

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

David B. Wangsgard for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology presented on May 4, 2001. Title: Street Children: The Other Side of Tourism in Hue, Viet Nam.

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Street children are a significant presence in Hue, Viet Nam's tourist center, where they eat, sleep, work, and play. Utilizing ethnographic methods, this study examines how tourism impacts the lives of street children involved in the industry. The street children have generally been compelled to leave home because of adverse conditions there. Prospects of making considerable amounts of money, as well as freedom and good times, drew the children to the street and to Hue's tourist center, which they considered to be a better option than life at home. Over time, the street children have gained insights into Western culture through their interactions with Western tourists. Using their understanding of Western tourists' values, the street children manipulate and exploit the tourists for financial gain.

The street children's lifestyle, which is supported by tourism, is contrary to highly regarded Vietnamese cultural values, and thus puts them at odds with mainstream society and local authorities. As non-domiciled youths, who exist in an exposed and uncertain environment and elicit disdain from members of mainstream society, the street children are indeed vulnerable. Given the street children's circumstances, they perceived tourism as a positive thing in their lives because of the success they enjoyed from their involvement in tourism.

A resolution to the street children issue could be achieved by remedying the factors of abuse and poverty at home that result in children living on the street. Providing street children with a safe place to sleep, education and vocational training, food, and protection from abuse by police are simple steps that would increase the children's quality of life. Street children are not presently considered legitimate stakeholders in the tourism industry. Researchers and tourism consultants need to be informed about street children's interests and participation in the industry, so that they can act as advocates for these unrecognized stakeholders.

Theories of globalization and imperialism in the context of tourism are challenged by this study, which demonstrates that the consequences of tourism are not always and only negative, especially as perceived by local populations. This study also gives cause to reconsider the nature of childhood and suggests that there are possibilities beyond Western expectations.

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**Street Children: The Other Side of Tourism in Hue, Viet Nam**

by  
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David B. Wangsgard, Author

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# **Street Children: The Other Side of Tourism in Hue, Viet Nam**

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

In January 2000, I went to Hue, Viet Nam with the intentions of researching sociocultural impacts of tourism. An exhaustive assessment of all sociocultural impacts would have been impossible given my time constraint of six months, and thus I needed to narrow my topic. Upon my arrival in Hue I met a group of college students from the United States, who were on a study-tour in Viet Nam. These students were involved in a short-term language and culture program at Hue University's College of Education, where I was enrolled in an advanced language course.

I spent my first week in the country recovering from a gastrointestinal anthracite that I contracted from some food served on the train from Ho Chi Minh City to Hue. After a week of being more or less confined to my bed I was anxious to get out and explore the city. Several of the college students from the United States invited me to accompany them to one of the local tourist bars they frequented at night so that I could meet, and see firsthand the phenomenal pool playing abilities of several street kids they had met. This was my first encounter with the small group of street kids who would become the focus of my research.

After this initial introduction, I encountered one or more of these street children on a daily basis as I strolled along the city's main tourist drag. Everyday (or night) I witnessed these kids interacting with foreign tourists. Whether they were trying to sell something, trying to get the tourist to buy or give them something, sharking the tourist at



pool (the prize usually being a bottled soft drink), or simply having a lively conversation, these kids seemed to always be engaged with foreign tourists. As these street children became more familiar with, and accustomed to me, and I with them, they identified me as a student and a friend rather than a “tourist,” and I realized that this would be an excellent opportunity to explore their role in Hue’s tourism, and its impacts on their lives.

### **The Setting**

Hue is a small city that straddles the Huong Giang (Perfume) River, with a population of approximately 350,000. Small businesses, shops, and cafés characterize the central part of the city. Specialized economic districts known as agricultural and industrial villages dominate the fringes surrounding the central city. Hue was the imperial capital of Viet Nam during the reign of the Nguyen dynasty. The old city lies on the northwest bank of the Huong Giang River, and is encompassed by waterways and a large fortress-like wall that remains intact today. In the center of the old walled city is the forbidden imperial city, otherwise known as the Citadel. The Citadel is one of Hue’s biggest and most prominent tourist attractions. Although the city’s old quarter is densely populated and economically active, the majority of touristic development has taken place in the newer part of the city on the southeast side of the river. It is on this side of the river where all the big hotels (and most of the small ones), tourism companies, restaurants, bars, and the majority of tourist shops and cafés are located. These tourism enterprises are concentrated along two axes, Le Loi Street and Hung Vuong Street; running northeast and southwest, and northwest and southeast respectively. I will often refer to these two intersecting streets as the “tourist drag.” Hung Vuong is the smaller of

the two, and more pedestrian friendly. Hung Vuong Street is flanked by numerous outdoor cafés that cater to tourists, and hosts a branch office of the country's most popular tourism company. For these reasons large numbers of tourists congregate on Hung Vuong Street to eat, drink, shop and catch tour buses. Thus, the street children whose livelihood is tourism have made Hung Vuong Street their home, where they work, eat, sleep, and play.

### **Tourism Research**

The availability of worldwide tourism to huge numbers of "average" people is a recent phenomenon, and thus, so also is the study of tourism. In the 1970s, social scientists began publishing a substantial amount of literature about tourism. The principal questions being asked were, and still are: Why do people travel? What impacts does tourism have on the host societies? What is the balance of power in the relationships between hosts and guests? (Chambers 1994, 1997; Graburn 1989; Lett 1989; McLaren 1998; Nash 1989; Nash and Smith 1991; Nunez 1989; Smith 1989; Urbanowicz 1989).

The majority of research conducted on the impacts of tourism has shown that while tourism generally has a positive effect on the national economy of the host country, the local economies, environments, and cultures are adversely impacted.

At first glance, the economic consequences of developing a tourism industry appear positive, and in fact some are. Tourism can bring in foreign exchange; develop infrastructure; boost production and development of related local products, resources, and industries; and increase full-time, part-time, and seasonal employment. However, a more

critical assessment reveals that the negative impacts typically outweigh the positive effects of tourism.

Large transnational corporations are a driving force behind the development of the global tourism industry. Although tourism is often seen as a source of employment, in actuality tourism offers temporary, low-wage jobs without long-term commitment from the industry or benefit to the community (McLaren 1998). Profits generated by local people employed in the tourism industry are leaked out of the community and back to the big businesses that developed the tourist destination (Brandon 1993; Lindberg 1991; Lindberg and Huber 1993). Goods and services are imported to serve the tourists' needs and wants. Small, local businesses cannot compete with the large, transnational corporations, and are driven out (Khan 1996; McLaren 1998; Urbanowicz 1989). Traditional subsistence economies in remote areas are replaced with a market economy that severely hampers or excludes local participation due to unfamiliarity with the new economy (Lindberg and Huber 1993; McLaren 1998). As the number of tourists to an area increases, resources such as food, land, and transportation become more scarce, forcing local people to compete with tourists for these resources. Scarcity and competition drive prices up resulting in inflation (Haley and Haley 1997; McLaren 1998; Urbanowicz 1989). Another consequence of an increase in tourism is the increase of demand for the local currency, which also promotes inflation. Increased demand will drive up the value of the local currency in foreign exchange markets, causing the prices of local goods to also increase. This makes it more difficult for local people to obtain the cash necessary to purchase goods and services at inflated prices, thus excluding them from participation in the market economy. Furthermore, an increase in value of the local

currency will drive up the prices of local exports reducing their demand, and thereby reducing jobs in export oriented industries (Brandon 1993; Haley and Haley 1997). If the area becomes too environmentally degraded, or if it simply falls out of fashion and tourists stop coming, this downward spiral will end. However, the local people who eked out a living in the tourism industry will be left without jobs (Boo 1990). If the traditional economy, supplanted by an economy based on tourism, has been abandoned then the local people have nothing to fall back on, and the former tourist destination is left in a state of disaster.

Environmental degradation is more readily apparent than the economic and sociocultural impacts of tourism. An area's scarce natural resources can be quickly gobbled up by tourists, who may be more accustomed to consuming larger quantities of resources than the local population (Boo 1990; Brandon 1993; Buhalis and Fletcher 1995; McLaren 1998; Puntenney 1990; Croall 1995). More people visiting an area equals more wear and tear on an area's natural environment. Olindo (1991) reports that the high volume tourist traffic in Kenya has degraded sensitive soils, scattered herds of buffalo, elephants and other animals, and disrupted the regions wildlife to the point that the animals frequently fail to feed, mate, or raise their young. Eventually the number of tourists may exceed the area's carrying capacity, and rapid environmental degradation ensues. This is exacerbated by the construction of high-density tourist facilities that produce large amounts of sewage, air pollutants from increased traffic, waste water, and an array of liquid and solid wastes ranging from used oil and battery acid to beer bottles and film packaging; all of which must be absorbed by the local environment (Boo 1990; Buhalis and Fletcher 1995; Croall 1994; Glick 1991; McLaren 1998).

Globalization theory assumes that increased uniformity (in the form of commodities, people, capital, technology, communications, and knowledge) across national boundaries leads to sociocultural homogeneity, or global acculturation (Long 1996). In the context of tourism, acculturation occurs in the direction of the tourists' society (typically the West). This occurs because the hosts perceive the tourists' culture as wealthy, technologically advanced, and carefree. At the same time, the hosts internalize the tourists' perceptions of local poverty and inferiority (Puntenney 1990). The local culture heavily adopts Western characteristics, or is all but replaced by a superficial Western-type culture. McLaren (1998) believes that host societies feel inadequate relative to the tourists' culture, and feel the need to change. This pressure to change eventually leads to the degradation of local culture, and the development of a "consumer monoculture." Ultimately the host society's traditional culture becomes little more than a commodity in the global market.

Tourism theorists have often viewed tourism as imperialism. Chambers (1997:7) states that tourism "has often followed the path of earlier imperialistic ambitions of the Western nations, in which travel is expressed as one of several colonial privileges." Desforges (1998:1) describes the touristic encounter "as one in which the local community is 'invaded' and 'colonised' by tourists who irredeemably alter 'traditional' ways of life." Nash (1989) also calls tourism a form of imperialism because it is an expansion of a society's interests abroad. The balance of power weighs heavily in the favor of the expansionists as their interests are imposed on an alien society. Nash goes on to explain that industrialized metropolitan centers (typically Western), which produce tourists, exercise varying degrees of control over the nature and development of tourism

in alien societies in order to meet the tourists' expectations and demands for Western amenities. Nash claims that it is "this power over touristic and related developments abroad that make metropolitan centers imperialistic and tourism a form of imperialism" (1989:39). In this same vein, Brandon (1993:43) submits that "local people [often] bear the problems of tourism and generate the profits which then disappear; tourism is thus seen as a modern form of colonialism."

### **The Tourism Industry**

Viet Nam's tourism industry holds a prominent position in the country's economy. Between 1988 and 1998, foreign investors poured US \$35.2 billion into Viet Nam; 27% of this investment (\$9.5 billion) went to hotels and tourism (Haley and Haley 1997; UNDP 1998b). As the Vietnamese government has slowly opened its command economy to market forces, tourism has grown in leaps and bounds. In 1990, approximately 25,000 foreign tourists visited Viet Nam. By 1995, this number had mushroomed to 1.35 million foreign tourists, who brought in about US \$818 million. The government aimed to attract 3.5 million foreign tourists, and 11 million domestic tourists along with expected revenues of US \$2.6 billion by the year 2000, and approximately US \$11.8 billion by 2010. In 1994, the tourism industry accounted for 3.5% of Viet Nam's GDP. This proportion is expected to grow to 9.6% by the year 2000, and 12% by 2010 (Haley and Haley 1997).

Viet Nam's workforce includes approximately 33 million active workers, with 1.1 million people entering the labor pool every year. Around 1% of Viet Nam's workforce is employed in the tourism industry (Haley and Haley 1997). These numbers are official

statistics and based on the number of people employed in places such as hotels, tourism bureaus, developed tourist sites, tour companies, and other “official” enterprises. If the people selling postcards and souvenirs, *xich lo* drivers (Vietnamese pedi-cabs, see Appendix A for photograph), motorbike taxi drivers, café workers in tourist areas, Internet café proprietors, and numerous others whose mainstay is tourism were included in the official tally the above proportion would be much higher.

In 1997, the number of foreign tourists peaked at 1.7 million, and then dropped to 1.5 million in 1998, attributed to the Asian economic crisis (South China Morning Post 1999a). Accordingly, the government’s National Administration for Tourism (VNAT) readjusted their earlier target of 3.5 million foreign tourists in 2000 to 2 million, with the target number of domestic tourists remaining at 11 million (Saigon Times Daily 1999a). To help shore-up their bets, VNAT is launching a US \$30 million global marketing campaign, “Vietnam—A Destination for the New Millennium,” which has been promoted through brochures, videos, CDs, and an official web-site and electronic newspaper (Saigon Times Daily 1999b, 1999c, 1999d, 1999e; Xinhua News Agency 1999b). As a result of VNAT’s marketing campaign, and no doubt because of a rebounding East Asian economy, the number of foreign arrivals at Ho Chi Minh City’s Tan Son Nhat international airport during the third quarter of 1999 was up 26% over the same quarter in 1998. Most of the foreign tourists are from other Asian countries. The number of tourists from Hong Kong increased 250%, from Thailand 59%, from Japan 28%, and from the U.S. and U.K. 15% (Xinhua News Agency 1999a).

Vestiges of Viet Nam’s imperial capital draw large numbers of tourists to Hue. In the way of tourist attractions, Hue offers numerous ancient Buddhist temples and

pagodas, the old imperial city or Citadel, and the expansive tombs and mausoleums of former Nguyen emperors and their families scattered throughout the forests adjacent to the city. Located in central Viet Nam, just south of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, Hue and the surrounding areas were the sites of intense battles during the Vietnamese-American war, and thus many tourists interested in the war also come to Hue.

