

# ‘Vagrants Wearing Make-up’: Negotiating Spaces on the Streets of Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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**Summary.** Since the start of the financial crisis in late 1997, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of children living and working on the streets of Indonesia, including a dramatic rise in street girls. All street children are marginalised by the state and mainstream society, and this is reflected in the marginality of the spaces they occupy in the streets. In Indonesia, street children are seen by mainstream society to be committing a social violation, as their very presence contradicts state ideological discourse on family values and ideas about public order. Such an offence justifies the ‘cleaning up’ of children from the streets, arrests, imprisonment and, in some extreme cases, torture. This paper seeks to explain how girls in particular suffer discrimination on the streets, and how their social position is doubly marginal to that of street boys. This is because they are seen to be actively violating the construction of femininity in mainstream discourse, where the street is ‘no place for a girl’, an ideology that street boys also adhere to. By examining the lives and experiences of a group of street girls, the paper describes how they are not passive victims of the male gaze, but survivors who actively reject the roles society expects of them. Their behaviour patterns are explained as survival mechanisms that are articulated through their style, income-earning activities and the production of street girl identities. The paper shows how street girls negotiate social and personal spaces that are different from those of boys, and how they have succeeded in creating their own gendered sense of place on the street. These socio-spatial patterns are explained as ‘geographies of resistance’, which are a response to the pervasive patriarchal discourse within Indonesian society, a society which believes that girls, in particular, should not be on the streets.

Almost from the beginning, the presence of women in cities, and particularly in city streets, has been questioned, and the controlling and surveillance aspects of city life have always been directed particularly at women. Urban life potentially challenged patriarchal systems (Wilson, 1991, p. 14).

Since the Asian financial crisis began in August 1997, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of children living and working on the streets of Indonesia (ADB, 1999; *Straits Times*, 2000). Save the Children Indonesia puts the current population of Indonesian street children at 120 000, compared with a pre-crisis figure of 50 000, and

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street girls make up 20 per cent of this figure (Irwanto *et al.*, 1999; *Straits Times*, 2000). Within the past few years, there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of female street children, particularly in the city of Yogyakarta, Central Java.<sup>1</sup>

Street girls are not so visible as boys. This is because they do not earn their money in the same way as boys (by shining shoes, busking and selling goods), due to gender divisions of labour in the informal sector and the socialisation of children in the home. In 1995, a study of child workers in three cities on the island of Java found that

Children working in the formal sector were mostly (90 percent) females while those in the informal sector [which includes the street] were mostly (84 percent) males (Irwanto *et al.*, 1995, p. 7).

The Indonesian state and society have a disapproving attitude towards children working on the streets and perceive them to be a defilement of the city landscape. This is because they do not conform to the image of a modern progressive nation that the state wishes to portray to potential foreign investors (Kusno, 2000, p. 104). Public spaces are being recreated and 'colonised' by globalisation and street children are seen to be 'out of place' and to be committing a social violation, by transgressing that which is considered to be appropriate behaviour (see Harvey, 1996; Cresswell, 1996). In the eyes of the authorities, such an offence justifies the 'cleaning up' of children from the streets. This involves arrests, imprisonment and in some extreme cases torture and extermination (Kusno, 2000, pp. 104–105; Beazley, 1999, 2000a). Street children are also stigmatised through a discourse of deviance in the media and are portrayed as either delinquent runaway thugs, or as helpless and abandoned victims of neglectful parents (Beazley, 1999, 2000a). All street children in Indonesia are thus marginalised by a repressive state and mainstream society, and their social marginality is reflected in the marginality of the spaces that

they occupy on the street (Beazley, 2000a, 2000b).

This paper explores how street girls in particular suffer discrimination on the street and how their social position is even more marginal than that of street boys. This is because they are not only harassed by the state, but also by men and boys on the street.

Elsewhere, I have discussed the street boy communities in Yogyakarta and the formation of their own sub-culture, the *Tikyan*, a name which derives from the Javanese *sithik ning lumayan*, meaning 'just a little but enough' (Beazley, 1999, 2000a). To understand street children's geographical behaviour patterns and the various settings of the sub-culture, I used selected spatial stories, or 'mental maps', that were collected as a participatory research exercise (see Gould and White, 1974; Matthews, 1992). The children were asked to draw a map (or picture) of the parts of the city where they spent most of their time; places which were important to them and which they knew best. By using these maps, I examined the perceptual images the children had of the city and identified the 'activity nodes' that were tied to the various aspects of their lives (Matthews, 1992). The maps illustrated how the children's social marginality is reflected in the places that they occupy (traffic lights, railway tracks, bus stops, public toilets) and which I perceive as urban niches where their access is not rigidly controlled.

It is within these urban niches that street children find solidarity and where their identities as *Tikyan* are constructed and articulated. The analysis demonstrates how street children's geographies are transient, how they identify with particular areas for different activities (work, leisure, pleasure and rest) and how their use of space changes in relation to their age and gender (Beazley, 2000a).

Street boys and girls have found numerous ways in which to protest and refuse their exclusion from society. By consistently moving in the margins, they have developed a

network of socio-spatial strategies in order to survive. Sometimes such techniques are suppressed by the state, but the children are used to persecution and respond by moving to another location and by finding solace in one another.

Peer group communication is therefore extremely important in street children's lives and, due to their own needs for personal survival, they do not want to break out of that connection. To remain accepted, an individual child must conform to the expectations, norms and values of the group. Such values include shifting hierarchies and a rigid surveillance from within and, although in many ways street children sub-cultures are safe spaces, they are also replete with internal rivalry, violence and oppression. These social processes exist in order to preserve the unity of their community and sometimes the expectations of the group go against a street child's own personal needs (Beazley, 1999, 2000a, 2000b).

In this paper, I continue my analysis of the street child sub-culture in Yogyakarta, by examining how these social processes influence behaviour *within* the street child social world, between street boys and street girls. By examining the lives and experiences of 12 street girls (aged between 12 and 20 years) in Yogyakarta, I discuss how—despite their subordinate street status—sub-cultural options are also available to them. I explain the girls' behaviour patterns as survival mechanisms and strategies of resistance, which are articulated through street girls' discourse, style and income-seeking and leisure activities.<sup>2</sup> I also explain how street girls negotiate different social and personal spaces for themselves and how they have succeeded in creating their own gendered space on the street. I see this produced cultural space as a 'microculture' (Wulff, 1988, 1995) which exists beside, and interconnects with, the dominant male street boy sub-culture, the *Tikyan*.<sup>3</sup> I present these socio-spatial patterns as 'geographies of resistance' and as a response to the pervasive patriarchal discourse within Indonesian society, a society which believes that girls in

particular should not be on the street (see Pile and Keith, 1997).

