An Anthropologist and Children in a Street War with Social Exclusion: Confessions from Fieldwork

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Abstract The author discusses the issue of social exclusion from an anthropological point of view, incorporating into it elements of both feminist and biomedical discourse. She argues for the universal vulnerability of every human body as well as for the universality of certain features and mechanisms of social exclusion entwined within the experience of trauma. Drawing on the concept of 'misfitting' borrowed from the feminist theory of vulnerability, she explores trajectories of socially excluded bodies caught up in a vicious circle of violence. In her view, the only valid way to break this circle is to evoke empathy in human beings by means of a visceral rather than intellectual approach. "Embodied cognition" as a means of fighting social exclusion is a case in point of this approach. The arguments presented in the paper are based on the author's fieldwork experiences among street children in Tanzania, which have inextricably intermingled with her own lifespan trajectory.

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"No war can be conveyed over a distance. Somebody sits eating dinner and watching television: pillars of earth blown into the air; cut—(…); cut—soldiers falling and writhing in pain; —and the man watching television gets angry and curses because while he was gaping at the screen he oversalted his soup. War becomes a spectacle, a show, when it is seen from a distance and expertly re--shaped in the cutting room."
Ryszard Kapuściński, The Soccer War (1992: 179–180)

In the "street war with social exclusion" presented in this paper there are neither "pillars of earth blown into the air" nor "soldiers falling and writhing in pain". Nevertheless, there are "pillars" of verbal assaults "blown into the air" and "fighters" enduring pain from street harassment, among them street children and myself. There are also witnesses, passers-by and street vendors watching this human drama unfold before their eyes, too often looking on either indifferently or with a chortle. For those chortling, this war is a spectacle, a show seen from the observer's distance. For me, the author of this paper, this war is seen from the distance of my intellectual work, but has never been and never will be emotionally distant. For the reader, this war has been reshaped into an intellectual piece of writing that imposes order and reason; therefore, my aim as an author is to reveal the way I experienced it: as chaotic, absurd, incomprehensible, and simply emotional (cf. Nordstrom – Robben 1995: 12). Yet this is not an easy task for many reasons. How to construct a scholarly text containing an account thickened with the emotions evoked by the witnessing and experiencing of violent acts, emotions which blur the line between science and journalism, while, at the same time, not "flattening them down into theory" (Daniel 1996: 4). As Clifford Geertz states: "Good anthropological texts are plain texts, unpretending. They neither invite literary-critical close reading nor reward it" (Geertz 1988: 2). Following intuitively these vague but noteworthy guidelines, I must confess to my own anxiety and impotence regarding the production of a text about violence and trauma which requires drawing on fieldwork that became my own lived experience. My impotence has manifested itself in all possible ways, including an unwillingness to think and speak about these everyday experiences of trauma and, perhaps most importantly, accept them as part of my own life trajectory. My escalating anxiety resulted from my being aware that the day would come when I would have to write about it, and my doubts about whether, once this day arrived, I would be able to turn into science painful emotions that are more suited for producing tears than an academic text. As Cathy Winkler has rightly pointed out, it is a luxury to do research with a plan, a research focus, and, most importantly, some degree of comfort and security in being able to maintain your identity (1995: 155). Yet this luxury was taken from me irretrievably the day a traumatic event encroached abruptly into my fieldwork. Since that day, my own advantaged and relatively comfortable identity as

Photo by the Author, Dar es Salaam 2015

a researcher has been undermined by a disadvantaged, uncomfortable identity, that of an 'oppressed' human being, one that no one would like to experience or share aloud. For this reason my "confessions" from my fieldwork do not aspire to "discretion in sharing *only what [I] must* about [my] personal [life]", as some anthropologists would urge doing (Mc Lean – Leibing 2007: 13). This is because I share *everything that I do not want to but have to* about my personal life. On the other hand, I neither apologize for bringing up my personal/emotional perspective nor explore the inner conundrum of the "blurred borders between ethnography and life" (ibid. 2007: 6). Instead, I claim that my subjective emotional perspective, which has arisen out of a bodily experience of trauma (and caused my identity to be undermined) has paradoxically helped me to objectivize the subject of my interrogation (street children's agency) by making me realise that, indeed, children endure trauma, even though they do not name it or speak of it (see picture). My own bodily signs of trauma have led me to correlate some of their behaviours and interpret them as obvious signs of trauma (which in more comfortable circumstances I would probably have not noticed or would have interpreted differently). As Mc Lean has rightly pointed out, our emotions "derive from our experiential history and personal vulnerability, which connect us to others in particular ways. This connectedness (or in some cases, fracture) intrinsically links emotions to our sense of compassion, morality, and justice, or reminds us of their absence" and helps us to reach "insights that would not otherwise have been available to [us]" (2007: 270). In this sense our emotions indeed become not only our "moral", but also our "intellectual compass" (Goslinga – Frank 2007: xvii). In my case, it was my personal vulnerability that literally connected me with my interlocutors, street children, who represent a particularly vulnerable social group.