In response to this economic opportunity, and in order to capitalize on the tourists' needs, hotels big and small (I could count almost 20 from my apartment balcony alone), restaurants, tourist cafés, tour offices, bars, photo shops, Internet cafés, souvenir shops, and booths selling soft drinks, cigarettes, rain gear, Western snack food, and other tourist essentials quickly sprang up. "Dragon Boats" line the southwest riverbank closest to the intersection of Le Loi and Hung Vuong Streets, waiting to take tourists on cruises of the Huong Giang. Hundreds of *xich los* patrol the tourist drag or park outside the hotels attempting to dissuade potential customers from walking to their destinations. Prostitutes stroll along the tourist drag or congregate in bars, winking at, and struggling to hold conversations in English with Western men. And children roam the streets selling postcards, souvenirs, offering shoe shines, and begging.

Hue is not particularly rich in natural resources. It lacks the large industries of the North and South. Hue does not attract the international big business that Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City do. And Hue is far removed from the agricultural rice bowls of the Mekong and Red River Deltas. The tourism industry accounts for much of Hue's recent development, and is a driving force in the economy. Many of the students I became acquainted with at Hue University's College of Education were studying European languages, Geography, and other disciplines that would make them more competitive in



their aspirations of working in a big hotel, a major tour company, or as a private guide. I also taught one of the many evening English classes the university offered to the general public for a fee. I taught approximately 40 students, who were hotel workers, taxi drivers, prostitutes, tour guides, and young school children who sold tourist items on the street. Almost every one of the students told me that they were taking the class to improve their English skills in order to be more successful in the tourism industry. As can be seen, the tourism industry is a major presence in Hue.

### **Street Children: Defining the Subject Population**

There have been very few anthropological studies of children living on the streets. Most of these studies have focused on psychological models of childhood and adolescence, and often fail to address street children's experiences and participation in the larger system (Marquez 1999). Furthermore, I have been unable to identify any study that elaborates on street children's experiences and participation in the tourism industry.

This is my point of departure from the canon of literature on street children. Although I address several issues that are central in the street children literature, these are not the focus of my research, insofar as they are not related to the children's experiences and participation in the tourism industry. These are issues such as creating self-identity, coping with growing older on the streets, familial relationships, causes for leaving home, involvement in state programs, group dynamics, the psychological stress of living on the streets, etc.

However, I should note here that I observed many of the same forces at work against the street children, and many of the same characteristics exhibited by them that

have been reported by other authors in diverse parts of the world (Aptekar 1988; Le Roux 1996; Lundy 1995; Marquez 1999; Kilbride *et al.* 2000). One serious challenge that the street children face is disapproval by mainstream society. In Viet Nam, the father is the undisputed head of the household, and all other household members are subordinate to him (Jamieson 1993). Children are expected to defer not only to the patriarch of the home, but to all of the child's elders regardless of their relation. The Vietnamese language makes this very apparent through the myriad of age and gender specific pronouns used when addressing anyone. Street children have little or no adult supervision. They decide for themselves where to go, and what to do. Street children frequent places, and engage in behavior and activities that are not the social norm for children. Mainstream Vietnamese society perceives street children as a threat to the power and control of the traditional patriarchal family order. This was also observed to be true by Aptekar (1988) in his study of Colombian street children, by Marquez (1999) in her study of Venezuelan street children, by Kilbride *et al.* (2000) in their study of Kenyan street children, and more generally by Lundy (1995) in her study of street children in the United States.

As a threat to traditional Confucian social ideals held by mainstream Vietnamese society, street children elicit disdain and fear, and are vulnerable to abuse by the mainstream, and especially by the authorities. This is a recurring and cross-cultural theme that runs throughout the street children literature. These and other similarities such as reasons for leaving home, the formation of surrogate family relationships, and economic activities reported by other researchers in different parts of the world boost my confidence in the replicability and validity of my findings.

Before a subject can be discussed meaningfully and understood, that subject must first be clearly defined. So, who and what are street children? There have been diverse definitions used to describe street children. The most prominent and unifying similarity between street children internationally is life on the street. According to Hartman *et al.* (1987:294) the street is “an open environment that is unprotective, enticing, and exploitative.” Ritter (1989:157) defines the street child as a youth “who has separated himself from his family, has abandoned any pretense that he has a family, and now relates almost entirely to the street.” Wilkinson (1987) defines the street child as “a youth as young as 10 or 11, and as old as 22, who spends most of his waking hours in areas frequented by other street kids and who engages in street activities, whether or not the youth is actually homeless” (c.f. Lundy 1995:5). The inter-NGO definition of a street child is

any boy or girl who has not reached adulthood for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and sources of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults. (c.f. Williams 1993:832)

Aptekar (1988) and Kilbride *et al.* (2000) emphasize that street children, like the children of the working poor, out of necessity are often involved in “adult” activities. However, these researchers also point out that unlike the children of the working poor, street children enjoy a “seemingly adultlike ‘freedom,’ with independence from adult authority typical of most street children around the world” (Kilbride *et al.* 2000:2). Kilbride *et al.* put the age range of street children from “newborn infants born on the streets up to about 16 to 18 years of age when most nations define the person as an adult” (ibid). Whereas Aptekar (1988:xiv) states that “street children, although predominately boys, are of both

genders, range in age from six to sixteen, and spend a great deal of their time in public view.”

Kilbride *et al.* (2000) further distinguish between children “of” the streets and children “on” the streets. Children “of” the streets are homeless and can be found regularly sleeping outdoors in alleys, street pavements, store fronts, etc., and account for about 20% of the world’s street children. Children “on” the streets (about 80% of the world’s street children population) frequently return home to sleep, and eke out a living on the streets by day. Aptekar (1988) further categorizes street children by personality type and the factors that resulted in the child’s separation from home and family.

Despite the diversity of definitions, and recognizing that there are differences between individual and groups of street children, the similarities between street children worldwide cannot be ignored. I endorse Johann Le Roux’s conclusion that

it needs to be emphasized that street children represent a worldwide phenomenon despite cultural differences. Examination of the literature also indicates that the backgrounds of street children...are remarkably similar [and] findings presented in the present study...are common among street children internationally. (1996:430)

I found this to hold true among the street children I interacted with in Hue.

In this study I identify street children or street kids (used interchangeably) as individuals who have not yet reached adulthood, for one reason or another have left home, are not under adult supervision, and spend the vast majority of their time on the streets (following the definition of “street” quoted above from Hartman *et al.* (1987)), where they sleep, eat, play, and make a living.

**Purpose of the Study**

Nunez (1989) and Chambers (1997) establish the need for research that focuses on the communities and populations impacted by tourism—those who are often marginalized, and whose voices are rarely heard. The present study, by describing the lives and experiences of a small group of street children, is an attempt to redress the paucity of information about street children's experiences and participation in the tourism industry, and how it affects and shapes their lives. By presenting the street kids' perspectives on tourism, as communicated to and interpreted by me, I hope to give voice to a very marginalized group of individuals who are greatly impacted by tourism. The information provided by this study is meant to enhance anthropologists' and tourism researchers' awareness and understanding of this vulnerable population.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

As there are no extant studies that combine street children and tourism, in the present chapter I review qualitative research pertaining to two subjects, which have been considered and approached separately, and distinctively. In the street children literature, detailed elaboration of the day-to-day aspects of street children's lives is sparse. And none of the literature elaborates on the experiences, and participation of street children in the tourism industry. The literature reviewed in this chapter is relevant to my research in as much as it attempts to describe and interpret the experience of being a street child.

In the tourism literature, there is an abundance of research on the consequences of tourism for the host communities, and specifically the sociocultural effects of tourism. However, very few of these studies present an emic perspective or interpretation of tourism's impacts, and the street children variable is simply non-existent in the tourism literature. The literature reviewed below informs my research on the general level of tourism's sociocultural impacts on local populations.

#### **Street Children Literature**

Aptekar (1988) conducted a seminal study of street children in Cali, Colombia, collecting data through participant observation, interviews, and a battery of psychological tests. He and a team of graduate students followed the children through the streets, a social service agency, and the state juvenile detention center spending time with the children "as they ate, played, worked, and even slept, so that we could share the variety of experiences they had as they moved around the city" (ibid: xv).

According to Aptekar (1988), street children existed in Colombia as a consequence of extreme poverty and the social upheaval caused by the country's struggle for independence. The ruling Spanish patriarchy saw its conservative values threatened by the opposing values of an African matriarchy, and the independent children that it produced. This resulted in attempts by the government to contain and remedy the children's deviant lifestyles.

Aptekar (1988) put forth a two-level typology of prepubescent street children, aged six to twelve. The first type, called a *gamine*, is an independent, free spirited, and adventurous child socialized for early separation from family. The second type, designated as a *chupagrueso*, is a dependent and abused victim, willfully pushed out of a dysfunctional family unit.

As street youths reached adolescence and their physical appearance began to change they lost the tolerance of mainstream society, and the ability to elicit adults' sympathy and support. *Desamperados* are adolescents who cope poorly with this change, *sobrevivientes* are characterized as wounded survivors who are coping marginally, and *afortunados* are adolescent youths who are making a successful transition into adult life.

Prepubescent street children were observed to develop chumships or intimate, supportive, and enduring friendships with one or more peers. This type of relationship is called a *camada*, and provides corrective life experiences, and replaces functional familial relationships for children otherwise deprived. The *gallada* is an economic association consisting of both prepubescent and adolescent youths who share work and resources for their mutual benefit.

Aptekar (1988) concludes that street children exist outside Colombian mainstream society's acceptable role of childhood. The street children of Cali earned and spent money as they saw fit, traveled at their leisure, lived away from home, and controlled their own activities, education, and relationships. This deviance from the accepted childhood norms engendered disdain and conflict with adults who anticipated control of, and obedience from children. In his conclusion, Aptekar poses the provoking dilemma faced by cross-cultural researchers of whether street children exemplify the "impoverished end of childhood? Or are they, perhaps, illustrative of expanded possibilities of childhood" (1988:211).

In a similar study, Marquez (1999) reported on her research of Venezuelan street children in *The Street is My Home: Youth and Violence in Caracas*. Collecting data through participant observation, interviews, and a thorough review of popular media, Marquez critiques popular notions of street children, and attempts to convey the meaning of being young for people living on the streets. She does this by examining street children's everyday experiences in their work, their networks, their choices and expectations for the future, and relationships among themselves and the larger social setting in which they live.

Marquez (1999) submits that psychological and sociohistorical models of childhood and adolescence are not completely adequate in explaining what constitutes childhood for youths with little or no family support, and who spend a majority of their time on the streets. She moves away from psychological models because the conflict in the lives of children living on the streets stem from tangible conditions such as hunger, fear of abuse, and lack of protection.



Marquez (1999) argues that the marked increase in the number of street children in Venezuela is a consequence of the national economic crisis caused by a sharp drop in oil revenues. This drop in revenues led to acute unequal distribution of income, resulting in social and political upheaval. As in Colombia, the dominant class saw their traditional patriarchal family values challenged, but also their systems of labor, education, and criminal justice, which influence the street children's behavior and the rumors about them. Marquez expands on Aptekar's (1988) analysis of the relationship between the street children and the values they represent, and the economically and politically dominant classes, which view the street children as a threat to the patriarchal family and social order. She accomplishes this by examining Venezuelan national attitudes toward young people on the streets in the context of their everyday lives.

Marquez (1999) elaborates a less sophisticated typology of street children based on age and choice of activities, rather than personality profiles or psychoanalysis (Aptekar 1988). *Chupapegas* refer to all prepubescent street children, typically under the age of 15. *Chupapegas* elicit contradictory sentiments of pity and disgust from mainstream society, in part due to reports and information disseminated by popular media. *Malandros* are adolescent street youths who are associated with drugs, violence, and other illicit activities. *Monos* are adolescent street youths who are more concerned with wearing brand name clothing and impressing girls, and whose activities are more legitimate than those of the *malandros*. However, *monos* may resort to crime in order to obtain the material things that are important to them. The street youths who fall into the two adolescent categories are simply viewed as dangerous thugs and delinquents by Venezuelan mainstream society, and elicit no conflicting reactions.

Marquez (1999) concludes that state and legal policies regarding street children are ineffective and misguided because they are based on misinformation and misconceptions perpetuated by the popular media's poor, and insufficient research. Many youths from large, poor families are socialized early to survive on their own, or financially contribute to the family by producing an income on the street. Many street youths are not vagrants but working children playing a vital role in the survival of the family, with the street as the locus of their economic activity. Many youths on the street are not abandoned (contrary to popular belief) but have left the barrios to find goods, money, and a different sort of life. They travel, eat what they please, play video games, and believe they are finding freedom. Life on the streets is a rational alternative to the socially, economically, and politically oppressed existence in the barrios—the streets offer their imaginations a wider range of possibilities.

Kilbride, Suda, and Njeru (2000) produced a study of street children in Kenya, which they compare and contrast to studies of street children globally. With a team of student research assistants, and street children employed as informants and interviewers, they collected data through participant observation, focus groups, informal and formal interviews, and surveys of street children, their parents, and NGOs involved in the rehabilitation of street children. Qualifying their use of participant observation, Kilbride *et al.* state that they did not participate directly in many of the street children's activities, such as sleeping outside, begging, swindling, or selling. However, the researchers are confident that they can responsibly "paraphrase street life by 'giving an account' as informed by ethnographic and related techniques" (2000:15).

Kilbride *et al.* (2000) situate their research in the present cultural context of Kenyan family values that are still widely practiced, particularly in the rural areas, and that serve as ideals. The study is also set in a historical context of family values to contrast against present circumstances, in which numerous street children are physically and economically abused and exploited as laborers. Beside the social contexts and cultural understandings that shape the lives of street children, Kilbride *et al.* also seek to add critical questions that sometimes transcend specific concerns of the street children. Their interpretation of street children's exploitation, in the main, is derived from social science theory and comparative studies of street children globally.