### What is a Street 'Child'?

It is well acknowledged that 'childhood' is a culturally and historically specific institution (Aries, 1962; Holloway and Valentine, 2000). This is no less true in Indonesia, where changing notions of childhood relate to the country's integration into the global capitalist economy and the subsequent ways in which the élite have been influenced by the "global export of modern childhood" (Stephens, 1995, p. 15). The concept of a child varies considerably in Indonesia, depending on the perception of different activities and the national age-related legislation (Bessell, 1998, pp. 14–15).

Street children themselves refer to each other as 'child' (*anak*) well into their early twenties, and it is not uncommon for someone in their late twenties, particularly unmarried girls, to be referred to as *anak*. The children and youth with whom I spent my time in Yogyakarta were mostly between the ages of 8 and 20 years, although many were not really sure of their age.<sup>4</sup> All of them, both boys and girls, referred to themselves as 'street children' (*anak jalanan*). For the purposes of this paper, therefore, this is the age-group to whom I refer as 'street children'.

### Girl Sub-cultures

Many feminist approaches to 'youth sub-culture' have criticised 'sub-cultural theory' for ignoring feminist issues and point to the masculine and sexist elements of sub-cultures that marginalise girls (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; McRobbie and Nava, 1984; McRobbie, 1996; Taylor, 1993).

In addition, and central to the concept of a 'culture of femininity' among feminist sub-cultural theorists, is the contention that girls negotiate a different social space from that of boys, and that those girls who enter male territory do so on male terms, as girlfriends, appendages or whores

(Carrington, 1993, p. 30). McRobbie in particular has stated that sub-culture itself may not be the place for 'feminine excitement'.

Women are so obviously inscribed (marginalised, abused) within sub-culture as static objects (girlfriends, whores or 'faghags') that access to its thrills ... to drugs, alcohol and 'style' would hardly be compensation even for the most adventurous teenage girl (McRobbie, 1991, p. 25).

Street girls in Yogyakarta are also marginalised and abused by street boys, who call them *rendan* in their own language, coming from *kere berdandan*, meaning 'vagrants wearing make-up'. *Rendan*, however, is not a name used by the street girls themselves and they find the word offensive. This is because the name *rendan* is used as a insulting label by street boys, who liken street girls to prostitutes and consider them as subordinate to themselves. It is in this way that street boys assert their difference from the girls, constituting them as powerless objects of sexist discourse and as inferior others (see Walkerdine, 1990, p. 5).

Street girls in Yogyakarta are thus positioned at the bottom of the sub-cultural hierarchy, pushed to the margins of the street kid sub-culture by boundaries that are created from within. By drawing on arguments posited by Carrington (1993) and Miles (1997), however, I contend that street girls are not 'static objects' or 'mere appendages' to street boys within the street kid sub-culture (Carrington, 1993, p. 30). Instead, I argue that street girls do not passively accept their inferior position on the street, but actively attempt to subvert their situation through various psychological, social and spatial resistance strategies.

Recent studies in the UK have shown that the street provides an important social venue for young girls, as well as for boys, but that their use of space often conflicts with that of boys (Matthews *et al.*, 2000; Skelton, 2000; Skelton and Valentine, 1998). Girls in public spaces often find that they are conceptualised as "being the 'wrong' gender and being in the 'wrong' place" (Skelton, 2000, p. 80). As

Skelton (2000) argues, however, girls will frequently resist such a marginal positioning, especially through their friendships and the ways in which they make use of the street as a social space where they create their own social worlds.

### Ideological Discourse

The lives of street girls in Yogyakarta cannot be fully explained without first understanding their environment—that is, the city in which they live: Yogyakarta in Central Java. It is also important to understand the state's ideological construction of femininity, known as *State Ibusim*, which is reproduced through mainstream society's discourse and, subsequently, through the city's landscapes (Suryakusuma, 1996; Wolf, 1996; Gerke, 1993). More specifically, it is important to recognise how these ideological constructions are played out on the street and how street boys have appropriated patriarchal attitudes, despite their own alienation from mainstream society. Such an understanding of gender inequality and patriarchal power relations in Indonesian society helps to explain the stereotyping of street girls as prostitutes, the mistreatment they receive from society and their subsequent need for 'invisibility' on the street.

The city of Yogyakarta is 10 hours by train from the capital city of Jakarta, in south-central Java, and is in one of the poorest and most overpopulated provinces in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> There are few large industries in the city and, with its numerous private and state universities and education establishments, it is most famous as a student town. Domestic and foreign tourism is also extremely important to the city's economy and, before the political and economic crisis of 1997, tourism was a rapidly growing industry and the city's main business activity (Haryadi, 1994, p. 221).

Yogyakarta is the 'undisputed traditional cultural capital' of Indonesia (Smithies, 1987). It was the old capital of Java, the seat of the powerful Mataram dynasty and the focal point during the 1945–49 revolution

against the Dutch (Ricklefs, 1993, pp. 220–233). It is also where President Sukarno (1945–66) declared Indonesia's Independence in 1945. In 1966, President Soeharto (1966–98), who was born in Yogyakarta, took power and led the 'New Order' regime until following the onset of the economic crisis, he was forced to step down in May 1998.<sup>6</sup>

### *State Ibuism*

During Soeharto's 'New Order', ideological indoctrination provided significant assistance to the state's attempts to create a culture of conformity for uniting a highly diverse and unequal society. One of the ideologies constructed by the 'New Order' state in the pursuit of power was a sex and gender ideology, known as *State Ibuism* (Suryakusuma, 1996). *State Ibuism* represses women by emphasising their 'traditional' role, placing them in a subordinate position to men and defining them in narrow stereotypical roles of housekeepers and mothers. Such gender construction may be attributed to the interests of the state in maintaining its power and control over society (Suryakusuma, 1996).

As a result of this patriarchal ideology, girl children in Indonesia are not socialised to spend time on the street, or to work in the public sector, and are usually kept close to home and assigned domestic roles and duties from a very early age (Geertz, 1961; Sullivan, 1994, p. 84). Such gender stereotyping excludes girls from the labour market and binds them to their future role as mother and caretaker of the family home. Mobility restrictions are also enforced, particularly once a girl reaches puberty (de Silva, 1997, p. 53). This is because girls in Indonesia are believed to need protection and guidance sexually, and their movements are restricted to around the 'safe' environment of the family home, a household or a factory (see de Silva, 1997, p. 53).