It is of great importance to underline here that vulnerability is a universal phenomenon and "lies not simply in our neediness and fragility but in how and whether that vulnerable flesh is sustained" (Garland-Thompson 2011: 598). The world, depending on whether we are sustained by it or not, bolsters our sense of *fitting* or *misfitting* and, consequently, our sense of either coherence and predictability or disjuncture and contingency. "Fitting is a comfortable and unremarkable majority experience (…), an unmarked subject position that most of us occupy at some points in life and that often goes unnoticed" (ibid. 2011: 597), whereas misfitting is a minority experience with minority forms of embodiment that in encounters with unsustaining environments "can lead to segregation, exclusion from the rights of citizenship, and alienation from a majority community, (…)" (ibid.). An epistemic privilege of a vulnerable body is its oppositional consciousness, which arises from the experience of misfitting. "Misfitting has explanatory power to produce a coherent narrative of how inferiority is assigned and literal marginalization takes place." (ibid. 2011: 601) As my personal vulnerability is a product of the bodily experience of misfitting, I take it as my advantage in the hope of shedding new light on

the subject of social exclusion. Nevertheless, my narrative does not aspire to be coherent as violence itself has nothing to do with coherence. Besides imposing scholarly order and reason, my aim is to expose the very hallmarks of the subject of my interrogation, namely that social exclusion, paraphrasing Nordstrom and Robben, "is confusing and inconclusive" (1995: 3).

My paper is seemingly an autobiographical account on social exclusion and trauma from fieldwork, as my professional life irrevocably is intermingled with the vicissitudes of my personal life. Nevertheless, it would be fallaciousness to read this as a failure to provide the reader with the universal features (e.g. social categorization) and mechanisms (e.g. social visual registry) in which the phenomenon of social exclusion is grounded and perpetuated. The universalism of my arguments in the paper lies in the embodied knowledge of a socially excluded body (one in possession of 'epistemic privilege') that anyone could potentially represent at some point in his/her life. The trajectory of this body, viewed from the perspective of a vicious circle of violence, is characterised by three interrelated domains of experiences to which it is continuously exposed in life: vulnerability, everyday trauma, and an (un)empathetic environment. Each of these represents a section of the paper respectively.
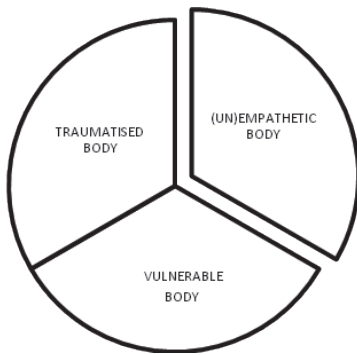
Universal Human Body in a Vicious Circle of Violence

The Vulnerable Body

I was a fledgling Master's degree holder in cultural anthropology when I went to Tanzania for the first time in 2008.[1] It was the first non-European country I had ever visited. The official purpose of my stay was to work on a developmental computing project under the auspices of a governmental program: Polish Aid. At that time, I did not speak Swahili, an official language of Tanzania. Workshops were run in English for the local authorities and

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1   For clarification this paper encapsulates events, fieldwork experiences and field notes between 2008 and 2015, along with my memories and reflections afterwards. For methodological reasons I have divided these into two stages: 1. 2008–2012 when I was familiarizing myself with issues affecting street children through my volunteer work, and through social NGO workers' etic (to children) perspective, 2. 2013–2015 when I conducted official research on street children's agency, that was bolstered through the children's emic perspective as I focused on those children who were living and sleeping on the streets of Dar es Salaam and for different reasons had very rare contact with social-service workers.

students.[2] In the course of time, in addition to my official work, I started visiting one of the local street children's centres run by local citizens. This decision reflected my own personal interest in disadvantaged children. When I was a teenager, I worked as a volunteer for the local Christian organization on behalf of impoverished families in my home town. This was the initial trigger for my interest in children living under adversity.

My first encounter with disadvantaged youngsters at a local centre in Tanzania was a very thought-provoking experience in a cognitive-comparative sense. It also led me to realize that my vulnerable body was an advantage for me in an epistemic sense. When the children saw me, they quickly started to ask and guess about what had happened to my hand, as my right upper limb consists solely of an upper arm. As language was an obstacle to communication from both sides, they mimed possible answers, from which I could easily read their suggestion that someone must have cut my hand off with a cleaver. Their body language expressed curiosity intermingled with candour – something completely contradictory to what I had experienced during encounters with children from my own socio-cultural bailiwick. The latter's reactions were usually expressions of astonishment and bewilderment. Smaller children accompanied by their parents or family members had generally asked either them or me directly why I did not have a hand. These episodes demonstrate how our knowledge about the world is embodied. They reveal distinct sets of lived experiences and how the degree of exposure to them at an early stage of life shapes young people's understanding of a complex reality and the way they approach it.

Street children are born into and brought up under adverse circumstances, wherein individual bodily self-awareness is moulded by socio-cultural and political demands conditioned and exerted by historical powers and trends. It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace the biographical and broader historical entanglements characteristic of the "life history approach" that led these youngsters to fall into the category of vulnerable bodies, or more accurately, of *misfits*. What I would like to focus on here is the "visual registry operating in social relations that is socially constructed, historically evolving, and culturally variegated but nonetheless powerfully determinant over individual experience" (Alcoff 2006: 194) In this interactive process individuals are labelled with identities that do not reside in visible features but emerge from shared, dominant interpretations of "visual markers on the body" (ibid. 2006: 6) as well as outside of the body. Once labelled, they are "more speedily slotted into the pigeon-holes in the future" (Douglas 1966: 37). These visual markers make their bodies vulnerable to the contingent experience of either fitting in (inclusion) or misfitting (exclusion).

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2   In Tanzania English is introduced as the language of instruction at the secondary
     level. National secondary education was not free until 2016. Therefore, a command
     of English is still the privilege of the wealthier, educated classes.