Kilbride *et al.* (2000) argue that the street children problem in Kenya has resulted from a decline of indigenous family values and a dramatic increase of social circumstances unfavorable to children, such as children being born out of wedlock and abandoned, or turned over to abusive caretakers. This problem is exacerbated by Kenya's very high birth rate, which results in large numbers of children being subject to these unfavorable conditions. Kilbride *et al.* cite multiple causes for the breakdown of traditional Kenyan family values, including the absence of a father. In contrast to Aptekar's (1988) study of Colombian street children, matrifocal tendency in Kenya has resulted in an aberrant movement of children away from homes that can no longer provide for them. Other causes for the breakdown of Kenyan families are the absence of the traditional sibling caretakers, the absence of fostering by adult relatives, and grandparents who are now heavily burdened by daughters' children born out of wedlock and rejected by the current husband, and an abundance of AIDS orphans left by deceased

parents. Grandparents' stories, imbued with social ideals and models of right behavior, have been replaced with radio, television, and schoolwork.

Kilbride *et al.* (2000) also state that the growth of the international economy, with its demands for competitive prices and cheap local laborers, who are often children, must also take responsibility for the increase in street children. While the breakdown of the traditional family provides push factors for children to leave home, the demand for labor provides pull factors that draw them to the cities. Kilbride *et al.* further point out that street children are a recent development in Africa, but reflect patterns of exploitation ultimately stemming from 20<sup>th</sup> century colonialism. Colonial policies caused land dispossession, overstretched resources, growing rural poverty, and low wages resulting in the dislocation and abandonment of many children. These children were moved from rural areas to urban settings where they worked in mines and factories, and lived on their own on the streets. Harsh working conditions on plantations also forced many children to run away to the streets.

Kilbride *et al.* (2000) distinguish between two types of street children: children "of" the streets and children "on" the streets. Children "of" the streets are homeless and can be found regularly sleeping outdoors in alleys, street pavements, store fronts, etc., and account for about 20% of the world's street children. Children "on" the streets (about 80% of the world's street children population) frequently return home to sleep, and eke out a living on the streets by day. The public characterizes both types of street children as troublemakers and a threat to society, and thus they are subject to popular disdain and constant police harassment. Like Aptekar (1988) and Marquez (1999),

Kilbride *et al.* observed that street children could beg successfully up to the age of about 14, when they no longer look innocent and come under heavier scrutiny and suspicion.

Unlike Aptekar (1988) and Marquez (1999), Kilbride *et al.* (2000) were able to gain access to two street girls through their boyfriends, and the girls then served as a bridgehead into a street girl community. Thus, Kilbride *et al.* were able to explore gender differences among street children. Street girls, who typically left home because of shameful parental beatings, were more vulnerable, and disadvantaged compared with the street boys. Street girls had less occupational flexibility available to them than the boys, and most had to, at one time or another, participate in prostitution or "survival sex." This put the girls at greater risk for abuse, rape, and pregnancy, which was a terrific burden for street girls.

Kilbride *et al.* (2000) emphasize that being a street child is an event in the child's life, one with a beginning, and, for most, an end that culminates in a transition into some adult status. The authors conclude that a cultural model emphasizing Kenyan derived indigenous family values and support might be revitalized to address the problems of street children who now live outside regular family exchanges and assistance.

Lundy (1995) conducted research with inner city street youths in the United States. Lundy employed ethnographic methods, including participant observation, informal and intensive interviewing, and informant narratives to collect data and paint a complex picture of street youths' lives. Her informants were selected from youths she treated at a youth crises center, where she worked as a nurse clinician.

Lundy (1995) describes in detail segments of the lives and experiences of a small group of street youths, and attempts to see the world through their eyes, and to identify

patterns in the commonalities and varieties of their experiences. Through detailed narratives by, and personal portraits of her informants, Lundy also attempts to convey qualities, attitudes, and values held by street youths.

Lundy's (1995) informants consisted of males, females, and transvestites, all of who were at least 18 years of age because her research guidelines constrained her from studying minors. Lundy categorizes street kids as youths as young as 10 and as old as 22, who spend most of their waking hours on the streets and places frequented by other street kids, whether or not they were actually homeless, and who engage in "street activities." All of Lundy's informants were put into a single, general category of "street youth." She characterizes street youths as a nearly invisible subculture, alienated from family and other supportive structures, and who seek to remain isolated from mainstream society.

Lundy (1995) argues that street youths from healthier homes tend to return home, but youths from less functional family units (including foster homes) exhibit a pattern of returning home (or to the institutional foster care) only to leave again, and eventually stop returning. Those who stay on the streets have typically run from, or been forced out of dysfunctional, and chaotic homes. Conditions at home often involve physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, substance abuse by parental figures, and a sense of unpredictability and instability. Poor self-esteem and emotional impoverishment are often exhibited by the youth prior to his or her separation from home. Once on the streets, street youths become acutely aware of the exigencies of survival, and many turn to prostitution, stealing, drug dealing, or begging. This lifestyle puts street youths at greater risk of abuse, victimization, violent and traumatic injury, and illness, which serve to further erode the youths' emotional and physical welfare.

In her attempt to articulate a descriptive model of street youths, Lundy (1995) concludes that all share the common link of life “on the edge,” geographically, temporally, socially, economically, and physically—literally living on the periphery of mainstream society in every regard. Lundy observed that mainstream culture responded to the street youths with ambivalence. When street youths were presented as misguided and mistreated children, the response was one of concern. However, more often, street youths elicited fear, suspicion, disdain, and rejection, which served to further isolate them from mainstream society.

Lundy (1995) recommends that drug rehabilitation targeted at the unique needs of street youths, intensive and prolonged psychotherapy, vocational training, and the possibility of early access into adult status be made more readily available to youths living on the street.

### **Tourism Literature**

There has been a vast amount of literature published on the study of tourism, ranging from managing and marketing to environmental and ecological considerations. I will concentrate on contributions to tourism research that deal with sociocultural issues. However, I feel it is appropriate to begin this section with a brief review of an article by Nash and Smith (1991) that focuses on what the anthropological perspective can offer tourism studies.

Nash and Smith (1991) argue that tourism falls within the realm of anthropology because it can be found in most human cultures, whether in the form of the tourist or the destination of the tourist. Anthropology brings a holistic, and cross-cultural perspective

to the study of tourism. An important area of anthropological inquiry in fairly recent years has been the impact of Western ways on the non-Western or Third World. Thus, anthropologists have begun to view the tourist, like the conqueror or missionary, as an agent of direct or indirect cultural change in less developed regions of the world.

However, the authors emphasize that tourism is not a determinant of cultural change, only an influence. Nash and Smith point out that anthropological research has focused on cross-cultural transactions between hosts (particularly Third World) and guests (Industrial World), and the consequences of these transactions. More recently, research has concentrated on tourists' motivations to travel and their expectations of the experience shaped by the tourists' own culture.

Nash and Smith (1991) are confident that tourism research offers fertile ground for theoretically oriented discussion to thrive, as well as a host of situations in which applied anthropology can address practical problems. They further state that there is "no reason why practical concerns cannot go hand in hand with theoretical interests" (ibid: 20). They conclude that anthropology offers the study of tourism a comparative approach to the forces that generate tourists and tourism, the transactions between cultures or subcultures, and the consequences for the cultures and the individuals in them, which ultimately can further our insights to the human condition.

In 1977, Valene Smith edited a landmark work in the anthropological study of tourism. A second edition was produced in 1989, in which the contributors revisited the original case studies in order to provide a longitudinal perspective of the particular tourist destinations and cultures in which the authors worked. In addition to documenting the cultural impacts of tourism through the case studies, Smith (1989) introduces the second



edition of *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* as also providing a theoretical perspective to the study of tourism. Smith *et al.* develop theoretical discussions of tourism analysis through the case studies, which consider the impacts of tourism on local populations, tourism and gender roles, tourism as a form of imperialism, tourism and development, and local perceptions of tourism.

Smith (1989) identifies five different forms of tourism: ethnic tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, environmental tourism, and recreational tourism. She distinguishes the different forms by the type of destination, and the particular types of activities undertaken by the tourist once at the destination. Smith further identifies seven different types of tourists: explorer, elite, off-beat, unusual, incipient mass, mass, and charter. Her tourist typology is based on the number of tourists, from very limited to massive arrivals, and the tourist's adaptations to local norms, ranging from "accepts fully" to "demands Western amenities." Smith argues that the touristic impact on a culture, and consequently the local perceptions of tourists and tourism, are a result of the type of tourists who visit the culture.

Smith's (1989) volume concludes with a discussion of anthropology's theoretical approaches to the study of tourism, by Nunez (1989) and Lett (1989). Nunez emphasizes that the anthropological study of tourism has followed the same ontogeny as the study of acculturation, examining "both parties within the situational nature of contact" to achieve a "more complete understanding of the phenomenon" (c.f. Smith *et al.* 1989: 267). Lett concludes that two broadly divided interests have emerged from the anthropological literature on tourism. There are those "who are interested in exploring the culturally defined meanings that the experience of tourism holds for the tourist and those he or she

encounters” and those “who are interested in assessing the range of empirical effects that tourism has upon the sociocultural systems of host societies” (c.f. Smith *et al.* 1989: 276).

In a recent edited volume, Chambers (1997) provides an applied anthropological perspective on the study of tourism. The case studies in the volume address issues of cultural authenticity and material culture, urban tourism, gender and tourism, and tourism and ethnicity. Chambers emphasizes that tourism needs to be recognized as a mediated activity, and more attention needs to be paid to those “actors and institutions that stand outside the host/guest relationship but that so greatly influence the consequences of tourism” (1997: 4). These mediators are such institutions and individuals as travel agencies, tour companies, travel promoters, local governments, and tour guides. The traditional host/guest relationship occurs when tourists, or guests, seeking authentic cultural experiences, interact directly with local individuals, or hosts. The actors and institutions described above have begun to mediate the host/guest relationship by influencing, and even dictating who the tourists interact with, as well as when and where these interactions occur. Chambers submits that the motivations for mediating tourism vary greatly, but argues that most mediators tend to obscure themselves in order to maintain at least the appearance of the traditional host/guest relationship desired by the tourist, and to conceal the unequal benefits many mediators enjoy from tourism endeavors. However, Chambers proposes that the consequences of tourism for local or “host” communities are not always, and only negative. He calls for more research on local communities, how these communities are constructed, and the “manner in which group identities and traditions are invented and authenticated,” which he argues is in part

“a result of deliberate attempts to engage the interest of tourists or otherwise appeal to the imagination of outsiders” (1997: 5).

Chambers’ (1997) point that diversity exists within most communities, and that community members do not equally participate in, benefit from, or share the costs of tourism activities is very germane to my study of a distinct subgroup in the Vietnamese community—street children—and the unique ways in which they respond to tourism.

A well-established component of the anthropological study of tourism is the host/guest relationship. Developing countries assume the role of “host” to “guests” from industrially developed Western nations. This concept is the result of tourism developments often following “the path of earlier imperialistic ambitions of the Western nations, in which travel is expressed as one of several colonial privileges” (Chambers 1997: 7). While this international assumption of tourism may be correct in its own context, it ignores that tourism has become a mediated activity on the local and national level as well. Tourists are often guests of their nations own airlines, hotel chains, resorts, and frequently buy their own goods—tourism is a major industry in developing *and* developed nations. Chambers challenges the notion of the host/guest relationship, arguing that tourism, in its current form, “has altered all this, to the extent that in many instances of travel the distinction between guest and host has become blurred if not irrelevant” (1997:4).

Chambers (1997) does recognize that contemporary tourism has both exposed and contributed to unequal economic and cultural opportunity. However, he feels that it is still possible to direct tourism development to these issues with the aim of encouraging greater equity.

In an earlier publication, Chambers reported on Thailand's tourism industry in *Conserving Culture*, edited by Mary Hufford (1994). Chambers argues that tourism presents a paradox: it draws international attention to a region's cultural and environmental resources yet can potentially destroy these. Historically, anthropologists have taken a very partisan stance on tourism development issues: it's bad. This biases the way anthropology frames its tourism research questions. Chambers argues that anthropology can contribute an ethnographic approach to tourism research by representing local voices, which are not always, and only anti-tourism. In order for ethnographic research to be useful to tourism planners, tourism's impacts first must be teased out from those of other forms of development and culture change. Second, it must be realized that ethnographic research on tourism cannot be generalized from one place to another.

Thailand designated 1986 as the Year of the Tourist. This was a promotional campaign designed to increase international tourism and draw attention to the country's cultural heritage and recreational resources. The campaign specifically targeted families in hope to lessen reliance on solo males travelers, who visited Thailand in order to participate in the sex trade. The campaign was successful, and several other Southeast Asian countries have followed suit. In fact, it was so successful that it surpassed planners' expectations, and regions that previously had little exposure to tourism experienced rapid development of tourist facilities and accommodations. This sudden boom in tourism, which replaced rice as the country's principal export industry, caught several regions off guard, and the result was a barrage of social and environmental problems, with which the Tourism Authority of Thailand was left to deal. Thailand's

view of ecology (cultural and physical environment) stems from Buddhism and is fundamentally different from Westerners' ideology, and it is in this context, Chambers (1994) argues, that the problems must be confronted and resolved. Chambers believes that the Thai government recognizes the potentials of tourism as both positive and negative, but he states that their success in confronting the negative impacts of tourism will hinge on their ability to shape their responses to the country's unique circumstances.

Chambers (1994) concludes that if solutions for tourism's negative impacts on the environment and human culture are generalized internationally, then the solutions will be over-simplified, and will neglect indigenous responses that are shaped by a country's historical and cultural development, which are most promising in reaching real solutions.

McLaren's (1998) provocative book, *Rethinking Tourism and Ecotravel*, offers a skeptical analysis of the burgeoning global tourism industry. McLaren argues that tourism, in its current form, results in only negative consequences for host communities. She establishes that transnational corporations ultimately control the global tourism industry. These big businesses are involved in every aspect of the industry, including all levels of transportation, accommodations, food service, entertainment, travel arrangements, travel money and insurance, souvenirs and outfitting, and through promoters and agencies they are responsible for motivating the tourist to travel. Policies are made to fit corporate agendas, with national governments giving corporations tax holidays and other incentives in order to attract the tourist dollar, while local needs are overlooked. Locals are displaced by so called "development", and local economic enterprises are put out of business by imported goods and services. McLaren's explicit

point being that corporate greed exploits people and resources around the world in the name of economic growth.