Many girls when they do work outside the home do so with their mothers in the markets (a traditionally female public space in Yogyakarta), as domestic servants (and there-

fore 'safe' in someone else's home) or in factories. All of these occupations are considered to be respectable positions in safe spaces that are appropriate for young girls.<sup>7</sup> As a result, there are not so many girls working on the streets or in other informal-sector activities (see Blagbrough, 1995; Wolf, 1996; Bessell, 1998). The only other occasions one sees young girls on the streets in Yogyakarta are travelling in groups to and from school, and in the shopping malls with parents or friends (before 9.30pm).

Consequently, girls in Yogyakarta grow up with a limited spatial experience and an internalised fear of the streets as they are frequently warned against its 'dangers'—so they appear less appealing as an option (see Katz, 1993). Further, social stigma and stereotyping are key mechanisms that back up and reinforce many of the restrictions placed on women in Indonesian society. For example, when I talked to boys and girls on the street, they often mentioned how girls were 'supposed' to behave. I was intrigued by this rhetoric and asked them to tell me exactly what was expected of young women by Indonesian society. The children (both boys and girls) answered that women in Indonesia cannot go out after 9.30 in the evening, they cannot go where they please, they cannot drink alcohol, they cannot smoke, they cannot have sex before marriage, they cannot wear 'sexy' clothes and they cannot leave the house without permission. They must be good, nice, kind and helpful, and stay at home to do domestic chores and to look after their children or younger siblings. These answers from the children are a clear example of how gender roles are internalised at an early age.

Women are thus oppressed by Indonesian state ideology and there is a distinct distrust of women who break any of the unwritten rules, act independently or leave the 'traditional sphere' of the home and family. In Indonesia, male dominance is reproduced through pervasive stigmatisation and a woman without a home defies all mainstream conventions. She is seen to challenge the patriarchal view of the ideal family and to

represent chaos. Thus, girls who do not conform to the female stereotype of staying at home, out of sight, being the passive 'ideal girl', are regarded with suspicion and are stigmatised and labelled 'bad girls' (see also Walkerdine, 1990).

### Sphinx on the Street

Due to the very nature of their existence, street girls are mistrusted by mainstream society. The moral message is that the city is a dangerous place for women and the actions and lifestyles of street girls fall outside acceptable behaviour. Any single woman seen on the street after 9.30pm is viewed by society as sexually permissive and a 'bad woman' or a prostitute, and prostitutes are officially labelled by the state as 'women without morals' (*WTS* or *Wanita Tuna Susila*). The way the label 'tramp' is interpreted when applied to women compared with men reflects similar stigmas existing in our own society. As Lucchini says of street girls in Argentina, but which is equally relevant for street girls in Indonesia

The street world is before all masculine. The presence of girls in the street upsets the values and representations of adults. Uneasiness takes place, and the explanation of this presence goes through a pathologisation of the girl and her family. The marginal girl and the delinquent girl are soon associated to sexuality (Lucchini, 1994, p. 8).

Men on the streets of Yogyakarta adhere to these same patriarchal beliefs that the street is fundamentally a male space, run by men. Along with other street codes, they pass these beliefs down to street boys, who subsequently hold a contemptuous and dismissive attitude towards street girls.

While I was in Yogyakarta, I frequently saw street boys mocking street girls, calling them names and sometimes even hitting them or kicking them. The girls suffered this abuse from street boys more than from any other group of men on the street. I think this was because street girls were one group over

whom the boys actually had some control, and to whom they felt superior. Street boys I knew felt very strongly that if girls want to be on the street then they have to comply with their rules and values, which are necessarily masculine and tough. If they do not like it, then they should not be there.

### Producing Margins: *Tikyan* versus *Rendan*

During focus group discussions and informal interviews, I asked the boys to explain why they thought it was alright for them to be on the street, but not the girls. The overwhelming response was that the street was 'no place for a girl'. Many of the boys expressed this sentiment, and one boy said to me: "If my little sister lived like that I would kill my father for allowing it to happen, as she should not be allowed to be on the street" (Eko, 14). The boys felt that the girls should seek good jobs that are 'more honourable', such as a being a domestic help (*pembantu*). There were also boys who felt that the girls were "lazy to work", as all they did all day was "sit, eat, sleep, sit, eat, sleep ... continuously" (Budi, 15). This was an interesting point of view, and is exactly the same attitude that so many people in mainstream society have towards street boys.

Street boys, therefore, do not see street girls as being the same as themselves, even though they are often on the streets for similar reasons.<sup>8</sup> The boys felt that it is acceptable for them to be on the street, as it is a masculine space, but they strongly disapprove of girls living on the streets and think that they should be at home.

Street girls are considered by most street boys to be a different group, and 'other' to themselves, and as being more comparable to prostitutes than to street children.

When I asked one boy about street girls, "*Cewek* (girls) *anak jalanan* (street kids)", he said "There aren't any". I then asked "What about *rendan*?" and he said "Oh them! They're not street kids, they're *rendan* ... almost the same as prostitutes" (Rahmad, 13). As McRobbie and Garber (1976, p. 217) point out, males in most societies



**Figure 1.** Positioning street girls as 'other'. The cartoon reads: *Street boys*: "Mbah ... are 'Rendan' allowed to join in Kartini Day celebrations?" "Ssh! Who says they can't?" *Girl*: "Mbah ... they say that Kartini wanted women to have the same rights as men ...". *Boy*: "BUT REMEMBER KARTINI WAS NOT A 'RENDAN'".

have divided the female world into "women-with-hearts-of-gold-who-look-after-them, and prostitutes", and have the idea that women are either virgins or whores. This dichotomy is the focal point of the Indonesian state's gender ideology and street girls are caught in its pitfalls and contradictions.

### Ibu Kartini

The street boys' attitude toward *rendan* is clearly illustrated in a cartoon in a street boy magazine *Jejal* (Figure 1), which is produced by a local non-government organisation (NGO) that assists street boys, *Girli*. The cartoon positions *rendan* as being entirely 'other' to an almost mythical figure in Indonesia, Ibu Kartini or 'Mother Kartini', a recognised Indonesian feminist ('*Mbah Boro*' cartoon, *Jejal*, April 1997, p. 30). In the 19th century, Kartini lived in a town,

Jepara, which is not far from Yogyakarta. As part of the state's ideological construction of femininity, Kartini is represented in government discourse as the epitome of the 'good woman' with a 'heart of gold' in Indonesia. She has been officially sanctioned by the Indonesian government as the ideal Indonesian woman, wife and 'mother', and is perceived as having possessed all the nurturing, self-sacrificing qualities that a woman should desire (Tiwon, 1996, p. 57). The cartoon suggests that if a girl does not behave in the correct and proper way—in the way Kartini is believed to have behaved (by adhering to dominant patriarchal ideology)—she has no rights, least of all equal rights to those of men.

