survival.

Ellen, for example, was forced to sniff rugby by her uncle-surrogate, who was selling the stuff to other streetchildren and adult passersby. "*Ingon man sila nga kinahanglan mouban ko sa ilang gibuhad ug uban ko nila*" (My "uncle" and "aunt" told me, I must also do the things they are doing, if I have to stay with them). According to their neighbors in the streets, this would make it easy for the couple to conduct their business. Ellen must also be one of them "*para dili siya mopiya-it sa pulis*" (so she won't squeal anything to the police). Like Negro, Ellen reflecting on the experience, said it was not really bad "*kay makalipas man sa gutom*" (because it made my hunger pass).

Traumas and Hidden Pains from Murder, Death and Abandonment

Maricris was eight years old when her mother died of pneumonia. Her father, not knowing how to take care of the children, brought them to her grandmother. For a while, the father tried to fulfill his obligations but his unstable job hardly allowed him to achieve this desire. Meanwhile, his mother-in-law kept on nagging him about the lack of food for his children. After a year of this, he just left. Maricris remembers her father telling her that he was going away to look for a job. He never came back, however, nor was he heard from again.

She was never able to go to school. First, her mother was always sickly, so she had to stay home and take care of her younger brothers. Then her mother died and Maricris had to work to help her grandmother "feed her brothers". Her grandmother says Maricris cannot go to school because she needs her to earn money, adding that she herself did not go to school but is able to survive.

Michael was four when his father was murdered at the pier in Cebu. His mother, afflicted with terrible melancholies and postpartum depression, started to neglect the children. She left for Manila to work but she never sent any money for the children whom she left with their grandmother. The latter, earning less than twenty pesos a day from picking up grains and scraps at the pier brought Michael to help her. A year later, his mother came back pregnant with her new husband in tow. Michael did not like his stepfather and quarreled with him, prompting his mother to sell their house and leave again for Manila. This time Michael really felt as if the world had closed up on him, saying: "My mother should not have sold the house my father left us and she should not have taken all of it for herself. Now we do not have anything. I doubt if she ever thinks of me and my brothers. I hate her child and her husband!"

Jaime lost his father when the latter was stabbed by a local "anti-communist" squad for his and his wife's activism in their barangay association. Out of fear, Jaime's mother fled and left him and his two sisters with their grandmother. Two weeks after the death of Jaime's father, his grandmother went to the next village to join her daughter. She said this was "to quiet things down." Jaime wishes he could become like Rambo, the freedom-fighter played by Sylvester Stallone. He imagines killing the people who were responsible for his father's death. He hardly says anything, except when asked about his heroes, particularly, Rambo.

The daughter of separated parents, Marites hides her pain through a nervous laugh. She had learned this technique when, as a seven year-old, her father,

who by now had remarried, got Marites from her mother so the girl could take care of her stepsister. Her father's new wife had a daughter who taunted Marites that Dan was not her father. On top of this, her stepmother would strike her head with an iron every time Marites did not please her. The woman wanted things brought to her in a flash, but the girl was quite slow because of her frail and sickly body. Moreover, the daughter of the stepmother would drive her away whenever she went near their father, telling her "Go away, you smelly girl, he is not your father." When she complains to her father, the latter would tell her to shut up and not be a troublemaker. Thus, Marites says it is better to laugh.

Summary and Discussion

The life-studies of streetchildren show that growing up in city streets has little to do with age, nor does this entail a smooth preparation for adult tasks and roles. The socialization of streetchildren is characterized by much ambiguity and tension that are not easily processed and understood by outsiders and even by the streetchildren and their families, who are caught in a series of events that do not allow them much control over their life-conditions. Contrary to the common view that the socialization of children into adult roles follows an ascending developmental line, Maynes (1989) argues that this perspective does not capture the experience of people often struggling to stay afloat and beset by the chronic insecurity, poverty, illnesses, accidents, and family tragedies so common in working-class existence. Indeed, examining the events perceived by the children and their families as critical or important junctures in their lives, one can see oscillation of their chances in a spiral of disadvantage.

Narratives of the streetchildren's lives seem to be characterized by the following: (1) the loss of a happier time or of an Eden at a very young age (0-6); and (2) the struggles or contest of self as they grow up in the streets of the city and into several jobs. The later stage is associated with discovery, knowledge, and capability of the self in a harsh and competitive urban environment. For streetchildren in the study, knowledge and exploration about sex, drugs, struggles with authority figures within and outside of the family, deception and betrayal, appear much earlier than among middle class kids. Living and/or working in the streets constantly expose them to various risks including physical harm, crime and other anti-social activities.

I began this paper with a critique of the normative conceptions of the socialization of children into adult roles. Through the narratives of streetchildren, I argued that the formation of the self and one's identity takes place within the "communities" of the family, peer groups, neighborhood, the city, and the larger society. Thus, it is imperative that the changes and dynamics at these levels be examined for they provide clues in understanding the changes in the self or identity of the child or youth. The life-stories of streetchildren sufficiently confirm the widely acknowledged fact that economic necessities in urban poor families and communities force children to begin working even before normal physical, emotional and social maturation processes have taken place. The life-stories likewise show that the tendency of working children to understand their income-generating activities in terms of their duties as children is a very persistent theme. The children in this study never for one second question why they should

be assisting in breadwinning functions or even become the main breadwinner of their families. The fact that their assumption of these roles has denied them opportunities for education and leisure does not seem to cause rancor in their hearts. They accept this as part of their duties and roles in their families.

In turn, this relational perception and conception of the self as duty-bound and focused on social roles rather than on one's capacities, attributes and rights is very much part of the broader Philippine culture and of Asian societies in general. Comparing the socialization of Hindu and American children, for example, Schweder (1991) notes that while the socialization of American children is rights-based and focused on individuals, South Asian children perceived individuals in terms of their duties and obligations with a broader set or sets of relationships. Thus, instead of saying that they have to work because their parents are not good providers or cannot earn enough, Asian children simply understand that it is their duty to help. As good dutiful children, they help families by working. This conception

of children's roles as duty-based holds certain implications for the universal declaration of children's rights or of other moves to minimize or eliminate the incidence of child labor. It is quite clear that these can yield different interpretative outcomes under differing sociocultural and political contexts.

Finally, the binary conception of child/youth and adult categories cannot be readily applied in the case of streetchildren. Having been pushed to assume adult roles prior to maturity, streetchildren with their associated attributes of innocence and vulnerability suffer ambivalence and tensions in managing their acquired relative autonomy and inherent dependency vis-a-vis adults and the dependency of adults on them. Child/youth-focused programs therefore, many of which are based on this binary child-adult conception, cannot effectively address the difficulties of streetchildren. Other approaches are needed to address the plight of urban poor families and communities and to change the differently constituted "many-people environment" of streetchildren.

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