McLaren's (1998) assessment of tourism's impacts on local communities includes the following topics: (1) Sociological development cycles begin with a euphoric local perception of tourism as an opportunity, but erodes into apathy when problems and unfavorable changes begin to emerge, and finally to antagonism when the locals blame tourism for their problems. (2) Economic myths of tourism being a source of employment, when in actuality it offers temporary, low-wage jobs without long-term commitment from the industry or benefit for the community. (3) Human rights are violated when traditional populations are displaced for tourism development. The military is used to monitor locals who are seen as a nuisance, or locals are enslaved to build tourist facilities. (4) Loss of traditional culture due to the introduction of technologies, and outside influences by the Western world creates psychological pressure for traditional societies to modernize. (5) Transnational corporations acquire land for tourism development. The economic benefits of the development do not go to the local communities, but rather are leaked out of the area, and often the country, to the transnational corporations. (6) Impacts on indigenous peoples include the loss of culture due to commodification by tourism, and loss of traditional land use practices replaced by land use policies that favor tourism. (7) Health concerns arise as tourist destinations become more urbanized, and disease increases. (8) Women and children are at risk when traditional cultures are turned into service cultures and these vulnerable groups are recruited to serve the demands of a growing global sex tourism industry. (9) The fundamental ecological issue is that tourism can potentially exceed the ecosystems

carrying capacity to the point of environmental degradation that tourism in the area will collapse.

McLaren (1998) concludes that new “eco” or “alternative” forms of tourism are rarely what they claim to be, and are merely used as marketing ploys. She defines tourism in general as cultural voyeurism. McLaren contends that these alternative forms of travel will only fulfill their missions when they achieve minimal impact, with the local environment and community actually benefiting from the experience. She conveys a fatalistic view that tourism in its current form is simply not sustainable, tourism today is incompatible with life tomorrow, and ultimately, all tourism greatly costs the earth and everyone on it.

McLaren (1998) presents a very biased and negative view of tourism, which in many cases is valid, and drives home her point with numerous examples and case studies. However, she only rarely includes local voices, and then only those in support of her position. McLaren superimposes her opinion on sundry cultures and people, and fails to represent local voices or recognize individual, or unique responses. An ethnographic component to her research would have better accomplished this. However, McLaren champions local grass-roots action, and education of tourists and hosts in order to dispel myths and create awareness in the industry and individual tourist. Her extremely critical analysis will make any reader pause and reconsider his or her own perspective and touristic activities.

Cater also addresses ecotourism and social issues in a volume he edited with Lowman, *Ecotourism: A Sustainable Option?* (1994). Cater points out that there has been much difficulty in reaching a consensus concerning the definition of ecotourism.

Much of this difficulty arises from the unresolved question, “is ecotourism a product or a principle?” Some organizations use the prefix “eco” to increase sales and profitability, while others believe that ecotourism should be interpreted as being environmentally, culturally, and economically friendly to present and future populations. Small nations or regions with little power often have tourism or ecotourism thrust on them, while others have little else to sustain their economy. Cater argues that in some very depressed areas sustainability is a luxury that the present cannot afford. He establishes that there are four stakeholders in ecotourism: tourists, tourism organizations, host populations, and the natural environment. These stakeholders are subject to four possible scenarios: win-win—positive links between environment (read human and natural) and development; win-lose—environment benefits but development suffers; lose-win—environment suffers but development benefits (usually short-term only); lose-lose—both environment and development lose out.

Cater (1994) concludes that when policy makers are defining solutions it needs to be taken into consideration that what is sustainable at this time may not be in another time or place. Therefore, a compromise needs to be reached, a middle ground for human and natural environments, and development. This compromise probably won't be optimal for the human and natural environments or development, but it will be a step forward and more sustainable than tourism has hitherto been.

In a more business and management oriented article, Haley and Haley (1997) review implications of foreign direct investment (FDI) specifically in Viet Nam's tourism industry. The Vietnamese government has been endeavoring to attract FDI to its tourism industry since the early 1990s. However, the relationship between certain



elements of tourism within economic and political systems is not yet clear. “These variables and their impact on strategic decision making become even more difficult to understand in the context of Vietnam, which has been progressing and changing over the years” (Haley and Haley 1997: 1). The authors discuss tourism and sustainability in general and in the specific context of Viet Nam, and illustrate the recent trends and current situation of the country’s tourism industry in economic terms. Haley and Haley argue that tourism is an integral component of the nation’s development, which involves many levels of inter-relationships and coordination at local, state, national, regional, and international levels. In order to better understand these relationships, researchers and policy makers must have some understanding of the tourism industry’s stakeholders’ goals. According to Haley and Haley, these stakeholders are investors (private and governmental), tourists, indigenous populations, and host governments.

Haley and Haley (1997) outline key economic considerations in terms of benefits and costs. Economic benefits of tourism include obtaining more foreign exchange; extending existing infrastructure; increasing employment directly in the industry as well as in other inter-related and non-related industries through the multiplier effect; developing local products and resources; and spreading development geographically and across industrial sectors. Conversely, tourism can also increase inflation; increase unemployment by displacing productively employed individuals, and through currency-exchange value effects; increase susceptibility to political changes, spread of disease, and economic fluctuations; increase unbalanced economic development; and increase visual pollution and destruction of resources.

Haley and Haley (1997) also consider tourism's potential sociocultural impacts, both positive and negative. In a best case scenario, tourism has the potential to broaden education; increase international peace and understanding; dissolve language, social, religious, and racial barriers; and increase appreciation of one's own, and others' culture. On the down side, tourism can equally increase misunderstanding, stereotyping, and xenophobia; fuel the commercialization of culture and religion; and contribute to prostitution, conflict, and crime.

Haley and Haley (1997) conclude by offering recommendations, which, they argue, will cultivate sustainable development in Viet Nam's tourism industry. Their recommendations include the Vietnamese government creating economic and social indicators that focus on national well-being; encouraging participation of all major stakeholders through public consultation approaches and processes; the formation of advisory boards with all stakeholders as members; providing help to support industries; and designing standards and regulations for assessing economic and social impacts.

In order to provide a better understanding of how Viet Nam is marketed to the potential tourist and how this may shape the tourist's expectations, I conclude my literature review with an article by Lassiter (1997), written to appeal to the tourist. The author states that despite claims to communism, capitalism is alive and well at the grass-roots level. He plays to the tourist with stories of very cheap consumer products (mostly souvenir type stuff) and food. He does mention the underdeveloped infrastructure, but adds that those willing to endure some lack of convenience will enhance their adventure. He highly romanticizes Viet Nam with exotic pictures of "bustling rural markets...quiet thatched villages...very primitive [and] easily accessible hill tribes" (Lassiter 1997: 2, 4),

and locals hard at work in the rice paddies. He also paints a rosy picture with the statement of “we saw absolutely no evidence of people going hungry,” and instead describes the Vietnamese people as “enviably trim” (ibid: 2). He continues to play to the tourist by saying the country is young and vibrant, and these young, vibrant people show no animosity towards Americans. He then offers a sample itinerary of “must see” sites, almost all of which have explicit links to the war with the United States. He describes many of the ordinary rural villages as “dusty towns...of little interest, other than for some bomb craters” (ibid: 4), and if tourists find an agreeable country town, their experience may be ruined by insistent children badgering them to buy souvenir items. Lassiter notes that it is interesting how quickly tourism and related industry has spread even to remote areas where vendors hassle tourists to buy bullets and fake dog tags. In effect, the tourist can have an authentic experience of traditional Southeast Asia if he or she can avoid or endure the irritating entrepreneurs, which the tourism industry, in its quest for an authentic experience, has created.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Method of Inquiry**

The central research question I attempt to answer through this study is “How does tourism affect and shape the lives of street children involved with the industry?” In order to achieve this I examined a small group of street children and their day-to-day experiences with tourists, their views on tourism, and their participation in, and how they responded to tourism. Data collection was effected through the basic ethnographic instruments of participant observation and informant inquiry. I employed principles of ethnographic and qualitative content analysis (Bernard 1995; Flick 1998; Spradley 1979) to guide data analysis, and to identify general themes and patterns representative of the informants’ experiences with tourism and its impacts on their lives.

#### **Rationale for the Method**

A review of the literature about street children, and tourism’s sociocultural impacts suggests that these two complex phenomena have not yet been fully apprehended. Qualitative research methods seek to reveal the nature of phenomena as humanly experienced, and examine the phenomena as they unfold. A more holistic understanding of the consequences for street children involved in the tourism industry can be best achieved through ethnographic methods. Participant observation, formal interviews, and informal discussions can provide the researcher with an emic perspective into the street children’s everyday lives, and participation in tourism, as experienced and understood by them. Gaining an insider’s, or at least a near insider’s perspective is also desirable because the street children often deceive outsiders, and act out stereotypical

behavior in order to capitalize on a given situation. Street children and tourism researchers alike have established that a more complete understanding of these two topics can be realized through the use of ethnographic methods, which can better apprehend and represent the lived experiences of street children (Aptekar 1988; Kilbride *et al.* 2000; Lundy 1995; Marquez 1999), and the experiences and attitudes of local communities impacted by tourism (Chambers 1994, 1997; Nash and Smith 1991; Nunez 1989). The use of ethnographic methods in examining the lived experiences of street children participating in the tourism industry is consistent with this study's goal of understanding how tourism affects the lives of these children.

### **The Sample Population**

As stated in Chapter 1, this study's sample population consists of individuals who have not yet reached adulthood, for one reason or another have left home, are not under adult supervision, and spend the vast majority of their time on the streets (following the definition of "street" quoted earlier from Hartman *et al.* (1987)), where they sleep, eat, play, and make a living.

Although there are no official statistics on the number of street children in Hue, there are many children in Hue who could be defined as such. The majority of the world's street children are boys (Kilbride *et al.* 2000), as is the case in Hue. My primary subject population consisted of four street kids who typically sleep on the street during the day, and come out to play, make money, and live during the night, and whom I came to know very well. Although there were approximately 20 children who worked on the tourist drag, and could generally be considered street children, the four street kids who

make up my primary sample were the only children on the tourist drag who regularly slept on the street, and were not under the authority of an adult guardian. Thus my primary sample size was restricted to these four individuals. Throughout this study I will refer to these four individuals as “participants”, as they were the only street children who actively participated in my research. All of the participants are adolescent boys between the ages of 14 and 18, who have dropped out of school, left home, and make their living on the streets. They are all boys for several reasons. First, I never met a girl who satisfied the requirements of my street children definition. There are young girls who sell postcards and other souvenirs, and interact with tourists, but they live at home and the majority go to school for at least part of the day. The young girls I met on the street also keep normal hours (sleeping during the night) because they do go to school. Even though some young girls beg from tourists and do not go to school, the definition of street children used for the primary participants in this study excludes them because they go home at night, and are under the authority of their families, who provide for their basic needs. Furthermore, while mainstream society tolerates male street kids to a point, it would be completely unacceptable for young girls to live and conduct themselves as the male street kids do. If this were otherwise it would be culturally and socially intolerable for a man to hang out with young girls. In wider Vietnamese society, boys only hang out with boys, and girls only hang out with girls; lovers are the only exception to this rule.

I will also draw on information from a secondary population of children who I observed and interacted with. This group consists of ten children, four of whom are young girls. None of these individuals fit into my somewhat parsimonious definition of street children, however, all of them can be identified as street children by the more

generous definitions put forth in the literature. I was on a first name basis with all of these kids, but was not as involved, or familiar with them as I was with the primary participants. I should also note that all of the individuals included in the primary and secondary populations were familiar with one another, at least by sight.

In order to achieve a more holistic account, I present the perspectives of tourists and local citizens, who interacted with the street kids. This information was solicited, and more often volunteered during conversations with approximately 20 tourists, and numerous local citizens who owned, operated, and patronized establishments on the tourist drag.

## **Fieldwork**

### *Site Selection*

Research method follows the research question, but is also determined by the unique characteristics of the field setting. My selection of Hue's tourist drag as my formal field setting was one of fortuitous circumstance, given my unexpected introduction to the group of street children who became the focus of my research, who made the area their home and locus of activity, and that it also was the location of my own residence. Although the street children made many excursions away from the city's tourist center (of which I took several opportunities to accompany them), I determined that the tourist drag would be the most appropriate setting for my research, as this is where the street children's lives and experiences with tourism unfold. The seemingly constant presence of other Westerners in this setting also afforded me many opportunities

to blend in with the tourists in outdoor cafés, and observe, unobtrusively, the activities of the street kids and their interactions with tourists. The proximity of my residence to my field setting enabled very frequent, casual, spontaneous, and often, unpredictable interactions with the street kids.

### *Gaining Access*

The street kids endeavored to meet and interact with foreigners as part of their survival strategy, and after our initial introduction they were impressed and intrigued by this American who could converse with them in Vietnamese. I encountered at least one group member on a daily basis, and began trying to build a rapport with them. After about a month of this daily interaction they began seeking me out, and including me in their recreational activities. Thus, I was able to break out of the perceived role of “tourist” and came to be considered a friend, which allowed me to gain more of an insider’s perspective to their lives. I would like to note that the friendships I established with these street kids were authentic, and not merely fabricated to facilitate access.

The research project was reviewed under the guidelines of Oregon State University’s Institutional Review Board, the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Approval for the research project was granted by the university’s Institutional Review Board.



## Data Collection

### *Data Collection Techniques*

Participant observation refers to “research characterized by a period of intense social interaction between the researcher and informants, in the milieu of the latter” for the purpose of understanding that milieu (McCall and Simmons 1969, c.f. Lundy 1995: 27). Participant observation combines passive and assertive roles, which are complementary components. The passive element is that of watching and listening, interspersed with, and followed up by a more active role of questioning and asking. Integral to participant observation are informant interviews, whether a formal interview or casual conversation, which bring greater depth, clarity, and understanding to the researcher’s observations (Spradley 1979).