What is interesting about this cartoon, is that the history of Kartini has been reworked and her words 'rearticulated' by the state (Tiwon, 1996, pp. 56–57). In reality, Kartini

was a young woman who wanted to rebel against the shackles of 'tradition' (*adat*), marriage and family. She wanted to be free and independent and not to be dependent on her father or her husband, but only herself. She wrote these desires in her now-famous private letters to a friend in Holland (Tiwon, 1996, pp. 56–57). Kartini understood that it was wrong and 'sinful' to have such yearnings and, eventually, succumbed to the pressures of élite society, and a father she loved, by marrying a man she did not want and, subsequently, dying in childbirth aged 25 years old.<sup>9</sup> When reading the words of Kartini: "I long to be free, to be allowed, to be able to make myself independent, to be dependent on no-one else ... happiness is freedom" (Tiwon, 1996, p. 55), I am reminded of the same sentiments which were frequently expressed to me by street girls in Yogyakarta, almost a century after Kartini died.

Regardless of the fact that street boys are powerless children, marginalised and ill-treated by the control of an oppressive state, they are also perpetrators of patriarchal social relations, and street girls are one group to whom they feel superior. In this way, the boys 'stake a claim to the mainstream' and create new margins within the street child world (see Murray, 2001, pp. 154–156). They do this by asserting their differences from street girls through male performance identities and labelling them as *rendan* and 'other', thus assuming a moral authority over the girls and "seizing power" (see Walkerdine, 1990, p. 6). A process of 'shifting marginalities' thus accommodates them while further alienating others and maintaining power at the centre (see Murray, 2001, pp. 154–156). As Walkerdine (1990, p. 5) asserts: "An individual can become powerful or powerless depending on the terms in which his/her subjectivity is constituted".

### **Resistance to Patriarchal Social Structures**

Women are not passive victims of circumstance locked into a private sphere, unable or unwilling to make a difference in their

own lives. Instead ... men occupy multiple and shifting sites, employ a range of strategies, and experience a wide variety of spatial relations ... Women are able to negotiate spatiality in a variety of ways: while some do largely in their spaces of confinement, some ... as a strategy of resistance are able to breach the boundaries imposed on them (Huang and Yeoh, 1996, p. 107).

The Indonesian state's attempts to keep women in the home are highly incompatible with most people's lives. As Gerke (1993, pp. 47–48) emphasises, such policies are merely an imposition of middle-class values that have moulded 'traditional' practices to suit the needs of dominant groups to create a passive, socialised workforce and to control overpopulation and unemployment. Such ideologies only see women in relation to their husbands and children, thus ignoring their roles in the labour market and the fact that many women are economically independent and dominant members of the household. Far from being 'idle', in reality, women in Java are traditionally economically independent, autonomous decision-makers, who have to cope with the problems of poverty, unemployment and oppression in their families' everyday lives (Sullivan, 1994, p. 111). Such an actuality means that women cannot stay at home looking after their children, but must go out to work.

Further, the impact of the New Order's economic restructuring has created many social changes and these have placed an enormous strain on the traditional patterns of family structures. Growing male unemployment and lack of work in rural and urban areas have seen many adults (male and female) migrating to work on plantations in Malaysia. Significant numbers of young women have also started working in factories or as housemaids in Singapore and the Middle East, leaving their children in others' care, and this has caused the desertion and dislocation of many families (Robinson, 1991; Wolf, 1992; Cox, 1992, p. 12). It has



also resulted in children needing to work on the streets to supplement the family income.

The 'traditional' concepts of women and children's roles in society as promoted by the state are, therefore, the antithesis of the role of the majority of lower-class families in Javanese society. In reality, there has been a crucial gender dimension to the form of economic restructuring pursued by the Indonesian 'New Order' state. However, as Huang and Yeoh (1996) have identified in Singapore, and Desai (2002) in the slums of Bombay, poor urban women are not passive victims of circumstance, but are able to cope with repressive situations by developing their own "diverse and subtle strategies to bring about change and enhance their lives" (Desai, 2002, p. 374). These strategies are both social and spatial and can be viewed as a form of informal politics that are crucially important as a form of empowerment for individuals, and which represent young women's 'citizenship in action' (Desai, 2002).

As a result of the social environment in which they live—one dominated by patriarchal discourse—street girls have similarly adopted particular styles, behaviour patterns, informal networks and discourse in their everyday lives in order to empower themselves. These are their own 'subtle strategies' that are integrated into their lifestyle as survival strategies and as strategies of resistance to their marginalisation and sexual subordination in a male-dominated street world.

Street girls are very aware of existing social rules and the image that they create by being out alone at night, but the majority of them say it does not bother them. They say they are *cuek* (could not care less) and to let people think what they like (*biarin*). Such linguistic responses can be understood as one way in which the girls 'resist' the claims of dominant groups in mainstream society.

Leaving home itself can be seen as a girl's first refusal of ideological constraints placed upon her. Many girls told me of how they left home because of violence or abuse, or because they were "bored of being stuck in the house all day" doing domestic chores and

not being allowed out. They wanted to escape to be 'free as a bird' and they stressed how much they enjoyed living on the street with friends who feel the same way, being able to take their own decisions and living as they pleased.<sup>10</sup> As Skelton (2000, p. 92) found among working-class girls in Wales, street girls in Yogyakarta are also "escaping from the home" to the public streets, as an escape route from their domestic responsibilities.