There are three primary "visual markers" that, in my view, make street children[3] particularly visible in terms of social registry. These are: (1) a lack of an adult's permanent control and care, (2) physical appearance, and (3) "aberrant" behaviour. These are interrelated and, taken together, represent "an aberration of childhood" from a societal perspective (cf. Aptekar 1988: 46), making these "dangerous and endangered" youngsters (Scheper-Hughes 2004: 13) a particularly vulnerable group. The first marker is tied to the position of the children within a social structure that is inextricably linked to that of adults. Street children who either live or work (or both) outside their homes and families, deprived of adult control, represent a particularly "misfitting" group in society. Those on the streets who "join police, prostitutes and adult vagrants on this arena at night" represent "society's ultimate outlaws" (Ennew 2002: 389). In many societies, a strong reliance on male authority within families contributes to street children's negative image as "uncontrollable" youths, as many come from families with no male authority; it also promotes their mistreatment by public functionaries, who often themselves come from families with unequal gender power relations (cf. Aptekar – Stocklin 1997: 394) There is a large number of scholarly works that provide evidence of police brutality towards street children worldwide, as well as in Tanzania (see: Lugalla – Mbwambo 2002; Lockhart 2002; Flynn 2008; Wiencke 2008). My fieldwork among street children in Dar es Salaam confirms some of the research data presented by the authors in question. The local authorities and policemen, called *askari*, definitely do not provide 'child-friendly' services to young urban vagabonds. Firstly, if not explicitly harassed, the children clearly serve a political agenda underpinned by the practice of tokenism. Some of the children I interviewed reported to me that government authorities only occasionally visited them on the streets, giving them some small gifts in exchange for taking photographs with them and then quickly disappearing. Secondly, I was informed by the children, in accordance with researchers' accounts, about night round-ups ("intermittent sweeps") organized by the police, and the children's suffering from accidental imprisonment in their aftermath. On one occasion, I participated in a court trial against street children accused of stealing fuel canisters by the owner of a petrol station. These children, as they awaited trial, were placed in the most infamous adult prison in Dar es Salaam, commonly known as *Segerea jela.* The attorney's primary task initially was to prove that they were underage so they could be moved to the juvenile detention centre. The absurdity of the situation lay in the fact that some of the children were noticeably underage. Additionally, the incongruity of the situation was amplified by a judge's remark on the children's misbehaviour mirrored

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3   I consider "a street child" to be "… any girl or boy … for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings and wasteland, etc.) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults". (ICCB 1985, quoted in: Lusk 1989: 57–58).

in their clothing. At the beginning of the trial she asked them in front of everyone in the courtroom why they were appearing in court unwashed and in dirty clothes, showing no respect to her and other officers. It was evident to all those gathered that the children, who had just been transported by the police to the court from jail, where they had been kept in dreadful sanitary conditions, could not have been clean and properly dressed. This case, which took place in 2012, fits Flynn's depiction of the Tanzanian court and prison systems in the 1990s, as "poorly equipped to deal with children in an appropriate and timely manner" (Flynn 2008: 29).

The children's physical appearance, especially their "dirt" as a visual marker on the body, is the second attribute reinforcing their misfitting into society. "Many responses to street children, especially from governments but more recently from civil society, have been preoccupied with social hygiene, cleaning the streets of "vermin", and have portrayed street children as a social disease" (Ennew – Swart-Kruger 2003: 7). There is strong evidence of collaboration between bribed police and the local authorities, influenced by businessmen, to remove children from the streets, as their visual image does not fit that of the tidy, hygienic areas where these local businesses are run (cf. Aptekar – Stocklin 1997). During my fieldwork in 2015, I met a man running his own small shop with beauty products in one of the most presentable parts of Dar es Salaam, the city's and business centre, called *Posta*. I made an appointment with him after I heard from the children living in this area that he provided them with food on a regular basis outside of his shop. For me it was an unusual attitude that many local businessmen would definitely oppose, as they would rather chase street children away from their places of business. Indeed, during our meeting, the man confessed that he had been threatened by the police and municipal authorities for his philanthropy. His activities obviously encouraged children not to leave the area, which was already being treated by them as a "home", and where they spent time during the day and slept at night. Unfortunately for the children, this encouragement did not conform to the perceived self-interest of many individuals working in this area, for whom the children were nothing more than "vermin", to use Ennew's & Swart-Kruger's term, that they had to get rid of in order to maintain the hygiene of their businesses (2003: 7).

The above instances of ignorance, disdain and oppression are just the tip of the iceberg of the violent reality the children face in their everyday life on the street. Their "aberrant" behaviour, the third visual marker of their misfitting into society, misjudged by public opinion as 'delinquent', consists of survival strategies developed in response to adverse circumstances. The strategies are a synonym for the social competences they must acquire in order to survive. Here a two-way visual registry (society observing street children, and children observing society on the streets) as a source of both their vulnerability and resistance is a key reference point for their acquisition of survival

skills. This resistance more often than not can be achieved only through manipulation of the roles imposed on them by society, e.g. the role of the 'child' itself. As a result of my prolonged observations during my fieldwork, I came to the conclusion that some children, even though very young, intentionally behaved in a more 'child-like' manner, that is, in an innocent and infantile manner, which made them more successful in obtaining assistance from city dwellers. It was evident that this tactic paid off in many situations.[4] Another example of embodied survival skills concerns gender switching. One day, after a few hours of spending time with a group of street boys, I spotted that one was in fact a female who was pretending to be male. Her male outward bearing and appearance, as she explained to me later, was intended to avert sexual abuse.

These examples of the children's "aberrant" behaviour, that is, actions that represent "an aberration of childhood", definitely do not exhaust the subject of children's skills and strategies developed in response to their living conditions. Nevertheless, I chose them deliberately amongst many others in order to depict how visual registry in social relations "powerfully mediates body image and the postural model of the body" (Alcoff 2006: 194). A misfit's self-awareness is moulded by his/her visual vulnerability and individual responses to it. These responses require an embodied knowledge about the world that stems from a dissonance between the body and the environment, one's felt/achieved and ascribed/imposed identities respectively (cf. Garland-Thomson 2011). This dissonance formulates a "double consciousness" (Du Bois 2008, quoted in: ibid. 2011: 601) whose "epistemic privilege" lies in tracking, negotiating and mitigating one's vulnerability.