I engaged in participant observation, augmented by concurrent interviews with street kids for a period of six months. During this time, I encountered and interacted with street kids individually or in a group almost on a daily, or nightly basis. The typical scenario would find me walking to or from my apartment on the tourist drag, or I would be sitting with my wife and daughter at our landlord’s outdoor café, also on the tourist drag, and one or more street children would happen by. They would stop and talk, I would invite them to sit down and have a soda, or they would invite me to accompany them to wherever it was they were going. If circumstances prevented me from immediately accompanying them, we would plan to meet a little later and go then. We would typically end up in a pool hall, a tourist bar with a pool table, coffee shops and cafés frequented by locals rather than tourists, and infrequently a parent’s home. At other

times, especially if there were Western tourists present, the kids would acknowledge me with a greeting and exchange pleasantries, but then would go to work involving themselves with the tourists. These are the settings and circumstances in which I most often observed, interacted, and casually and seriously conversed with my informants/friends. These often informal and casual settings generated a variety of conversations or informal interviews, which provided me with rich, detailed material that elucidated my observations, and ultimately led to a greater understanding of my research concern.

A list of possible interview questions was compiled to elicit more specific information about the street children's lives, experiences, and perspectives, and to elaborate on emerging themes (see Appendix B). These questions served as a take-off point for the more formal interviews conducted at least once with each of the primary participants.

Interviews were conducted in small, off-beat cafés and coffee shops. All interview sites were chosen by the participants, and were familiar settings in which they felt comfortable and relaxed. My only request of the interviewees was that they choose a location that was quiet and would provide privacy. I was very pleased with the participants' choices, in that the locations provided quiet privacy, and also because I was introduced to several places that were previously unknown to me. All interviews proceeded smoothly and without unwanted interruption with the exception of one, which was interrupted by a large, noisy group that crowded into the small café where the interview was taking place. We rescheduled and the interview resumed the following day at a modern-looking coffee shop, where trendy teens would gather to watch music videos.

During the first formal interview, I encountered several challenges to audiotaping the exchange. After obtaining the interviewee's consent to tape the interview I produced my mini-tape recorder, which immediately intrigued the participant, who began to examine, play with, sing into, and rewind the device so that he might hear himself on tape. After satisfying his initial curiosity, and obtaining a promise from me to let him play with the recorder later, the interview commenced. Not far into the interview I was asking him to elaborate on his home life, and I noted that we were not far from his parents' home. He quickly responded, "It's very far from here" and then reached over and turned off the tape recorder. He then stated, "You know where I live, Thanh [a fellow street kid] knows where I live, but very few other people know where I live, and I'd like to keep it that way." Because it is in the best interest of the participants to keep this and other such information out of the local public arena, making a record of it on tape made this participant very uncomfortable. To avoid this in the future I abandoned any further attempts to audiotape interviews and elected to take notes by hand, which seemed less obtrusive to the participants, and caused much less distraction.

### *Recording Data*

I kept a small notepad on hand at all times, which served as my field log. I recorded my observations, interactions, key and interesting points of conversations, activities and behavior, descriptions of people and places, and interview transcriptions and notes in the field log. Through purposeful recollection of key words and phrases recorded in my field log, I elaborated on, and entered the above information in a data processor at least once daily.

I also recorded my impressions, reflections, uncertainties, and personal reactions to the fieldwork, obstacles encountered, progress of the research or lack thereof, and relationship negotiations with the participants and members of mainstream society in a personal journal. My wife added another dimension by recording her perspectives, thoughts, and reactions. This practice allows the subjective dimensions of the research process to inform the objective dimensions, and *vice versa*.

### *Protection of Human Subjects*

Conducting ethnographic research with street children is a sensitive undertaking due to the children's vulnerability, and their aberrant behavior and activities by mainstream standards. I established rapport and trust with the street kids prior to engaging in my active research with them, and was strongly committed to their welfare. Almost all of the street children from whom I collected my data were minors. This fact gave me a heightened awareness of the need to protect their best interests. Furthermore, because children are classified as a high-risk population the research proposal was scrutinized and reviewed in detail before institutional permission to proceed was granted.

The observational component of the research was conducted in a manner that I felt was least intrusive, and the interviews, formal and informal, occurred in places where the participants felt comfortable and safe. I was upfront about my research agenda with all participants, explaining that I wanted to gain their perspectives about tourism, and understand how it affected their lives. In obtaining consent to participate, the street children presented an exceptional circumstance because of the absence of a recognized guardian. Also, written consent forms made the street kids uncomfortable because an

identifying document could leave a paper trail, potentially destroying the anonymity they enjoyed on the streets. Furthermore, several of the street children who participated were illiterate. Therefore, after explaining to the street kids that their participation was voluntary, that their true and street identities would remain anonymous, that none of the information would be made available to the local public or authorities, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and for any reason without repercussion or effect to our relationship, I sought verbal consent directly from the potential participants. (See Appendix C for the verbal script used when conveying elements of informed consent to potential participants.) I was mildly, and pleasantly surprised when all of the potential participants, with the exception of one, took time to seriously consider my request before responding.

### **The Researcher as Instrument**

During the study, I was concerned with the issue of researcher bias, and how it might affect my ability to observe, understand, and credibly portray the perspectives and experiences of the participants. In order to minimize the affect my own biases might have on my ability to clearly perceive, and faithfully represent phenomena I reflected on my feelings, attitudes, and fears about the street kids and my relationships with them, which I felt could potentially threaten the study's credibility.

Early on during my stay in Viet Nam, I became acutely aware of the normal Western response of stress towards Vietnamese relationships. Vietnamese relationships carry heavy obligations of time investment, reciprocity, savvy negotiations, and diplomacy. To the unexpected Vietnamese cultural neophyte these relationships can be

exhausting. These relationship negotiations extended to the street children, as well as members of mainstream society. Between the two I sometimes felt that I had no time for my wife and daughter, or myself, and there were instances when I resented the seemingly endless obligations incurred by my relationships.

There were several instances when one of the street children would be given a relatively large amount of money by a generous tourist. The beneficiary would invite me to go out for something to eat or drink with other street kids, and the rest of the money would often be spent on recreational pursuits over a short period of time. The following day the money would be gone, and I would be asked for a small sum of money to buy a meal, cigarettes, or to pay a gambling debt. Because of the reciprocal nature of relationships I was expected to reciprocate if I had the means. During periods of stress, I was covertly incredulous and disapproving of the street kids' mismanagement of money, and feared I was being used. However, I did not immediately express my disapproval, but waited until the incident had passed, and then gave counsel and advice expected of a friend.

I very often found myself in complicated and difficult situations that caused relationship stress between the street kids, members of mainstream society, and myself. In order to navigate the seemingly endless red-tape of visa extensions, study permits, permits to rent accommodations from local citizens, permits to allow non-student family members to reside for an extended period of time in local accommodations, etc. I had to rely on the help of well-connected friends, which entailed negotiating and maintaining relationships with Hue's "upstanding citizens." Situations would arise when I needed to be an "upstanding citizen," and one or more street kids would come along, interrupt

whatever and whoever I was engaged with, and want me to leave on an outing. The point of conflict was in the two different expectations of my reaction. The “upstanding citizen” expected me to completely dismiss the youth, possibly reprimand him for the interruption, shoo him away, and not have anything to do with him. On the other hand, the street kid expected, or at least wanted me to act as carefree as he did, get up, and immediately leave with him. The relationship stress occurred when I did neither, but tried to remain on middle ground, and not favor either of them by pointing out to the youth that I was presently engaged, and that I would find him later and go with him then. This was not the optimal response for either party, and I walked a very fine line trying to build and maintain confidence and acceptance by both groups.

Because I did not fully participate in all aspects of the street children’s lives, I was not considered a true insider by them, but held a conflicting role of marginal but honorary group member, with one foot firmly planted in the mainstream world of confining rules and regulations, while the other “ran wild” with the kids. Regardless, I became a trusted friend and confidant, and I gained insights that I would not have otherwise. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) have established that sincere concern for, personal and professional interest in, and a genuine relationship with one’s informants enhances rather than diminishes the credibility of research findings.

Periodically I cross-checked information with participants’ friends, acquaintances, and other participants for verification. I also conducted informal follow-up interviews with street children, and those who knew them in order to clarify and elaborate on observations, conversations, and events, and to verify my interpretations. Using the methods of participant observation, informal conversations, and formal interviews helped

to reduce the bias of each individual method. Also, conducting observations (participatory and non) in several different situations helped to reduce the bias inherent in observation, and using the participants' friends and others who interacted with street kids as sources of secondary information served to increase the scope and validity of the information.

My major advisor, a fellow student, and my wife acted as a sounding board for different areas of investigation, research approaches, data collection methods, and emerging interpretations. This group provided me with insights, perspectives, and helped me to recognize topics and questions that may have otherwise been ignored. I am especially indebted to Shawna, my wife, who provided me with tremendous support and grounding during the entire time I was in the field.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process whereby "recorded experiences, conversation transcripts, and pieces of information are compiled, reduced, and examined for their interactions (patterns) and basic themes" (Reinharz 1983, c.f. Lundy 1995: 37). Data analysis is an idiosyncratic process, and the construction of hypotheses and recognition of themes cannot be effected by a single formula. The researcher must rely upon personal insight, knowledge, and imagination as he or she grapples with the interpretation of the complex interplay between his or her informants, the data, and him or herself. This process will ultimately culminate in a "document uniquely reflective of the informants as realized by the researcher as instrument" (Lundy 1995:37). Principles of ethnographic and qualitative content analysis, as elaborated by Bernard (1995), Ely *et al.* (1991), Flick



(1998), and Spradley (1979) guided me in the process of seeking meaning in the data. This process is described below.

Through multiple careful readings of my field log, interview transcripts, and personal journal I became familiar with the material, and developed tentative categories. The data was organized according to recurring patterns and themes based on observations, and generally reflected by informants' perspectives and experiences. In order to link the categories, which are grouped under the pertinent themes, to the raw data from which they emerged, I listed participants' statements, and my observations under the appropriate category headings. Periodically I returned to the raw material to reexamine and reflect on the data. This served to generate new impressions, clarify, and refine the initial categories, which were reorganized and revised where I felt it appropriate.

Through this process, I identified themes, and relationships among the various elements. Related elements were then examined for commonalities and differences, culminating in the final analysis and writing stages, in which themes representative of the street kids are elaborated, relationships are described, and observations and impressions are integrated into a unifying model.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Introducing the Street Children and Their World**

The intent of this chapter is to introduce the four primary participants, and describe the world in which the street children live. This will be accomplished by presenting background information on each of the participants, their relationships with each other, their families, tourists, and mainstream society, their perspectives on tourism, and my observations of their activities and interactions with others. This information is taken from interviews, conversations, my field log, and personal journal. All interpretations from Vietnamese to English are mine, and participants are referred to by pseudonyms arbitrarily assigned by me. Themes will be identified and elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

#### **Dinh**

Dinh was the most volatile and unpredictable of all the street children with whom I interacted. Dinh wasn't sure of his exact age, but estimated that he was 14 or 15 years old, and is the second oldest of his parents' nine children. He was of average height for his age, but was quite thin. Most of Dinh's clothes had been given to him by tourists. The nicer articles of clothing would be sold for money, and he kept only those he needed. Around mid afternoon, when he usually first awoke, Dinh often appeared disheveled and unkempt, as he sleepily shuffled down the street. However, he would often reappear a few hours later looking alert, and fairly clean. Although his clothing was well-worn, it was not ragged. If judged only on his outward appearance, Dinh would be

indistinguishable from children of the working poor, with the exception of an expression of cunning and mischief that seemed to never leave his face.

Dinh has a first grade education, but upon completion of the first grade left school and his home for the streets because of his abusive father. He had been on the street for seven years when I met him. In the loose hierarchy of the group of street kids that consisted of the four primary participants, Dinh held a tenuous top position. This was due to the length of time he had spent on the streets, his aggressiveness, and his ability to speak broken, but intelligible English and profit from his interactions with tourists. Dinh also had the most blatant disregard for authority and mainstream society, and a well-developed capacity for getting into trouble. This made him one of the most ill favored street kids among many members of mainstream society who also made their living on the tourist drag. Despite all this, Dinh was friendly, generous, loved to joke (often crudely) and laugh, had the capacity to be kind and gentle, but could also descend into bouts of depression, which he sought to remedy through recreational activities. My relationship with, and brief introduction and assessment of Dinh are illustrated and elaborated below through interview excerpts, observations, conversations, and experiences with him.

On one occasion I planned to head out into the country to reflect upon the progress of my fieldwork, and revisit the information I had already collected. I rented a motorbike from my landlady's younger sister, and was preparing to leave when Dinh showed up. When he learned of my excursion he pleaded with me to take him along. He told me that he could show me the way, and take me to some interesting places that tourists rarely got to see. I agreed, and we spent the day taking in the countryside as we

rode along a narrow dirt trail that skirted rice paddies, and wound in and out of forests, and past Buddhist temples and old imperial tombs that had not been developed into tourist sites, as their more grandiose counterparts had. I was impressed by his knowledge about the different symbols that adorned the tombs, and by the fact that many of the monks at the temples knew him. Dinh explained that he was very familiar with all of the popular tourist sites around Hue, as well as the lesser-known sites. He told me that he had taken tourist friends to these places several times, and if he wanted to he could work as a guide, but preferred to simply accompany friends for entertainment.