Tonight I was sitting with two girls, Sita and Ety. I had just finished dressing Sita's hand which had 4 stitches after a friend cut her with a knife because of "too much emotion—it's normal for friends", she told me. Kirik (a street boy, aged about 14) came and sat beside me and said "this is a *rendan*" pointing at Ety and then, "this is also a *rendan*", pointing at Sita. Ety hit Kirik's leg, while Sita just laughed at him, got up and walked back towards the Toilet. I asked Kirik "don't you like *rendan*?", and he said he didn't know them, to which I replied "that's not true, you have lots of friends who are *rendan*". He smiled and said yes he did know them but that he did not really like them, that they were *nakal*, naughty, which is normal for boys, but girls should not be like that as they are "still small" (he used his hand to demonstrate how small they are). Ety sat and glared at him and then, mid-sentence, he got up and left. Once he had gone back to parking I asked Ety if she minded being called *rendan*. She said she didn't really care, but that the girls themselves don't call themselves *rendan*, just *anak jalanan*, street kids. She said that mainstream society (*masyarakat umum*) think that any girl who is out on the street at night "after 10 o'clock" is like all bad women, a prostitute. I asked her how that makes her feel, and she replied "*biarin!*", (let them!). She then said that although people thought that, it was still far better being on the street than being "*sumpek*" (stifled), at home in the house where you "*benar-be-*

*nar merasa kesal*" (are really feel fed up). I then asked:

- H: "Are you happy (living) in the street?"  
 E: "Of course I'm happy!"  
 H: "What's so nice about (living in) the street?"  
 E: "You're free and independent, there isn't anyone to tell you off. At home you are constantly busy; you have to do this job, do that job, working, working all the time. It's boring at home. When I went home I was shouted at so now I don't want to go home again. It's much nicer in the street" (fieldnotes, Yogyakarta, July 1997).

Many of the street girls came from small towns and villages in the central Java district. The city offers attractions and more opportunity and freedom than the village, and is often a source of liberation for the girls, just as the factory was for Wolf's 'factory daughters' in Jakarta (Wolf, 1992, 1996).

As young girls in Indonesia are excluded from public spaces and are forbidden to leave the house and surrounding grounds, to compensate they often watch television avidly. They are fascinated by soap operas and consume media and TV images of the bright lights and glamorous city lifestyles which seem so much more inviting to them than their boring domestic existence. With the pervasiveness of communication media into the villages, almost all girls in Indonesia have been exposed to the powerful and glamorous female images of the new millennium portrayed as free and independent, such as Madonna, Britney Spears and the *Dangdut* stars.<sup>11</sup> These women have become strong role models for young girls. Although it is difficult to assess the direct effect of mass media on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals, the images of global youth culture in magazines and on the TV are far more pervasive than even the government's ideological construction of femininity, and much more appealing as an agent of socialisation to a young girl.

The phenomenon of 'loose girls' (*perek*) in Jakarta is an example of the way in which Indonesia's female youth is being affected by the process of globalisation.<sup>12</sup> *Perrek* are young middle-class girls who take control of their lives by expressing their self-determination and 'experimenting' with their sexuality and new-found independence. As Murray says of *perrek*

These girls are influenced by the commodification of society and rising expectations created by the media and advertising, and reject the superficial morality which would curtail their ability to fulfil those materialistic expectations. They emphasise their autonomy, [and] have sex with whoever they feel like (Murray, 2001, pp. 36–37).

There is little doubt that the economic and political crisis, and more recently, the events of 11 September, have affected thousands of families throughout Indonesia in a detrimental way (Beazley, 2001; Ting and Walsh, 1998).<sup>13</sup> As a result, there are more girls living on the streets than ever before (ADB, 1999). One reason for this is because "traditional family structures that once kept girls more protected than boys are breaking down in the face of long term economic difficulties" (Barker, 1991, p. 1). I also believe, however, that there are more girls living on the streets due to the impact of global capital. Girls, in particular, are restricted by the culture of conformity and sexist role stereotyping which exist in Indonesia, and are rebelling against it.

### Spaces for Street Girls: Geographies of Resistance

Space is neither dominator nor liberator—it does, however, provide a context within which occur struggles to dominate and overcome domination (Breitbart, 1984, p. 72).

Having often escaped from stifling condi-

tions at home, however, street girls find that they are still not as 'free as a bird' from patriarchal ideology. Instead, they end up embracing one form of oppression (the street culture) while escaping another (the home). They soon find that the street is not "magically protected" from dominant gender constructions (see Miles, 1997, p. 71). Instead, they find that it is the same ideology that rules the street as the home, and that the relationship between street boys and girls is by no means egalitarian. As Miles suggests, however

Subcultural space as such does not guarantee freedom from constraint, but for some it does provide a site of reflection and negotiation (Miles, 1997, p. 76).

Once on the street, the girls are forced to negotiate their place and identity politics by developing various strategies for survival and safety through different productions and uses of space in the city. As a response to their male-dominated environment, they have erected and maintain a group boundary, which is physically located at the city park in the south of the city. I had previously met some street girls when they were 'visiting' the street boys at their gathering-point in the centre of the city, at the public toilet on the main street, Malioboro (Beazley, 2000a). At these times, the girls were fairly passive and silent. It was not until I visited them in their own cultural space, the city park, where they slept and 'hung out', that I really got to know them.

Due to the social environment they inhabit, street girls have a different perspective of the city from that of street boys, and specific ways of negotiating and using social and personal spaces for their everyday survival. As described, street girls have been firmly labelled as permissive by society, as their lifestyles fall outside acceptable behaviour. Despite their stigmatisation, however, street girls have managed to carve out their own niches in the city, as a resistance to the alienation they experience every day. One way in which they have done this is by constructing their own gendered gathering-space at the city park (Taman)—a female-

dominated space, to which they can retreat if they have had enough of the outside male world.

The Taman was a gathering-place for a group of about 12 street girls (aged between 12 and 20 years old). These girls slept and kept their possessions in a small house at the gates of the park and, during the day, they would 'hang out' in a sheltered part of the building and in other parts of the park. The girls who lived in this park called themselves the 'Park Kids' (*Anak Taman*). When they were in this space, their behaviour was very different from when they were in the street boy spaces, as they were far more vocal, gregarious and confident.

As Skelton (2000) found with the Rhondda Valley girls, by banding themselves together street girls can enjoy relative safety, as they realise that the only way of protecting themselves on the street is to form a gang. McRobbie and Garber (1976, p. 221) have, in the past, commented on the fact that girls do not "need groups" or have the masculine desire to "hang around together". However, McRobbie has more recently stated that

Gangs are part of the disconnected fragmented expressions of dissent that characterise feminism in the Nineties (quoted in Brinkworth, 1997, p. 133).