The ease with which Tanzanian street children received the fact that the person they had just met had no hand indicates not only their full awareness of the vicissitudes of everyday life, but also the circumstances in which they live, which provide them with this awareness. These circumstances subject their bodies to continuous confrontations with a non-sustaining environment and the need to negotiate their identities accordingly. Given the analogous circumstances to which I had been subjected, my encounters with Tanzanian street children were in part based on bodily experiences of the world through which our lives intersected, with our bodies standing at the same crossroads: vulnerable, marginalised, defenceless, but still, and above all, the bodies of survivors.

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4   Similar conclusions were drawn earlier by Cédric Audouard who carried out research among Venezuelan street children and noticed that some who looked 10-years-old due to their height, appearance, behaviour and way of talking, were in fact youths above 15. According to the researcher, their imitation of their younger counterparts was a strategy used to increase their chances of survival (Audouard, quoted in: Cueff 2006: 72).

The Traumatised Body

Universal human vulnerability is embedded in the contingent experience of either fitting or misfitting into a world that nobody can escape. "Any of us can fit here today and misfit there tomorrow" (Garland-Thomson 2011: 597). But particularly vulnerable are those who cannot escape the experience of misfitting on a daily basis. Being a misfit from time to time is not the same as being a misfit everyday. An individual for whom misfitting constitutes an intrinsic part of his/her life cannot benefit from the qualities of life characteristic of living in a fitting mode, such as material and visual anonymity, coherence and predictability. On the contrary, life in a misfitting mode is marked by imposed visibility, disjuncture and contingency, and through these hallmarks, one may refer to it as life in 'crisis'. In an analogy to Henrik Vigh's elucidation of "crisis", misfitting "is not often the result of a sudden tear within the fabric of everyday normality but rather the result of slow processes of deterioration, erosion and negative change – of multiple traumas and friction" (2008: 9). Yet multiple traumas need to be viewed not as single events but as a sequence of events that lead to the "fragmentation" of one's life understood here as "a state of somatic, social and existential incoherence" (ibid.). Understanding the experience of trauma not as an isolated event, but as an everyday reality stands in opposition to the dominant Western biomedical discourse from which the concept of trauma derives. The latter is defined in reference to a particular event (such as the loss of a parent, sexual assault or natural disaster, among others) that occurs sporadically, at longer intervals. The former indicate living conditions, wherein the traumatic event is "not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin 1969, quoted in: Scheper-Hughes 2008: 37). Life in a misfitting mode, understood as life in chronic crisis, sheds light on issues of social exclusion in terms of everyday trauma experienced by those discriminated against by the mainstream of society on a daily basis. This perspective is also useful for tracking the universal features and mechanisms of all forms of social exclusion, as well as the psychophysical responses that are its characteristic side-effects.

Since childhood I have experienced three types of social exclusion with different levels of intensity in terms of duration and impact. These are ableism, racism and sexism. All of them became part of my lived experience during my stay in Tanzania as well. Here I will discuss the first two. The breaking point came between 2013 and 2015, when my academic career was given a boost after I received a grant from the Polish National Science Centre to conduct a research project on street children's agency. As my command of Swahili progressed over the years, I gradually started to interact with the children without either a social worker's company or any interpreter's assistance. For an anthropologist, this is an unquestionable advantage, which to my surprise, proved to be a disadvantage as well.

In 2013, during the initial stage of my project, an incident occurred that changed my self-perception irretrievably. While I was passing through one of the most crowded and busy open-air markets in Dar es Salaam, I suddenly heard a loud male voice shouting: *"Mzungu hana mkono!"* – which in Swahili means – "White doesn't have a hand!" I turned and saw at a distance of some 10 meters a man who after our gazes met, looked straight into my face and started laughing and shouting out again the same words repeatedly. I initially froze, but after a moment, I gathered my strength and started to walk towards him, threatening to report him to the police. The man was still laughing, but slowly started to run, although he did not seem to be at all frightened.

This incident seemed to trigger a domino effect over next few years, during which I was harassed verbally in public on a regular basis.[5] I encountered this experience daily, even a few times per day, becoming the target of similar remarks on the street, although usually made in a lower tone of voice and in a less violent manner. Being constantly pointed out in public against my will due to my visible features, such as the colour of my skin and my physical loss, ones by which I would never define myself, had a devastating effect on my self-perception and personhood. Firstly, it violated my right to visual autonomy in public space and stripped me of my sense of security. Secondly, it undermined my sense of body-mind unity, as I had never perceived myself as a person who lacks any part of the body, nor paid attention to my "whiteness" in terms of self-definition. Thirdly, it distorted my perception of time and space compatibility, bolstering a sense of contingency in my life, and at the same time, debilitating my long-term planning. To conclude, it made me lose my sense of fitting into the world and was a doubly powerful experience of misfitting that I had resisted so strongly since childhood. After this first incident during my fieldwork, I started suffering from the immediate bio-psychological effects of trauma ascribed to biochemical changes in the brain and diagnosed as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.[6] From among its symptoms, I experienced chronic anxiety, emotional detachment, sleep disorder (which in my case took the form of oversleeping), time distortion (tychypsychia), hyper-vigilance, and in its aftermath, avoiding places, people and activities connected to my traumatic memories. During my fieldwork I also suffered from

5   It is important to underline that before this first incident I had also faced some public harassment, but with less intensity. The difference between "now" and "before" was mainly that before I was usually accompanied by a Tanzanian, (a friend, a social worker, etc.) and I was not fluent enough in Swahili to understand every verbal taunt on the street, especially when whispered.