On our way home we passed through Dinh's old neighborhood, and he asked me if I wanted to stop by his house, which I did. I had been there once before, during the *Tet* holiday (Vietnamese New Year), when it is customary for children to return to the parents' home for a visit. On my first visit I was surprised to find a nice, fairly large house, well-furnished with nice chairs, a large TV, and audio-video equipment. Dinh's father didn't say a lot, but smiled and joked about what a hoodlum his son is. On this first visit I hadn't known much about Dinh's past or home life, and I was a little confused as to why he had chosen life on the streets. As we neared the house for my second visit Dinh told me that almost everything in the house was gone. Dinh guessed it had been sold. I asked him why, and was told that I'd have to ask his father that question, but Dinh guessed it was related to gambling. We pulled up in front of the house and several of Dinh's younger siblings excitedly ran over to greet us. Dinh rarely ever goes home, so they were surprised to see him. Dinh asked a younger sister where their mother was. She told him that their mother had gone to Saigon, and that their father was in the house drinking. I had turned off the motorbike and was preparing to get off, but upon hearing

this news Dinh asked me to please drive away. I restarted the motorbike, but his father was already on his way out of the house, calling out a greeting, and looking and sounding very drunk. Dinh's father had just finished shaving his head, and was still covered with hair clippings. He walked over to us and began shaking my hand vigorously, and smiling drunkenly. I greeted him, and he asked me where my wife was. I told him that she was at home, and we needed to get going because she was waiting for me. Dinh's father nodded in understanding, but instead of releasing my hand he began kissing it and thanking me repeatedly (for what I don't know). I told him again that we needed to be on our way, to which he responded by hugging me and kissing my cheek while still grasping my hand. This was not a typical Vietnamese greeting. I finally pulled my hand free, and we left. Dinh was very upset and embarrassed. He began crying, and angrily said to me, "Do you see? My father is always drunk, and he hits my mother and my brothers and sisters. So do you see now why I don't go home?" Dinh had told me several times that the reason he is always talking nonsense and making dirty jokes is to make himself laugh and smile, otherwise he would be terribly sad, and would cry all the time. I felt sincerely sorry for Dinh.

Dinh had been asking me for an American t-shirt for a few days, and when I saw him on one particular night I decided that I might as well give it to him then. He followed my wife, daughter, and I to the entrance of the alley where our residence was located, and I asked him to wait for me there. Our landlady, whose family occupied the house in which our apartment was located, had explicitly told me not to bring any street kids to the house. Dinh had previously agreed to be interviewed, and I decided that this would be a good night to do it. Besides, I was giving him something, and thus he was

incurring obligation. When I entered the house, my landlord and a college student, who also rented a small room in the house, were sitting at the tea table talking. My landlord invited me to sit and have tea with them. I gratefully declined, telling him that I had an appointment. I went upstairs and grabbed the shirt, my tape recorder, and a pack of cigarettes to help keep Dinh occupied during the interview (often when he was sitting down he looked antsy, like he wanted to get up and go, and I was afraid that he might lose interest in the interview after a short time). As I headed back downstairs and rounded the landing I was surprised to see Dinh and a friend sitting in the open doorway of the house. My landlord and the student were still sitting where they had been. The college student was staring at Dinh and his friend, then turned and looked at me with a shocked look on his face. My landlord looked plain pissed-off. I immediately asked Dinh why he hadn't waited on the street, my landlady's admonition to keep the street kids away from the house ringing loudly in my ears. Dinh simply shrugged, and seemed completely oblivious to, and unaffected by the others' intense glares. My landlord asked me where I was going, not attempting to hide the disgust in his voice and on his face. I replied that I was going to go have a chat with Dinh, quickly put on my shoes, and led the kids away from the house. I am sure that declining the invitation to have tea with my landlord in order to go and talk with some street punk baffled and angered him. When we reached the street, Dinh's friend departed, and the two of us began walking to our destination. On our way we passed several small shops owned by some of the local individuals I knew, including my landlady's younger sister. I was stopped twice by very concerned looking shopkeepers, and asked, "Just where do you think you are going with

this no-good kid?" To Dinh's amusement, I jokingly responded that I was escorting him to jail, and walked on.

Dinh chose a small side street café, which looked almost identical to all of Hue's small cafés, as the interview location. The front of the café was completely opened to the street, and there were several plastic table and chair sets on the sidewalk directly in front of the café. The rest of the tables and chairs were set inside the café, but even here the room had a very open feel because there was no wall facing the street. The walls were a typical light powdery blue, washed out by the fluorescent lights overhead. There were a few men sitting outside, and there was no music playing, so it was quiet. We ordered a couple of sodas, and began talking. Dinh told me that talking seriously about his life made him very sad, so we would have to go and play afterwards to help him forget and be happy. I agreed and began the interview. The following is a selection of excerpts from this interview.

*How old are you?* "I don't know. I've been away from home for so long that I don't know my exact age." *Guess.* "14 or 15, or thereabouts."

*How long have you lived on the streets?* "About seven years."

*Why are you on the streets?* (He bowed his head, and responded very quietly) "You know why I'm on the streets. I don't like living at home. My father drinks a lot, and hits my mother and my brothers and sisters. I'm sad at home. I'm happier not being at home."

*Your house isn't too far from here, is it?* "It's very far from here." (At this point he turned off the tape recorder, and it stayed off for the remainder of my fieldwork.) "You

know where my father's house is, Thanh knows where it is, but very few other people know, and I want to keep it that way."

*What grade have you finished in school?* "The first grade."

*Why did you stop going to school?* "I started living on the streets. I also didn't like school. I was always getting in trouble, starting fights with the other kids, and the teacher would hit my hands."

*Now that you don't go to school, and don't have a job, what do you do?* "I just go and play and have fun."

*Where do you sleep?* "Sometimes on the street. I sleep at a lot of places. I know people who own cafés and bars and shops, and sometimes they let me sleep there. There are a lot of places I can go to sleep."

*How and where do you eat?* "I eat around. At the cafés. I don't know, I just eat."

*Do you have to pay, or are you sometimes given food?* "Of course I have to pay, no they don't give me food. I eat at my usual places, and they sell me the food very cheap." (I never did see Dinh beg for food, and he seemed a little bothered by me asking. Dinh had a sense of pride, and perhaps he felt that begging for food was below him.)

*Where do you get your money?* "I don't know, I just seem to get it." (I sensed that my line of questions may have been implying begging, and this bothered Dinh, so I took a different approach.)

*When was the first time you became acquainted with tourists?* "About seven years ago, when I began living on the streets. I met a couple of tourists from Switzerland. I was just hanging out down here on the street, and they called me over and started talking to me. I was only about seven years old, and I didn't speak a lot of English, but they were



able to find out that I wasn't going to school. They ended up giving me enough money to go to school for a month. I took the money, but I didn't want to go back to school, I didn't like school, so I just spent the money."

*So tourists give you money?* "Yeah, sometimes."

*What do you typically spend the money on?* "Food, I go and play a lot with the money, or buy gold jewelry. But when I get money I usually spend it all, then I don't have any left. That's why I sometimes buy gold jewelry. After I've spent all my cash, I can go and sell the gold and get back as much as I bought it for, and sometimes more."

*Do you share the money with your friends?* "Oh yeah, I take them to eat, and take them out for coffee, and take them to play."

*Do your friends ever get money from tourists?* "Yeah." *Do they share it with you?*

"Yeah, when they get money they also take me out to eat, and for coffee, and take me to play."

*Have you ever been arrested?* "Yeah, twice already. When the cops come and get you they beat you up, they pick you up by the hair or by the ear, and they hit you here, and here, and here, and here (pointing to his face, head, chest, and stomach). It's not like America, here the cops beat you up."

*You've been arrested, but you are here with me now, how?* "Did you see that guy we passed on the street who I said hello to?" Yes. "He is a cop, and he told them that I was not a street kid, but legitimate, and that I just sold cards and stuff on the street. He is a drunk, and doesn't know who is who, so when he is drunk and sees me on the street he thinks I am selling postcards, so that's what he told the other cops and they let me go."

*Do the cops come looking for street kids often?* “No, not really, only before holidays like *Tet*, and big activities like the tourist festival coming up, and they only catch you if you’re actually sleeping on the street, or fighting.”

*Are you afraid of the cops?* “No.” *But aren’t they going to be looking for you soon, with the festival coming up?* “Yeah, they’ll be looking for me.” *Will you hide?* “No, I will not hide. I just won’t go to sleep. I’ll just stay up all night, and drink coffee during the day to stay awake.”

*What do you want to do when you get older?* “If I have money I’d like to have a coffee shop, or café for tourists. If I don’t have money I don’t know what I’ll do.”

*What do you think of tourists?* “There are good people, and bad people. I once met a rich American man who would always give me money. He would give me 500,000 VND (roughly equivalent to US \$35), and when that was gone he would give me more. I gave him my email address, but he never writes or keeps in contact, so he is not so good.

There are a lot of people who are liars like that, they say they will keep in touch or send money, but they never do. I only have two friends who don’t lie to me, Linh from Saigon, and Maurice. They are both very good to me, they keep in touch and send money.”

*Why do you think tourists come to Hue?* “They come to see the tombs and tourist sites, why else?”

*Is it good or bad that tourists come to Hue?* “Of course it’s good.”

*Why is it good?* (Dinh starts laughing.) “Man, you’re acting like a cop. Sitting here asking me these crazy questions, it’s like a cop questioning somebody from the mafia on T.V. I’m just kidding. I don’t know why it’s good. I like meeting tourists and going to

play with them. I guess people also get money from tourists. Sometimes when I go to the bars to play pool the owners get mad at me, and want me to leave. But if I bring other people there [tourists] the owners are happy and like me, and let me play pool."

*Where do most of the tourists come from?* "From foreign countries." *Yes, but which countries?* "From Australia, England, Switzerland, France, lots of other places, but I think that most come from Australia and England."

*Would your life be different if there were no tourists?* "Yes, it would be very different. I would be very sad. I wouldn't have anyone to play with, or to talk to, and would kill myself. It would be too depressing to wander around by myself."

At this point a large group of customers entered the café, and it became quite noisy. Dinh told me that we had had enough sad talk for the night. He wanted to go somewhere fun, and told me that we could go to the country the following day and talk some more. He then led me to a tourist bar owned by a Vietnamese woman and her Australian husband. Dinh introduced me to the owners and several tourists there, but then withdrew into a quiet corner, where he sat idly playing with the tape recorder and looking very contemplative.

The interview was rescheduled to resume the following day in the early afternoon. I arrived at the prearranged meeting place, which was right next to the little shop my landlady's younger sister, Phuc, owned and operated. After several minutes of waiting I asked Phuc if she had seen Dinh around. She told me that he had passed by there several minutes earlier. I was getting ready to go look for Dinh in the direction Phuc indicated he had gone, but she asked me to sit down for a few minutes. I sat down and she asked me why I was looking for him. I told her that I needed to talk to him. Of course, Phuc

wanted to know why I needed to talk to him. (I was told by numerous individuals that in Viet Nam, and especially Hue, it is custom for people to ask about my personal life and activities in detail. This practice allows others to understand and sympathize with the person being questioned. This frequent interrogation was meant to convey concern and friendship, rather than being nosey.) I briefly explained to her that I was doing a research project for school, which involved finding out about street kids. Phuc then gave me a speech I had heard many times, telling me that these kids are bad kids, and that they'll steal from me, etc. Just then, Thanh, another of the primary participants, passed by on a bike, and stopped to talk. I asked him if he knew where Dinh was. He told me that he didn't, but that he would get word to Dinh that I was looking for him. I was always amazed at how fast information traveled down the tourist drag. Thanh left and within minutes Dinh appeared on the bike that Thanh had been riding. Dinh invited me to join him, Thanh, and Hai (another of the primary participants) for something to eat at a café just down the road. I climbed onto the bike seat, Dinh slid back onto the rear fender, and we rode away.

We joined Thanh and Hai, who were already eating. Dinh asked me what I wanted to eat. I told him that I was fine, but he insisted on getting me something so I ordered some food. Dinh said that when we were finished we could go to the hills and talk in a peaceful atmosphere. However, when we had finished eating his mood and priorities changed, and he invited all of us to go swimming. Thanh said he had to go make some money, jumped on his bike, and left to go sell silk paintings. I told Dinh that I didn't have any swim trunks with me so he decided that we should go have coffee instead. At this point Dinh told Hai to put on the shirt that I had given Dinh the night

before, who in turn gave it to Hai. Dinh told me that Hai only had one shirt, which was filthy, so he had given Hai the shirt, which was fine with me. Dinh then called over a *xich lo*, and we headed for a coffee shop that catered to the young, hip locals. Dinh paid the *xich lo* driver and then gave Hai money to go roller-skating at the rink located next to the coffee shop. We entered the coffee shop and Dinh stopped to talk with a young lady seated at a table. After we sat down, I asked Dinh who the young woman was. He told me that she is his older sister. I pointed out that she didn't resemble anyone in the photograph of his family, which he had given me earlier, but he assured me that she was his sister. When I questioned him further, he told me that she is not his biological sister, but is his sister like I am his older brother; a surrogate family on which he can depend for support in the absence of his biological family. I then followed a line of questions with Dinh:

*You have money today?* "Yes, I have money."

*Where did you get it?* "I sold my gold ring, the one I showed you the other night. I bought it for about 520,000 VND, but was able to sell it for 540,000 VND.

*Where did you get the money to buy the ring?* "My friend from Switzerland, Maurice, sent it to me." (I had recently translated an email from Maurice for Dinh. Maurice asked if Dinh had received the money he sent, which Dinh was supposed to use to buy silk paintings to sell.)

*Did you buy any silk paintings?* (Dinh began to laugh.) "No, I've already spent the money."

*What did you spend it on?* "I used it buy the ring I just sold, and I used the rest to play."

Hai had finished skating and joined us in the coffee shop. We joked and talked back and forth for a little bit about different music groups that we like. Dinh started getting a little rambunctious and broke one of the dishes on the coffee table. None of the employees saw it, so he hid the pieces in an empty cigarette box, and announced that it was time to leave. He pulled a wad of cash out of his pocket, paid for the drinks, and we all headed "home."