This phenomenon is powerfully illustrated in Brinkworth's (1997) work on girl gangs and street violence in Britain.<sup>14</sup> She notes that girls today are increasingly involved in street crime, robberies and drug deals and, whereas in the past they would have been "hangers-on of notorious male gangs", today they form their own gangs and cultivate the reputation of being 'hard' as a method of survival for: "If you can't work a reputation on the street, people will see you as a piece of dirt".<sup>15</sup>

### **Girl Power**

Street girls in Yogyakarta have similarly seen how aggression and the male approach commands respect on the street and in the home, and they copy it, thus gaining more confidence as well as status on the street. In

response to their social marginality, the Taman girls adopt particular styles, behaviour patterns and discourse in their everyday lives. These are integrated into their lifestyle as survival strategies, and as strategies or resistance to what can be understood as their marginalisation and sexual subordination in a male-dominated street life. The girls almost always wore jeans and men's shirts, and cut their hair short or hid it in baseball caps. This is partly to remain less conspicuous as a single girl on the street, but I also read it as an act of 'refusal' of the constructions of femininity in Indonesian society (see Hebdige, 1979, p. 3). The girls identified being female with being vulnerable and rejected female clothing for these reasons. This was a survival strategy for the girls as it makes them less visible and therefore less vulnerable to attack.

The Taman girls also smoke cigarettes (something 'not done' in Indonesia) and they regularly took pills and alcohol as a form of diversion and escapism.<sup>16</sup> The girls told me that they took these pills with cheap alcohol in order to "forget bad thoughts" and to relieve "stress".

Pills help you forget bad thoughts and problems. They make you fly, sometimes for as long as three days. When you wake up you can't remember anything of what you did. It's great! (Novi, 15).

The alcohol and pills help the girls release rage, frustration and dissatisfaction with their circumscribed female role. Sometimes they also take morphine and heroine, administering it through razor cuts in their arms. They mix it with their blood and then suck. "It tastes really nice", they said.

Like the street boys, most of the girls had tattoos, and many of them had the name of their boyfriend tattooed on their hand. As well as tattoos and body piercing, the girls have numerous razor cuts, often in rows up the insides of their arms. These cuts are a sign of their sub-culture and present a tough and anti-feminine image. The girls often said that they made the cuts in order to "feel the pain", but they also thought they looked

'cool' (*hebat*). Almost all of the girls had these scarifications on their arms and I read them as a 'social inscription', which can be understood as a "public collective, social category, in modes of inclusion or membership" (Grosz, 1994, pp. 140–141). It was a sign of belonging to their group. When discussing female punks use of body piercing, Miles refers to Hebdige's work on semiotic readings, and how women play defiantly with signifiers and "play back images of women as icons".

Here the female body was viewed as a site of empowerment, a place where the power can be appropriated within sexual discourse ... a symbolic means of reinscribing the body ... and if the body is the bottom line, then piercing becomes an act of refusal—a tactical block, a place to regain control (Miles, 1997, pp. 68–69).

Piercing, tattooing and scarification can thus be understood as an 'act of refusal' by the street girls and as an objection to dominant ideology which seeks to control their bodies. By wearing men's clothes, drinking alcohol, taking pills and cutting her arms, a girl is displaying how hard she is, thus 'working a reputation on the street' and placing herself on a more equal level to both her female and male peers, who respect such a display.<sup>17</sup>

Most girls would like the same livelihoods as street boys and to earn their own money (particularly by busking, shining shoes or petty trading). However, in Yogyakarta, street girls are ostracised from these positions (and spaces to work in) by street boys and public attitudes also make it difficult.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, they survive by taking boyfriends to look after them. Boyfriends are local boys or other street boys, who provide them with food, clothing and protection in exchange for regular sex.

Although street girls are seen to be synonymous with prostitutes, prostitution is only an occasional way of obtaining income for street girls. It is not something practised on a regular basis, while some girls never do it. It is simply one survival strategy and the girls do not regard themselves (or each other) as a

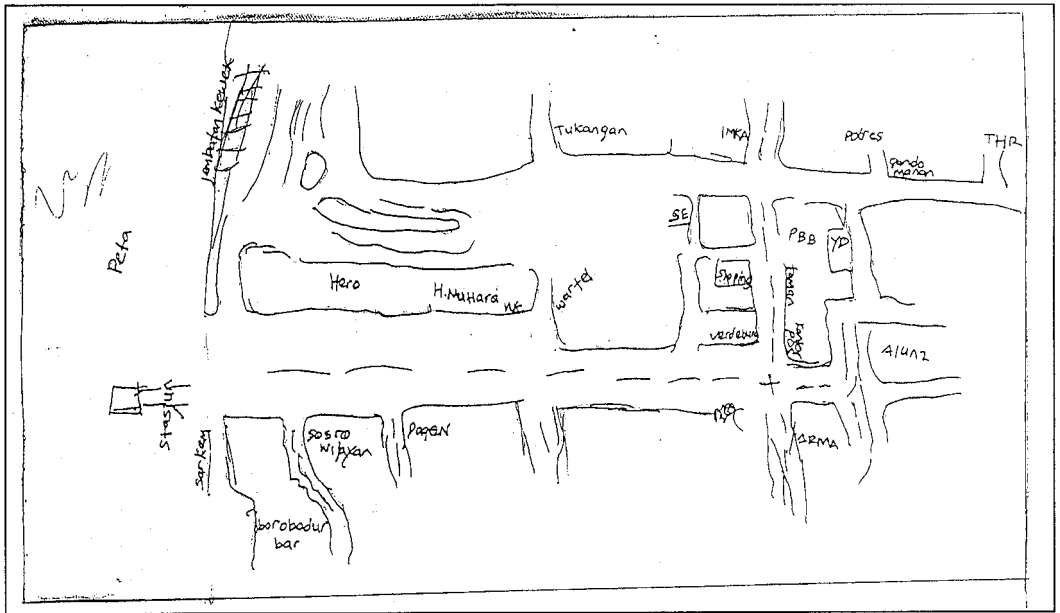


Figure 2. Fifteen-year-old Emy's map of Yogyakarta.

prostitute if they occasionally trade sex for money or, more often, a meal. Boyfriends, however, are the principal form of income and protection for the street girls. They are sought after to buy the girls clothes and regular meals, and to protect them. Usually boyfriends slept with the girls at the Taman. This is thought to be totally unacceptable behaviour in Indonesia, where sex before marriage is taboo and living together out of wedlock is considered indecent (Bennett, 2001, p. 3).

### Gendered Geographies

The effects of these geographies of resistance are multiple, fluid, dynamic and in some ways uncontainable or at least unintended (Pile, 1997, p. 27)

Street girls occupy different areas in the city from street boys, because the girls use the city differently. For example, they sleep and gather at the Taman, but they also visit different places in the daytime and at night.