6   Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder syndrome (PTSD) is a very well-known term widely discussed in scientific literature since 1980, when it was first introduced in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Anthropologists have criticized it mainly for being an overly narrow clinical method for diagnosing patients for whom trauma is not the result of an 'a priori' sudden breakdown with its immediate 'post' effects but an ongoing experience in a lifetime (see: Vigh 2008; Scheper-Hughes 2008). More information on PTSD and related readings from the Western biomedical point of view can be found on the following website: http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/PTSD-overview/ptsd-overview.asp.

continuous cystitis, which, after several hospital examinations with negative urine test results, I realised to be a psychosomatic symptom of my prolonged stress. Every day before leaving home I had to urinate multiple times, which I realised was a nervous tic-like manifestation of bodily resistance to my exposure to public harassment.

Being assigned to a particular socially, culturally and historically constructed category that is laden with stereotypes and stigma is not without cost for one's self-identity and personhood, or for one's psychophysical health. The first is linked to a disjuncture between one's felt/achieved and imposed/attributed identities. My felt and achieved identity as an able-bodied person who during her lifespan had acquired manual skills that many 'two-handed' people do not acquire did not concur with either the attributed identity of a 'disabled' person nor with the imposed visual public identity of a person 'without a hand'. Identity disjuncture is present among street children as well. One of the teenage "street children" I met during my fieldwork resisted being defined as a "street child" merely because he lived on the street. As he put it in a song: *Mimi sio mtoto wa mtaa, mtaa haukunizaa…* (I am not a child of the street: the street did not give birth to me). There were other children who shared his view as well. It is very lucky to be identified by your achievements and a great misfortune to have your identity reduced to visible features. Such a process of visual registry in social relations, underpinned by social categorization, paves the way for invisible violence, i.e., deeds that go "beyond physicality to include assaults on self-respect and personhood" (Scheper-Hughes – Bourgois 2004b: 318) and results in psychological harm and even physical harm.

Invisible violence has always been at the top of my research interests; nevertheless, I was previously not sufficiently aware of its 'invisible' impact. My intellectual efforts to embrace the experiences I encountered during and after my fieldwork have made me rethink my insights into the street life of my young informants in terms of its impact on their lives and their capacity (agency) to resist it or surrender to it. The trauma I experienced from intensified street harassment, among other things, broadened my understanding of the street children's encounters with unsustaining environments. I began to analyse them not as single events that they wrestle with vigorously, but as a sequence of interrelated incidents that, in the long term, causes many of them to surrender to their street fate. It shifted my research focus from their resilience in the face of adversity to their vulnerability to social exclusion over their lifetime.

Most street children were mistreated and neglected first by their parents and relatives[7] at a very early age, and subsequently, by society. The founda-

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7   Drawing on my fieldwork experience, it is frequently a stepmother or a stepfather who exerts their economic or affective power over a spouse so as to secure their own children with the exclusive right to the family property, which causes their stepchild/ren to leave their house and end up living on the street.

tions of their identity as full members of society have been undermined since the very beginning. On many occasions, I observed how these children were disregarded and disparaged by members of society. As Linda Martín Alcoff has pointed out: "Visibility is both the means of segregating and oppressing human groups and the means of manifesting unity and resistance" (2006: 7). So it was on the streets of Dar es Salaam. Due to my visual and emotional connectedness to my young informants, I resisted their exclusion as well. I quarrelled with *makonda* (bus conductors) who refused to let them to get on a *daladala* bus, I tried to allay the fears and suspicions of shopkeepers, restaurant staff, and the watchmen at the gas station, so that the children would not be chased away. I reassured passers-by that my smartphone, which the children were holding in their hands and enjoyed playing with, was safe, that they would definitely not steal it, and it was actually they who were protecting me from being robbed. Indeed, on one occasion when I was on a *daladala* with the children on the way to an art workshop site, I did not notice that my bag was open, and they warned me in a whisper to close it. This case of their safeguarding my person was not exceptional. As one Tanzanian social worker put it: "A child is like a *kioo* (mirror). The way you act is the way he reacts."

Verbal harassment likewise contributed to the maltreatment of the children in public. *Panya road* or *rodi*, which means 'a street rat' in Swahili slang, was one of the most common insults I heard used in relation to the children. Adopting a militant attitude, when I had a chance to approach someone using such a taunt, I would challenge them, asserting that "these children are not rats". Then I would ask them how they would feel if another passer-by called them the same name. Other insulting comments concerned the children's appearance. Some people, with an expression of disgust on their faces, called the children *wachafu*, which means 'dirty'. As I explained earlier in the paper, this was one of the reasons why the children were chased away from some public areas. It is a fact that the harsh conditions on the street make its inhabitants look dirty and smell bad. While casually examining the children's hands, I noticed sores on many occasions, suggesting skin diseases. However, I could never imagine, when they were hugging me or holding my hand, that I could refrain from accepting these spontaneous expressions of their affection and trust towards my person, the likes of which they had been refused since the very beginning of their lives. Whether to be a "barefoot" or a "white-coat" anthropologist has never been an ethical conundrum for me (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 417; Nader 1995: 426).