Several days afterward, I went to my landlord's café to buy some milk. While I was there, my landlord started going over some rental renewal papers with me that he needed to give to the local immigration office. Dinh showed up and started teasing and poking at me, and asking me questions. This was a faux pas on Dinh's part because he was interrupting, and showing disrespect to two elders. I tried to ignore him. Refusing to be ignored, he began grabbing at the milk I was holding, telling me to let him see it. I asked him to please wait because I was busy. Dinh did not stop, and my landlord became furious. He started screaming at Dinh, telling him to never come to the house again, that he would get a beating if he ever entered the house or the interior of the café, where we were sitting, and to basically get lost. Dinh glared at him, swore, and left. While my landlord was yelling at Dinh, I was aware that he was not only yelling loudly, but clearly and more slowly than I would expect. I decided that my landlord wanted to make sure that I also heard and understood everything he was saying. After Dinh left, the previous conversation between my landlord and I did not resume, so I said goodbye, and left. On my way home I thought that I would see Dinh, and perhaps ease the blow for him, but I didn't see him.

On the evening of the following day, my wife, my daughter, and myself were on our way home from an exhausting day of grocery shopping and haggling over prices at Hue's big market. We stopped briefly at our landlord's café to pick up a few more items before continuing home. Dinh and Hai were hanging around the café. Hai approached us and asked for a small amount of money so he could buy some food. Before I could respond Dinh came over and started asking me for a large sum of money so he could buy a watch. I was on a very tight budget, which the street kids were aware of, and they often referred to me as "poor." I simply smiled at Dinh's unexpected and unusual request, and went into the café to get the last of our groceries. When I came back out and started home Dinh told me that he didn't want to see me anymore. I asked him why, and he told me that I was tight fisted, stingy, and cheap. This response caught me off guard, and I asked him to walk with us so we could talk. He told me that he didn't want to, so with my patience wearing thin I continued home with my wife and daughter. After we had walked a little distance, I told my wife, Shawna, what was going on, and she suggested that I should at least buy them something to eat. While we were talking, Hai caught up to us. He was holding a bag that contained the shirt I had given Dinh, who in turn gave it to Hai. Hai told me that Dinh was returning the shirt to me. I told Hai that the shirt belonged to him now, and he should keep it. Hai told me that he couldn't keep it, or Dinh would yell at him. By this time Dinh was approaching. I asked him why he was returning the shirt. Dinh told me that he didn't like the shirt anymore. I asked Dinh what was wrong, and put my hand on his shoulder. He jerked away from me and began swearing and calling me names as he walked away. Hai just looked at the ground, saying that he was sorry and didn't feel the same way. When Dinh was gone Hai told me that

Dinh was being no good, and that Dinh's ideas and feelings were his own. Hai wanted to make sure that I understood that he did not agree with the things Dinh said. I thanked him, and slowly walked home, feeling a little bewildered.

Over the next week, I inquired of several of Dinh's acquaintances about his behavior, and what it meant for our relationship. Those who didn't like Dinh told me that he was simply a street punk, that his actions signaled an end to our friendship, and that I should no longer bother with him. Others who were more sympathetic towards Dinh told me that his erratic behavior was not atypical, and was due to the hardships and difficulties he had experienced in life. One of the participants, Thanh, told me that he had stopped hanging out with Dinh also. Thanh told me that Dinh had wanted Thanh to buy him something. When Thanh refused, Dinh became very angry. Thanh said that Dinh wanted to hit him, but was afraid because Thanh is bigger than Dinh. So Dinh beat up Thanh's bike instead. Hai told me that lately Dinh had been acting "no good," and seemed to be getting into trouble with everyone. He told me that Dinh had gone to stay at a friend's house for a while to regroup.

After a couple weeks, Dinh resurfaced and began to reestablish relationships. At first, he didn't approach me, but several times I saw him grinning at me from across the street. I didn't know quite how to react, so I would smile back, but decided to let him initiate things at his own pace. Two sisters, who were sympathetic towards Dinh, operated an Internet café where Dinh had his email account. One day I was there sending email and one of the sisters told me that Dinh had received email from his Swiss friend, Maurice, saying that he wanted to call Dinh on the phone at the Internet café. She asked me if I would pass the news along to Dinh. I agreed and asked Thanh to relay the



message to Dinh. That same afternoon Dinh approached me on the street. He told me that Thanh had given him my message, and was acting very casually, as if nothing had happened. I gave him the details of the message, and told him the time and date when Maurice would call. Dinh thanked me, and we continued on our separate ways.

A week passed, and I saw Dinh off and on. We would stop and chat, but there was still an uneasy feeling between us. Then one evening I went out to get my daughter some milk, and met Dinh. He invited me to go and play, but I told him that I needed to get milk for my daughter and return home. Dinh told me that he would buy the milk for her, and produced a wad of cash. He said that Maurice had sent it to him. I told him to save his money, but he insisted on buying the milk. I sensed that he was attempting to make peace, so I gave in. After we purchased the milk we headed back towards my residence. As we walked, Dinh put his arm around me, and joked and played as he did before our falling out. I decided that Dinh and I were friends again. Before we parted, Dinh told me that he might be going to Saigon with a friend, and that he might stay down there to work. The street kids were always talking about going south to one of the bigger cities to make money, so I wasn't sure how serious he was.

Several weeks passed, and I had not seen Dinh anywhere. I thought that maybe he actually did go to Saigon. Then, late one evening, Shawna came upstairs and told me that Dinh and Thanh were down on the street, and wanted to see me. I went down and met them. Dinh told me that he had been in Da Nang for about a week. He had received US \$300 from a French tourist, who he was referring to as his French father. While he was in Da Nang he stayed in hotels and lived the high life. Laughing, he related to me how he had managed to spend all of the money. As I stood there in disbelief, converting

US dollars to Vietnamese *dong* in my head, Hai appeared. He walked over and whispered something to Dinh. Upon hearing whatever news Hai had given him, Dinh sharply reprimanded Hai, and slapped him very hard upside the head. Although Hai is bigger than Dinh, he did not retaliate, but slumped to a sitting position with his head bowed and eyes cast down. I asked Dinh what was going on, but did not get an answer.

Dinh then invited everyone to go have coffee. We sat down in a café by the river, lighted only by Chinese style lanterns. Dinh told me that he was going to leave for Saigon in four days, and that his French father was going to send him a couple hundred dollars more. He said that he would stay in Saigon for three or four months, and hoped to work at a friend's coffee shop. If he wasn't able to work, he would just live off the money the French tourist was going to send him. We finished our drinks, and the kids walked me home. We stopped at the entrance to my alley to say goodbye. Dinh told me that he might not see me again before he left. Just then, my landlord drove by on the street. When he saw the street kids standing at the entrance to the alley, which leads to his house, he quickly stopped and scowled at us. I smiled disarmingly and greeted him. He asked why I hadn't gone to bed yet. I replied that I was on my way. He slowly pulled away, and as he did so he quickly said something in a low tone to the street kids, so that I couldn't hear. The kids just laughed, and when he was out of earshot they made crude comments about him. I interrupted their disparaging remarks, and told them that I was going home to bed, but that I would see Dinh again, before he left for Saigon.

Dinh never did go to Saigon. About three weeks before I left Hue, Dinh informed me that his father had sold the house, and moved the family south, just outside of Saigon. Dinh and his younger brother, who was seven and had also started living on the streets,

had been left behind. Dinh was looking pretty tattered and I asked him if he had been fighting. He told me that the previous night he was looking for a fight, and had his homemade, meter-long knife under his shirt and down his pants. A couple of cops saw the knife and grabbed him. They took him to one of the police stations and beat him up. He said that they jabbed him under the ribs, beat him three times with a baton, and then took keys and drilled holes between his fingers. As Dinh was relating the story, he mistook the look of shock on my face for disbelief. To validate his story, he lifted up his shirt and showed me his bruised torso, and then spread his fingers apart to reveal large sores. My eyes filled with tears, and I asked if there was anything I could do for him. He just laughed at me, teased me for crying like a woman, and then invited me to go play pool. We played until it started getting late, at which point I said goodnight and went home. I never saw Dinh again.

It was normal for one of the street kids to disappear for a week or two, especially after an encounter with the police. But as the time of my departure grew nigh and I hadn't seen Dinh for over a week, I started asking around. Thanh and Hai told me that Dinh had gotten into a fight, and cut off his opponent's nose with one of his homemade knives. The last they knew, Dinh had gone into hiding. However, they had heard several rumors on the street that the police had apprehended him, and he was going to spend the next seven years in a detention center for delinquent youths, which I had been told was basically a prison for minors.

## **Hai**

Hai was the most dependent, submissive, and insecure of the four participants. He was 16 years old, and the younger of his parents' two children. Hai was fairly tall and lanky. He had a physical awkwardness about him, typical of many pubescent boys. Hai fit the common street kid stereotype well. He owned few articles of clothing, all of which were tattered and perpetually dirty. He looked and smelled as though he rarely bathed. Whenever I saw him alone he appeared to be wandering aimlessly, and wore an expression of being lost.

Hai had a sixth grade education, and had been on the streets for two years. He left home because his stepfather rejected him after his widowed mother remarried. Hai lacked many of the interpersonal skills, the knack to charm and ability to establish beneficial relationships with tourists that the other members of the group possessed. Hai spoke very little English, which further inhibited profitable interactions with foreigners. His main survival strategy was to put on a very dramatic and pitiful expression of hunger, hold his stomach with one hand, and stretch his other hand out to the person he was begging from. This was not a very successful strategy for a teenage boy who was beginning to physically look like an adult, and the little money he received had to be supplemented by financial support from Dinh, whom he depended on heavily for money. Hai was very apparently the low man on the totem pole, and was very submissive and deferential, especially towards Dinh.

Hai's severe dependency pervaded our relationship. When I would see him on the street he would often put on his hungry face and hold his stomach, either before any words were spoken or immediately following our greetings. After I would give him

enough money to eat, he would always tell me, unconvincingly, that I was his best friend. I often felt uncomfortable when interacting or conversing one on one with Hai because the subject of conversation always seemed to change to his lack of money and empty stomach. When other participants were present they would reprimand him for begging from a poor student. Although I sincerely sympathized with Hai's plight, and gave him food money when I could, I felt that he was exploiting the relationship purely for economic reasons. The only times that Hai individually sought me out was when he wanted money. For this reason I never achieved the same level of intimacy or insight that I did with the other three group members.

I include Hai as a primary participant because he was almost always with one of the other three participants, and thus I got to know him well and had numerous opportunities to observe and interact with him. Hai is also representative of the second type of street children in Aptekar's (1988) two-tiered typology: the dependent and abused victim, willfully pushed out of the home. Hai agreed to participate in the study, but having a serious interview or conversation with him was difficult. After taking him to get something to eat or drink, his attention would turn from his need for money to endless crude jokes and inquiries about my sex life. The following are excerpts from an interview that took place in a coffee shop.

*How old are you?* "16."

*How long have you been on the streets?* "For two years."

*Where is your house?* "Far from here."

*Why are you here in Hue?* "I don't have parents." *Did they pass away?* "Yes. I have grandparents. Well, in fact, I lost my father but still have a mother, but she remarried."

*So why don't you live at home?* "I don't like my stepfather." *Why don't you like him?* "I just don't like him. He didn't accept me when he married my mom, and he was very mean and cruel to me. He is no good."

*Does your mom miss you?* "No." *I don't believe that.* "You're right, she does miss me."

*Do you miss her?* "Yes, but I go home a couple times a month to see her. I know some people with motorbikes, and I can pay them a little money to take me there. It's about seven kilometers away. But I never stay long because I don't like it there, and my mom's husband always wants me to leave."

*What do you do during a typical day?* "I hang out with my friends. When we have money we go and have coffee and go skating. In the evening we'll go and hang around the cafés where the tourists eat and try to get money to eat, or invite them to play pool. We just play a lot."

*How and where do you eat?* "Sometimes I can get money from tourists to buy food. When Dinh has money he invites me to eat. Some of the café owners will sometimes give me something to eat, but just the good ones."

*Where do you sleep?* "A couple times a month I'll sleep at home. Most the time I sleep behind that wall by the photo shop, or over in the corner of the big hotel. I know some *xich lo* drivers who have motorbikes, and they'll let me nap on their motorbike seats during the day."

*How do you earn money?* "Some of the good tourists sometimes give me money, but not very much. I don't speak very good English, so it's hard to talk with them, and the café owners chase me away when I try. When Dinh gets money from his friends [tourists] he shares it with me, if he's not angry at me."

*Why does he get angry with you?* “I don’t know, he just sometimes gets angry.

Sometimes when I get drunk and don’t know what’s going on he gets angry.”

*What are those on your arm (referring to the round scars from cigarette burns on his forearm, which all four of the participants had)?* He acted out putting out a cigarette on his arm. *Why do you do it?* “You do it because of sadness, you do it when you are very sad.” (On several occasions, the other participants told me that it was also a macho thing to do, to show that you are dangerous and tough).

*When was the first time you met tourists?* “When I left home and came to Hue.” *How did you meet them?* “Dinh and Thanh showed me how to ask them for stuff in English. If I had some money I could buy shoeshine stuff, or buy paintings to sell. If you loan me 20,000 dong I’ll go buy stuff to shine shoes.” *I don’t have any more money with me.* “Are you afraid that I won’t pay you back? When I earn enough money, I promise I’ll pay you back.” *It’s not that, I just really don’t have the money. I can only spend so much money each week or I’ll run out, and I just can’t afford it this week. Ask me again next week, and we’ll see then.*

*Have you ever been arrested?* “No. When the cops come around I hide and don’t let them see me. They come around a lot during holidays, but I can go home then.”

*What do you think about tourists?* “Tourists are fine.” *Is it good or bad that tourists come to Hue?* “It’s good.” *Why?* “Because they have money. Sometimes tourists will buy me something to eat, and we go to the bars with them and play pool. But a lot of them don’t like street kids, when I try to talk to them they’re rude and want me to leave.” *How would your life be different if tourists didn’t come?* “I couldn’t get as much money, and I wouldn’t have as much fun.”

*Why do tourists come to Hue?* “To play ‘kick the chicken’ [slang for sex].”