From their mental maps, it can be seen

that, as well as sleeping and 'hanging out' at the Taman, the girls visit different places in the city from street boys, including *THR* (the public entertainment park), *Hero* (the mall from where street boys are excluded by security guards), the '*BB*' (the Borobodur Bar, a tourist bar where sex workers operate and where they can perhaps meet foreign men), *ARMA* (a radio station where young people hang out), *SE* (a supermarket near to the Taman) and the Mutiara Hotel on the main street, Malioboro, where they 'hang out' at night (Figure 2).

Street girls also operate differently from street boys. Although they gather in a fairly large group at the Taman, when they are not there, they move around the city in twos or threes. This is partly to be less visible in the street due to the threat of violence or rebuke. Besides the need for invisibility, however, girls also move around the city in small groups because they do not have the same masculine dependency on groups or solidarity as street boys. This is something that McRobbie and Garber (1976, pp. 221–222) note when discussing the rea-

sons for the 'invisibility' of girl sub-cultures. As mentioned earlier, however, McRobbie has more recently noted the tendency for girls to adopt masculine styles and to form gangs as an expression of dissent, and due to their need for protection and to survive on the street.

During the daytime, the girls are much less mobile than street boys. This is partly due to their lack of income-earning activities, and they 'hang out' and sleep at the Taman, eat at one of the street stalls in the city square, or wander around the shopping area for entertainment. At night, however, they are highly mobile and move around the city far more than the street boys. This is because unlike street boys, who usually only mix socially with each other at night, street girls move between different social groups in Yogyakarta, in order to find different boyfriends and sources of income.

An integral part of street girls' daily survival strategies involves moving across social spaces to socialise with different groups, in their own territories. These groups include *becak* (cycle rickshaw) drivers outside the shopping centre; buskers in the market, at bus stops or in the city square; university and college students on Malioboro, the main street; *Om* 'uncles', outside the hotel; and local *kampung* (poor urban housing) boys at the entertainment park.<sup>19</sup> When they are out at night, the girls go dancing to *Dangdut* music at the *THR* (which they get into free by scaling the wall), they hang out with university boys outside the Mall and along Malioboro, and they sometimes go on trips away with university or *kampung* boys on their motorbikes, to *Paris* (the nickname for the beach Parangtritis 40 km away) and to the hill resort Kaliurang in the foothills of the volcano Mount Merapi. They also sometimes go for a ride in a *becak*, around the city with a *becak* driver from the shopping centre. One girl, Sylvie (14), explained to me how each girl at the Taman has her own *becak* driver friend, a 'special friend', who takes her around the city. When I asked how the girls pay for these rides, she said

Well the *becak* drivers have money and we don't right? So they give us money or

something to eat in exchange for our friendship, and we compromise.

All these different groups of boys and men are potential sources of income, alcohol, drugs or a meal, and every night the girls move around the city creating and maintaining these contacts. They also shift their identities according to where they are in the city and with which groups they 'hang out'. As well as forming relationships with these males, the girls also form friendships with female stall-owners on Malioboro and in the markets. These stall-owners are useful for credit and protection.

Street girls do sometimes visit the street boys at their gathering-place on Malioboro, (the toilet, marked on the map as 'WC'), but they seldom visit the Toilet where the street boys congregate unless invited, because they do not feel welcome or comfortable there and they are often treated with contempt. The girls' maps do show, however, that there are some spaces which the girls share with street boys, including: *IMKA* (a bus stop near the Taman where many of the street boys busk with guitars); *THR* (the entertainment area where live music is played and where the girls told me they go to look for boyfriends, and where the street boys go to 'look for *rendan*'); a particular food stall on Malioboro, outside the Mall; and the city square (*Alun 2*). None of the girls identifies *Ger-bong* (the transvestite and prostitute area next to the train station which was in all of the boys' maps) in their maps, as they never go there (Beazley, 2000a). Further, the girls' knowledge of the market and shopping area (*shopping*) is far more detailed than that of the boys, as it is where they spend much of their time during the day when they are not in the Taman.

Due to their social and spatial exclusion, street girls are forced to create spaces within which they can survive. Such socio-spatial patterns can be seen as survival strategies for the street girls. Further, their movements through the city across different social spaces, although perhaps 'unintended' as geographies of resistance, do mean that the girls blend into the city and are harder to detect than the street boys (see Pile and Keith, 1997).

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that street girls particularly encounter abusive discrimination on the streets of Indonesia, because they are seen to be committing a 'heretical geography' by violating ideas of femininity in state discourse and by 'invading' the street that is fundamentally a male space (see Cresswell, 1996). I have shown how, although street boys are themselves powerless children, suppressed by the control of an oppressive regime, street girls are one group to whom they feel they are superior and over whom they have power. For these reasons, street girls suffer ill-treatment from many street boys, who believe that girls should not be on the street.

In this way, street girls endure a type of multiple stigmatisation as they are victims of contempt, not only from mainstream society, but also from within the street sub-culture itself. Through the *Tikyan* discourse, street boys use difference to divide and rule, by accommodating themselves and alienating street girls, thus creating "boundaries of shifting marginality" within the street kid sub-culture (Murray, 2001, pp. 154–156). This is done by refusing girls their status as street kids and by labelling them as *rendan* or 'other'. Consequently, a street girl's existence on the street is even more marginal than that of a street boy, as she is at the 'bottom' of the sub-cultural hierarchy, pushed to the margins of the street culture by boundaries which are created from within an already marginalised group.

Such reproduction of mainstream patriarchal attitudes has affected social processes and everyday street behaviour in Yogyakarta. I have shown, however, that street girls are not passive victims of the male gaze, or mere appendages of street boys, but have been successful in negotiating the street child sub-culture to produce their own gendered sense of space. In response to their social exclusion and 'doubly structured subordination', street girls actively attempt to subvert patriarchal ideology by rejecting the sexist label *rendan* and identifying

themselves instead as 'street kids' and as the same as the boys (see Powell and Clarke, 1976, p. 226). This is achieved by drinking, smoking, taking drugs, having tattoos and razor slashes, wearing boys' clothes and talking and acting tough, thus 'refusing' the conventional notions of femininity in dominant discourse. The girls are thus participating in the spectacle of street kid sub-culture, by 'working a reputation' for themselves and by seeking visible identities and styles that are at once similar to the style of street boys and outside mainstream respectabilities.