My emotional attitude to children was like a moral compass I held in my hand that did not let me lose sight of my intellectual compass as well. My solidarity with the children helped me to puzzle through some of the less obvious symptoms indicating that they had been experiencing ongoing stress, fallaciously attributed to their supposed delinquency or disobedience. While "fitting is an unmarked subject position that most of us occupy at some points in

life and that often goes unnoticed" (Garland-Thomson 2011: 597), the misfit-ting subject position in terms of its suffering often goes unnoticed too. If I had not ridden a similar emotional rollercoaster, I would not have been able to notice some of the obvious signs of stress in the children's behaviour, such as exaggeratedly startled responses, outbursts of anger or hyper-vigilance. Therefore, my emotional grounding in analysing their behaviour bolstered my own intellectual capacity to unveil the children's suffering from stress.

Biological anthropologist Catherine Panter-Brick carried out research in Nepal (and later in Ethiopia) during which she compared the levels of a stress hormone cortisol determined from the saliva samples of children from very different socio-economic backgrounds: street-based working chil-dren and home-based children who either worked or attended school or did both. Unexpectedly, the mean levels of the hormone were similar for the street-based working children and home-based children who solely attend-ed school. She hypothesised that the most disadvantaged group of children – those living and working on the street – may have had blunted hormonal response to stressful events due to their habituation of the hazards of street life. To illustrate her argument she cited an incident from her fieldwork with two boys, aged 12 and 13, who were threatened by a street gang. In the after-math of their flight, one of them was wounded in the arm with a razor blade, nevertheless when asked, neither of them considered this event to be signif-icant or stressful (Panter-Brick – Pollard 1999; Panter-Brick 2004). However, I would be cautious in concluding that street life produces no greater risk in terms of stress-related disorder due to cortisol levels or children's percep-tions of their experiences, as the author of the study suggested. Even their ha-bituation to harsh conditions as another plausible explanation does not un-ravel the entire matrix of children's capacities for (and limitations to their) resilience. Street-based children indeed adapt to stressful situations, but at the price that these normalised situations become indicators of what will be their normality in the future. The street represents their internalised 'habi-tus', shaping their way of life and their way of perceiving the world and caus-ing them to be indifferent to stressful situations that are recognized (by their habitus) as normal. But one cannot forget that habitus, the principle of selec-tive power, tends to defend itself against change, in part by rejecting new ex-periences capable of calling into question its accumulated body of knowledge, if exposed to these accidentally or by force, but first and foremost by avoid-ing exposure to such experiences (cf. Bourdieu 1990: 60–61). I would claim that for street children some of the less stressful situations that were at odds with their 'accumulated body of knowledge' might be recognized as 'new ex-periences'. Therefore, my research question is how street children adapt to less stressful situations taken for granted by us (scholars). What would their cortisol-level responses be in this context? On the basis of my own research I have drawn the hypothesis that these children can consider less stressful

situations to be more stressful, or at least as stressful, as life-threatening situations, due to their street habitus. To illustrate my assumption, I will give the example of an incident that happened during my fieldwork. During one of the regular meetings I had with the street-based children at a petrol station, two of them (about 8–10 years old[8]) had a fight, during which one of them fell down and injured his head, which was bleeding. To my surprise, he showed no signs of either physical pain or psychological fear. Seeing the bloody head injury, I was clearly more frightened than he was. I spent almost half an hour trying unsuccessfully to convince him to go with me to the nearest dispensary to see a doctor. He refused to get medical assistance. Following other similar responses by the children to health-threatening situations during my fieldwork, I noticed that some of them preferred to endure physical pain rather than get medical treatment and quicker relief. The plausible reasons for their behaviour can be analysed on two interrelated levels. Firstly, it can be a rejection of a new, unfamiliar situation (a visit to the doctor) by their habitus. Secondly, it can be interpreted as an overreaction, a symptom of 'hypervigilance', which causes an individual to see a threat in a potentially safe environment. For psychologists, hypervigilance is a 'post-effect' ascribed as a symptom to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. But for many people for whom trauma is not an isolated event with 'post' effects but an everyday reality, this concept is too narrow. For those people, in my view, hypervigilance is rather a 'side-effect' of the adaptive response of the body to ongoing stressful conditions. As Vigh has noted, "Having to repeatedly regain a hold on the world and on one's positions and possibilities in it, in order to ensure one's well-being, leads one to experience the world as 'perplexing and perilous'", and thereby to be constantly "attentive toward – and act in relation to – the shifts of social forces" (2008: 17). "The consequence of such constant attentiveness is a relentless unease" (ibid.), which I will call, borrowing a term from psychology, 'hypervigilance'.

In my opinion, street life produces a greater risk of stress-related disorders simply because it provides more life-threatening situations than any other environment does, and, in this way, distorts children's perception of normality/abnormality. In many ways, it is our environmental perception of stress that regulates physiological responses. In the case of these children, being in an emergency ready-to-flee position is a normal state, while being in a motionless still position, i.e. by a school desk, is an abnormal situation. In the street, they are encultured into an everyday trauma that adversely impacts their perception of what is normal and what is not. This is one of the plausible reasons why many of these children, even when provided with shelter,

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8 Mostly I was not able to confirm officially their dates of birth as many of them were staying in the streets outside of parental or any other caregiver control. Due to my long-term experience I was assessing their age on the basis of their physical appearance compared with other home-based children.

food, and educational opportunities, ultimately drop out in favour of street life (a common problem faced by the Tanzanian non-governmental workers I met during my fieldwork).

My own psychophysical state during these ongoing stressful circumstances also had its part to play in the above conclusions. Some of its signs, which I blamed myself for (due to my inability to fulfil my vocational duties as a scholar), such as problems with concentration and oversleeping, over the course of time I came to understand to be symptoms of a stress-related disorder that had come to the surface following my first incident of public verbal harassment during my fieldwork. Of course, intellectually my psychophysical resistance to work had a more complex foundation as it was a symptom of withdrawal from memories of the most intensely traumatic period in my life. Nevertheless, this does not negate some obvious correlations between my and the children's experiences, as my disadvantaged position has helped me to puzzle through some of the less visible vicissitudes of their lives.

The (Un)Emphatetic Body

Embodied knowledge about the world gained from the disjuncture between the body and its environment "foster[s] intense awareness of social injustice" (Garland-Thomson 2011: 597), giving a misfit epistemic privilege in tracking less visible trajectories of social exclusion, ones that generally go unnoticed by those who "fit in". When we fit harmoniously and properly into the world, the experience of disjuncture cannot become our lived experience. "Performativity theory would rightly suggest, of course, that no smooth fit between body and world ever exists. Nonetheless, fitting and misfitting occur on a spectrum that creates consequences" (ibid. 2011: 594–595). And the realisation of these consequences can be evoked only through visceral embodied cognition.

Since visceral and not intellectual forces first drive our reactions to human suffering, especially when it becomes our own lived experience, visceral embodied cognition may more effectively bolster human empathy in terms of our ability to understand and actively involve ourselves in issues of social exclusion. For this reason, I have proposed it here as a radical means of fighting social exclusion. The Blue-Eyes/Brown-Eyes workshop on racism by Jane Elliott is a case in point here. In her workshop, participants with different socioeconomic backgrounds and origins are divided into two groups based on the colour of their eyes and put in either an inferior (blue-eyed) or superior (brown-eyed) position. The premise for the exercise is to simulate an apartheid-style regime. Jane Elliott's goal is as she puts it: "to inject live racism into (...) people in hopes that in the future they will decide not to let these things happen to other people." During her exercise, she exerts her hegemonic power on the inferior group, humiliating them and deriding them for a few hours,

so that they can get the feeling of how it is to be a target of racism in a white privileged society. These workshops have been held since the 1960s in many countries, unveiling different reactions in people to racism. Some comments by people who participated in the exercise are worth quoting here. A woman in response to Jane Elliott's question: "What does the exercise teach you?", said: "That I'm worthless." After being asked again: "If I can convince you that you are worthless for forty five minutes, what could I do if I did that for forty years?", she replied: "You could take away my self-being and who I am."[9] Another participant in the feedback to Elliott's exercise said: "You think you know intellectually, but you don't internalize this until you're drawn into this kind of situation where your emotions are being drawn on."

These comments mirror my own self-perception since the first racist attack on my person. A feeling of worthlessness and loss of identity have accompanied my mood ever since. Jane Elliott's exercise proves that a few hours of a bodily exposure to a negative social environment is sufficient to give one a sense of the feelings that some people endure on a daily basis, in some cases, throughout their whole life. Moreover, her exercise shows that this exposure more often than not entails emotional reactions, followed by feelings of worthlessness. For this reason, I argue here for visceral embodied cognition as a means of fighting social exclusion. The techniques used by Jane Elliott are a case in point of this approach, and with appropriate modifications could be applied to fight any form of social exclusion. Evidence for my argument is the participants' views quoted above, which reveal not only the hidden face of racism, but also of other forms of social exclusion, such as daily assaults by people on one's self-respect and personhood. To paraphrase Michael Jackson, the impossibility of being accepted into a society in which one has been seeking his/her place translates into a sense that one is worthless, that one is good for nothing, that one is doomed (2008: 70). By 'his/her place', I understand a sustaining environment to which everyone has a right, and which no one has/is given a right to undermine or violate.

Besides the psychosomatic symptoms of my ill-being as a result of my experience of everyday trauma, what was most distressing was not the direct attack it inflicted on my dignity and autonomy in public, or the unpredictability of when, where and how I could be insulted again, but the reaction of other people present at that moment, manifested in passivity or a more lurid form. After being stunned for a moment following this public assault on my person, and then responding to my victimizer, the next thing I did was to look around. I was surrounded by male petty traders who did nothing but stare and laugh. At that moment, I wanted the ground to open up, and I could

9   All comments and opinions on Jane's Elliott work as well as her own views on racism quoted in my paper may be accessed from different documentary videos of her workshops available on the YouTube channel, i.e. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nqv9k3jbtYU. My interpretation of her work is based on these videos as well.

hardly hold back my tears. I did not know whether they were laughing at me or at my harasser. I had no idea what to think. Since that day, I have had intrusive flashbacks of peals of laughter, and I cannot help but wonder why they behaved as they did. None of the explanations offered by my Tanzanian colleagues, e.g. poor education, an ignorance of others' culture, a scant awareness of human rights, mental illness, could provide me with relief. Although their reasoning was very similar to what I myself would have expressed to victims of racial and other such attacks in my home country, the common explanations for the root causes of racism now seemed to me to be too facile and represented stereotypes in themselves. No advice such as "take it easy", "let it go in one ear and out the other" could comfort me, either. I have not talked with any friends or relatives from my home country about my experience of trauma for the very same reason, as Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois have noted, most twentieth-century anthropologists withdrew from studies of indigenous forms of violence, namely for the fear of bolstering "Western stereotypes of primitivity, savagery, and barbarism" (2004a: 6).