Further to these general resistance strategies, however, there are also spatio-temporal geographies of resistance involved in the range of survival mechanisms adopted by street girls in Yogyakarta, and the girls negotiate a different production and use of space from their male counterparts in order to survive. The girls with whom I spent my time had attached themselves to a particular site in the city, the City Park (Taman) and refer to themselves as the 'Taman kids', thus creating a positive self-identity for themselves as a street-girl culture. I see this place attachment as a survival mechanism and 'geography of resistance'. The Taman is a site of liberation for the girls, where they can dress and act as they like, because it is their own space, a place that gives them a feeling of belonging, to which they can go to if they feel unsafe. In addition to this place attachment, the girls experience a wide variety of spatial relations over a number of different social sites. These socio-spatial patterns are survival strategies, as well as additional geographies of resistance in a society that seeks to restrict the mobility of single women in the city, especially at night. These tactics of resistance which street girls have adopted in the face of their multifaceted marginalisation can be recognised as a production of their own separate culture, which exists beside and interacts with the street boy, *Tikyan*, sub-culture, and which can be understood as a 'micro-culture' within the street kid sub-culture of Yogyakarta.

## Notes

1. The Asian Development Bank recently reported that in July 2000 there were 1600 street children in the city of Yogyakarta, of whom 500 were girls (*Straits Times*, 2000). The survey found that the average age of female street children is between 4 and 18 years.
2. This paper is based on material from my PhD thesis in Human Geography at the Australian National University (Beazley, 1999). Fieldwork was conducted over 14 months in the city of Yogyakarta, central Java, while I worked as a volunteer for a street girl organisation InasSwasti. The data were collected through informal interviews, focus group discussions and PRA activities (including the collection of mental maps) with a group of 12 girls, aged 12–20 years old, who lived in the City Park. Since completing my PhD, I have returned to Yogyakarta on three occasions to observe the impact of the Asian financial crisis on street children and youth (Beazley, 2001). The girls no longer live in the city park but, to protect their identities, the girls' names have also been changed.
3. In order to retain a micro scale perspective within sub-cultural ethnography, Wulff (1995, 1988) employs the concept of micro-culture to mean a 'small group culture', or a culture within a sub-culture, when writing about a group of 20 girls in south London.
4. Most children I met were unsure of their age. This is because they left home without any form of identification or record of their birth and so, after a few years on the street, they forget the year they were born. In addition, age and birthdays are often not observed in Indonesia and when one asks the age of a child one is usually only told which class they are in at school (Beazley, 1999).
5. The population densities in the province of Yogyakarta are about 1000 per square kilometre, compared with the Indonesia average of 85 per square kilometre. White and Tjandraningsih (1998, p. 42) note, however, how "despite acute population densities and undeniable poverty, the region scores surprisingly well on a number of social and demographic indicators". More recently, since the impact of the socioeconomic crisis in Indonesia, there has been a large jump in rates of severe malnutrition levels among children in Central Java, particularly girls (Hull, 1998).
6. The 'New Order' regime was a 'distinctive institution' that oversaw rapid social and economic change, and the consolidation of a social order which was widely accepted (Hill, 1994, p. xiii).
7. See Robinson (1991) for a discussion about the familial assumptions of domestic service in Indonesia.
8. Street girls often end up on the street for reasons similar to those of street boys. Some of the reasons given by girls for leaving home included: being unloved and beaten, alcoholic fathers, pressure to do well at school, vicious step-mothers or step-fathers, sexual abuse in the home by a relative, following friends, sisters or boyfriends, and the attraction of street life. This attraction was linked to being bored at home with no friends, too many rules, too much housework and wanting to be as 'free as a bird'. Other girls became pregnant and were too *malu* (ashamed) to face their parents or the neighbours, preferring to have the child on the street.
9. Kartini's letters leave the impression that she agreed to her arranged marriage because of her love for her father, an example of social pressure felt in a very personal way. Thanks to my anonymous reviewer for this observation.
10. See also Wolf (1992, 1996) who had similar findings among 'factory daughters' in central Java. The girls are "bored at home" (1992, p. 1) and bored by their domestic chores, and seek factory work on their own initiative without asking their parents' permission. Wolf writes that the girls "resist being pushed to the narrow edge circumscribed by patriarchal norms that bind women to their children and families" (Wolf, 1992, p. 261).
11. *Dangdut* is a form of modern 'pop' music which is particularly popular among the working class in Indonesia. The music is associated with drum and Malayan rhythm and is also influenced by Indian film music. For a discussion of *dangdut* and how it relates to Indonesian cultural nationalism and identity, see Simatupang (1996).
12. *Perek* is an acronym for *perempuan eksperimental*, or 'experimental girls' (Murray, 2001, p. 36).
13. During a visit to Indonesia in December 2001, I noted that the number of tourists visiting the country had declined dramatically since the US attacks and the subsequent bombing of Afghanistan. In addition, many foreign nationals closed their businesses and fled the country after the bombing of Afghanistan began. This was due to large-scale (but peaceful) anti-American demonstrations in Jakarta and threats against Americans and British citizens by fundamentalist Muslims who supported bin Laden (and



- many of whom went to Afghanistan to support the Taliban and fight the *Jihad*—the Holy War). From personal communication with people affected during this time, I understand that the decline in tourism has had a detrimental impact on the livelihoods of many of those on the tourist island of Bali and also in Yogyakarta, a city whose economy also depends on tourism.
14. See also Décugis and Laïb's article (2001) about the recent social phenomenon of girl gangs (*bandes*) in Paris.
  15. Brinkworth (1997, p. 132) quoting a 17-year-old 'Peckham Rude Girl', a member of a notorious south-east London girl gang.
  16. There are different types of pills which the girls (and street boys) take, most of which are doctor prescription pills for mental health disorders, stress or epilepsy (such as Mogadon, Valium or Rohipnol). Hence their nickname by the street kids: *obat gendeng* 'crazy medicine'. These pills can be bought on the streets for as little as 75 pence (US\$1) a 'strip' (a strip of 10 tablets).
  17. Lucchini (1994, p. 23) has noted how street girls in Argentina similarly show courage and act tough, in order to gain more respect from street boys. He states that by "taking risks identical to those of a boy, she ceases to be simply as object of desire".
  18. The only time I saw girls working was when they were invited to join a group of boys busking on the street.
  19. *Om* (uncle) was the name given by the girls to middle-aged men who come and visit the girls and offer them a meal or money, in exchange for sex (sometimes at an hotel if they are well-off).
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