There is one crucial point I cannot grant Jane Elliott. It is her indefatigable zeal to convince the participants of her workshops that "all white people are racists". She points to three features of white people's freedom: "White people's number one freedom is the freedom to be totally ignorant about those who are totally different from themselves. Number two freedom is the freedom to deny that we are ignorant. Number three freedom is to say to the people who are different from ourselves, who accuse us of making a racist remark: "Well, you took it wrong".[10] I would claim that this kind of freedom can be the 'privilege' of any race. During my stay in Tanzania following the first racist attack, on many occasions while talking with people about my experience of being called *mzungu*[11] (white) repeatedly in the street, I was denied the conviction of taking it as a racist remark. As I have already mentioned, my Tanzanian friends tried to comfort me with words such as "take it easy" and so on. One Sunday that I spent with a friend of mine, after talking to her for a few hours about how I felt excluded by society due to being constantly defined by my physical appearance in public places, I saw her off to the bus stand. The first bus that arrived was full, so I told her to wait for another one, as she was with her child, and I was worried the child would not get a seat. The conductor on this bus, hearing a snippet of our conversation, answered me with a loud voice: *"Mzungu hapa sio Ulaya"* which means: "White, here is not Europe". I suppose he thought I was talking about a seat for myself, and

10   See the reference in footnote no. 8.
11   The connotations of the word *mzungu* commonly used by Tanzanians to denote a white person are actually ambivalent. On the one hand, it is used in daily talk to distinguish between an inhabitant and a foreigner, on the other it is clear that its usage by some people is based on a racist premise. My interpretation is a reflection of my fieldwork interactions with people of all racial backgrounds (black/white/Asians).

he meant to deride my 'lazy' and 'comfort-seeking' attitude as a white person. To my surprise, my friend started to giggle. At that moment, she understood what I had been trying to explain to her for the last few hours, but she was not able to embrace it emotionally. For her, this was just an event she had witnessed, while for me it was a lived experience that, as a rule, I experienced on a daily basis.

Jane Elliott's statement that all white people are racists is the kind of attitude that sees "Eichmann in every one of us" (Arendt 1964: 286) because of our skin colour, which may ironically have the adverse effect of becoming a form of blaming-the-victim. Culture is not static, but a dynamically changing entity, and thus, so is racism and other forms of social exclusion, which in today's world, besides overt exclusion and assault, take on increasingly more subtle forms. These forms, paraphrasing Paul Farmer, "are both sinful and ostensibly nobody's fault" (2004: 307). While I was pondering the onlookers' attitude to the street harassment of my person, I simultaneously recalled similar reactions by people to the harassment of street children, namely indifference and passivity. On the other hand, on many occasions when I had a chance to intervene and stand up for the children, I had seen that my attitude encouraged other people to react, as well. One may confirm that evil is truly 'banal' and has two sides: If one person can drag thousands of people into an unprecedented crime, then on the contrary, one person may attract thousands of people to empathize with others' people suffering, which Jane Elliott actually started to do the day after the assassination of Martin Luther King. Given that it was this cruel event that inspired her, was it not empathy that drew her to take action? Empathy is the only emotion that can break the vicious cycle of violence in which our universally vulnerable bodies can end in either well-being or ill-being, or somewhere in-between, depending on our empathetic coexistence.

Conclusion

Since the very first extreme racist and ableist attack on my person, my own self-perception has changed irretrievably, and so has my research perspective on street children's agency. Instead of glamorizing their survival strategies, which indeed deserve to be called "a talent for life" (Des Pres, 1980, quoted in: Scheper-Hughes 2008: 25), I started challenging them. I asked myself about overt forms of violence, which I had become a target of as well, leading me to realise its invisible consequences, such as the internalised, distorted perception of normality/abnormality peculiar to socially oppressed humans. The young female teenager who switched her sex to male to defend herself against potential sexual harassment was later raped by a group of men, and since I received this sad news, I have not seen her again, although I tried my best to find her. Adding to the tragedy of this story was an ex-street boy's reaction to my

hardly breathed words that I felt sorry for her. With a slight smile on his face, he asked me: *"Kwa nini? Kawaida tu"*, which means: "Why? It's normal".

"Young people exercise their creative power (...) in and through their own bodies, setting in motion a process of self-realization and promotion of social status through consumption and expenditure, appearance, and fashion" (Honwana – De Boeck 2005: 11). But what happens if this process is not a freely made choice, and rather than bringing "self-realization and promotion of social status", it imposes on them instead self-protection and resistance to social status through the acquisition of survival skills and strategies such as the manipulation of social roles? Given the above-mentioned incident, this is a rhetorical question emphasizing the irrefutable evidence of the negative effects of street life on the psychophysical well-being of the children. These effects contribute to their exclusion by society as well as to a widening of the socio-economic disparities between them and their peers globally. The experience of human suffering due to social marginalization and oppression (of which any form of social exclusion is an apt exemplification) has one universal path to trace. It is the manner in which we incarnate it, which I have tried to illustrate by applying the perspective of a vicious circle of violence. It is also the manner in which we react to it in the first place, that is, by reacting emotionally rather than simply intellectually. Yet this immediate response, if repeated on a daily basis, more often than not has long-term consequences. The negative ones include a "relentless unease" or emotional indifference. The positive ones can include an "epistemic privilege", that is, an emotional perspective on the issue of social exclusion, stemming from the bodily experiences of the socially excluded entity, which anyone could represent at some point in their life. Becoming both a representative of this entity during my life, and a researcher in the meantime, gave me a potential advantage in terms of uncovering the vicissitudes of other socially excluded entities. Being equipped with sufficient emotional and intellectual capacities, I had to balance between these forces to make good use of this advantage. If I have managed to sensitize you, my readers and colleagues, to any form of social exclusion, or helped you better see its more or less overt or hidden face and realize its less visible impact on our coexistence, and proved that emotions can be equally suitable both as a means for interrogating a subject and as an approach for dealing with it, then I think I have succeeded and did not let my potential advantage be completely lost "in the street war" in which I participated simultaneously as a researcher, activist and survivor.

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