At this point, Hai began asking me detailed questions about my sexual activity, and I was unsuccessful in my attempts to further elicit any serious responses from him, so the interview ended.

As I noted above, some of Hai's most outstanding characteristics were his submissiveness to, and dependence on Dinh. The other two group members, Thanh and Phuong, recognized Dinh's tenure on the streets, but did not defer to him as a superior. When Dinh would try to dominate Thanh or Phuong, they would ignore it, or simply withdraw from him for a time. They were able to do this because they were financially independent. Hai relied on Dinh for clothing, money, entertainment, food, and guidance. When Dinh had money, Hai was always with him. If Hai wanted to go skating, or buy a snack he would approach Dinh in a manner that reminded me of a child asking a parent for money. Dinh would decide whether or not Hai should have the money for the activity or item, and then count out the appropriate amount. When Hai got the money he would excitedly run off to spend it, much like a child at a carnival.

On the other hand, Dinh could be very harsh when dealing with Hai. Several times when we were all together having coffee, Dinh would buy a cigarette and drink for everyone at the table, except for Hai. Specifically excluding someone in this manner, especially in a group setting, was a sign of great disrespect. There were several instances when we would be walking somewhere and Hai would begin poking and grabbing me relentlessly. I would tell him to stop, but to no avail. Dinh would respond by slapping him in the head, and telling him that if he didn't stop he could not come with us. Hai would immediately cease, and fall quiet until we reached our destination.



Hai submitted to Dinh because he would not have been very successful on the streets by himself. I witnessed several attempts by Hai to initiate an exchange with tourists, instead of simply begging from them. He would always try to initiate this interaction by teasing, and trying to joke with the tourists. He would sit or stand very close to them (personal space in Viet Nam is much smaller than what most Westerners are accustomed to) and make jokes, the content of which was almost always sexual. He would also do a lot of touching, mostly rubbing the tourist's arms and face to feel the hair. This would be followed by poking the tourist's ribs and stomach in an attempt to tickle them and make them laugh. Tourists did not respond well to a strange, dirty kid rubbing their faces and invading their personal space. On one occasion, a tourist sitting at an outdoor café got fed up with Hai's poking and prodding, and jumped up to do something about it. In his haste to get out of the plastic café chair, the tourist broke off the back legs of the chair. This particular attempt to initiate contact ended with Hai being chased off by the tourist and café owner.

Hai was not as resourceful as the other group members, and when he operated alone he would often get into trouble that he could not resolve without the help of others. One evening I noticed a small crowd of people standing by a little stand that sold liquor, candy, and other convenience store items. As I approached the crowd I saw the woman who owns the stand holding Hai tightly by the wrist, and talking excitedly to the people around them. The woman looked quite upset, and Hai looked very distraught. Phuc, my landlady's younger sister, was standing nearby, and I asked her if she knew what was happening. She told me that the woman was missing a bottle of liquor, assumed it had been stolen, and was blaming Hai, who seemed to be the only likely suspect nearby. I

asked Phuc if the woman had called the police. Phuc said that she hadn't, but was going to. Hai said something to the woman that I couldn't hear, and she let go of his wrist. He then began approaching several of the people in the crowd and desperately asking them something. The local people just turned away from him, so he approached a foreign tourist standing outside an adjacent bar, but the tourist simply shook his head at Hai. Hai stopped and looked around hopelessly. I then walked over and asked Hai what was wrong. A wave of relief flooded his face, and he told me that he had to pay the woman 22,000 *dong* to replace the bottle of liquor she was accusing him of stealing, or else she would call the cops. I quietly asked Hai if he had taken the liquor, and he swore that he had not. I believed him. When the street kids did something that could get them in trouble they would immediately leave the vicinity. This section of the tourist drag was lined with wall-to-wall shops, restaurants, and bars, and there was no reasonable place, that I could determine, to hide the liquor. Finally, if he did in fact steal the liquor, it would have been easier to simply return the bottle and avoid a police entanglement, rather than trying to round up 22,000 VND on the spot. It appeared as if everyone around had already made up their minds that Hai was guilty anyway.

Hai asked me if I could loan him the money. I only had 7000 VND on me, and no more at home. The shop owner came over and took hold of Hai's shirt to make sure he didn't get away. I asked her how much the liquor was worth, and she told me 22,000 VND. I told her that Hai didn't take the liquor, but she insisted that he did because he is a no good street kid and she was going to call the police. I told the woman that I would pay the money for Hai, but would have to go to the bank to get the money the following day. She agreed and let him go. Hai raised his hands in the air and yelled "freedom"

then quickly disappeared. The following day I paid the shop owner, who shook her head at me and mumbled something about me being foolish for keeping the company of those no good kids.

After Dinh disappeared and was rumored to be detained by the police for assault, Hai began to attach himself to Thanh. Thanh was very independent and had an attitude of "every street kid for himself." Thanh didn't mind Hai's company, but he did not provide the kind of support that Dinh had given Hai. In Dinh's absence Hai seemed less stable, and began drinking more often. He also started spending more time in the company of older men who would come out and prowls the tourist drag late at night, and who did not discourage his drinking. Because I did not feel safe in the company of these individuals, Hai and I interacted less frequently during my last few weeks in Hue than we had before.

On my last night in Hue, my wife, my daughter, and I were sitting at our landlord's outdoor café. The evening had been a little stressful as we hurried to wrap up last minute business, and say our last farewells to a myriad of friends. Hai showed up drunk. He began his usual pawing and lewd jokes. This may have been the last time I ever saw him, so I was trying to tolerate him. Hai got up and approached my landlady's 13-year-old niece, who was holding and playing with my daughter, Brooklyn. Hai wanted to hold Brooklyn, but when he tried to take her both she and the young girl resisted. Hai got upset and slapped the young girl across the face, which made Brooklyn cry. From my vantage point, it appeared that Hai had slapped my daughter. All my tolerance and patience dissolved instantly. I leapt from my chair, grabbed Hai, and manhandled him out onto the street, where I proceeded to let loose a stream of harsh

Vietnamese curses, reprimands, and threats more fluidly than I thought I was capable of. I had never come unglued like this before, as doing so would typically result in a loss of face for everyone involved. Hai shrunk from me with a look of shock and horror on his face, and then retreated across the street, where he slumped down next to a tree to sulk.

After a while the situation cooled off, and my landlady's niece came over to the table and told me that Hai had slapped her, not my daughter, but she was glad that I chased him off. Hai gradually made his way back across the street, and was hanging out in the shadows at the edge of the café. I called him over to the table, and told him that I knew he didn't hit my daughter and I didn't want to be mad at him, but regardless, he shouldn't get drunk and hit people. He assured me that he would never hit my daughter, and that he was very sorry that he had misbehaved. I apologized for yelling at him, and we made amends. He and Thanh then walked us home. I told them that I would like to go have coffee with them one last time, but it was late and I still had some packing to do. I gave them some money, and told them to go have coffee on me. We embraced each other, and they joked that I should quickly go inside so they wouldn't have to see me cry. We said goodbye one last time, and parted as friends.

### **Thanh**

Thanh was the most emotionally stable, and practically minded of the four participants. Thanh was fiercely independent, well adjusted, and resourceful. He was of average height, and physically fit. Thanh was 16 years old at the time of the study, and the second of his parents' four children. His father worked and lived 100 kilometers to the south, in Da Nang, where he had married a second wife. His father would come to

Hue and stay with Thanh's mother during the major holidays. Thanh's mother was raising his younger brother and sister, who were still in school, in a tiny 8-foot by 12-foot one-room apartment. Thanh's older brother had been in prison for two years, where he was still awaiting trial for fighting with, and injuring another man. Thanh's clothes were typical of other teenagers, minus the school uniform, consisting of jeans, a polo shirt or t-shirt, a long-sleeved sweatshirt for cold days, and sandals. For the most part, he kept himself and his clothes clean and groomed. Thanh was energetic and always on the move. The company and hours he kept were Thanh's only overt characteristics that could immediately identify him as a street kid.

Thanh had a seventh grade education, but stopped going to school because his family lacked the funds to further his education. Many mainstream individuals I knew had not gone past the seventh grade because of higher school fees, and many of the working poor considered a seventh grade education sufficient. Thanh had worked on the tourist drag for four years, where he began selling postcards to help supplement his family's income. At first, he would go to school during the day, and work on the tourist drag during the evening, returning home to eat and sleep. He gradually began spending more and more time on the street, and by the time he finished his schooling he was spending almost all of his time away from home. Thanh had a healthy relationship with his mother, who would worry about him while he was away from home, but would be hard pressed to support him had he chosen to live at home. Besides, the allure of the street appealed to Thanh, and he considered it a better option.

By Western standards, Thanh's rebellious attitude was not atypical of teenagers, putting aside the fact that he lived on the street and did not attend school. However, by

mainstream Vietnamese standards he was considered very rebellious because he chose to live on the streets, dropped out of school, spent much of his time playing, smoked in public at a young age, and most importantly he was not beholden to any parental authority. Thanh was also defiant of authority, but much of this stemmed from the way those in authority treated him. His older brother had been in a fight with another man, during which both opponents were injured and sent to the hospital. The other man had money to pay the official and unofficial fines to the police, and was set free. Thanh's family did not have the money, so his brother had been detained for two years, and his trial date was still uncertain. Thanh was very bitter about this.

Despite this, Thanh has great potential for a successful transition into adulthood. He endeavored to make a living through more legitimate economic activities, such as providing shoeshine services, and selling tourist items. Thanh did establish relationships with tourists in hope of economic gain, and for entertainment, but he earned a good portion of his income by providing tourists with goods and services. Thanh spoke fairly good English, was dynamic, friendly, and outgoing. He had learned to interact with Western tourists in a manner that was familiar to them, which made them seem more comfortable with him. Because Thanh did not make the tourists uneasy, and because he spent money that he earned from tourists at many of the shops along the tourist drag, members of mainstream society were a little more tolerant of him than many other street kids, especially if he had recently patronized their establishments.

Within the first week of meeting Thanh, and before our friendship deepened, he began scheming to exploit me as an economic resource. During a conversation we were having while playing pool, he revealed to me that he actually had a home and family

close by. I asked him why he didn't go home to sleep. He then explained that he would like to go home, but he lost his shoeshine supplies in the terrible floods Hue had recently experienced. He now had no way of earning money to contribute to the family income. If he could not pull his weight at home he could not return. The fact that he was not able to earn money made him too ashamed to go home, so he had not been home in several months. This information was partially true, the major exception was his wanting to return home, and I later learned that even when he had a means of making money he preferred to stay on the streets. Thanh concluded his woeful account by telling me that if he could only round up 20,000 VND he could purchase new equipment, and go home again. Thanh's approach of asking me to assist him in earning money, rather than simply begging, appealed to my ideals of "teaching a man to fish," or at least giving him the means to do so. At this time, I was still calculating expenses in U.S. dollars, and 20,000 VND is roughly equivalent to US \$1.50 (later, this seemed like a lot of money to me), so I struck a deal with Thanh. I would pay for his shoeshine supplies on the one condition that he would go home to sleep at night. I don't think that it had occurred to Thanh that I was not a regular tourist, but would be in Hue for six months, and would follow up on our agreement. Thanh readily agreed to the conditions, and we went and purchased his supplies.

The following week I saw Thanh daily, and each day he would proudly report that he had slept at home the previous night. Thanh later told me that although he was sleeping at home, he wasn't going home until the wee hours of the night, and sleeping until noon when he would wake, wash, and leave. To assure me that he was on good

terms with his mother regardless of his schedule, I was taken to his home several times to talk and have tea with her.

Approximately three weeks after Thanh and I had made our bargain he told me that he had lost a bet on a soccer game, and in the process lost his uncle's bike, which he had put up for collateral against his bet. He told me that he was 2000 VND short of being able to pay off his debt, and couldn't go home again until he got the bike back. I loaned him the money and obtained assurances that he would uphold our original bargain once he retrieved the bike. Thanh was astute at recognizing what others thought was best for him, and would exploit their concerns. Thanh did pay back the 2000 VND I loaned him, and for this small price had also succeeded in identifying my concern for him having a safe and secure place to sleep. Two weeks later he had lost another bet. He again appealed to my concern for his sleeping arrangements. Thanh told me that he was leaving home and going to Saigon the following day. When I asked him why, he told me that he had hocked his uncle's bike for gambling money, and lost the money betting on a soccer game. He told me that he hadn't been home in two days because if he goes home without the bike he will be in big trouble. He said if he had money he could get the bike back, and go home again. I immediately saw the obvious pattern developing. I realized that whether or not Thanh slept at home wasn't a real issue for him. Nor did I want to become a crutch for his gambling habit. Therefore, I expressed sympathy for his unfortunate situation, and wished him luck in Saigon. I suspected that Thanh would not go to Saigon, and he did not. He eventually did get the bike back. Thanh didn't ask me to help bail him out of any more gambling debts, and started sleeping away from home again. Despite this, our relationship progressed. Some time later, Thanh confessed that



although he didn't mind going home every once in a while, he preferred staying on the street. He told me that he was pleased with himself that he was able to uphold his end of our bargain for over a month, and that he viewed it as an accomplishment. From this point I felt that I had moved beyond being perceived by Thanh as an economic resource for him to exploit.

One evening I was sitting at my landlord's outdoor café when Thanh showed up, and sat next to me. He was carrying a cardboard case that contained a stack of silk paintings, which several shops and street vendors sell to tourists. He told me that he had just bought them for US \$30 and was going to start selling them. I asked him where he got the money, which was a considerable amount, to buy the paintings. He told me that his older brother had met a Japanese tourist several years ago, and they had become romantically involved. The Japanese woman, who Thanh referred to as his brother's girlfriend, had returned to Viet Nam and was attempting, unsuccessfully, to visit Thanh's brother in jail. Thanh asked me to help him write a sign in English that would introduce himself to tourists, and relate a brief sob story to make people feel sorry for him in order to increase his sales. We toyed with a few marketing strategies that involved him having to support his mother and put his little brother through school, or that he was a homeless orphan trying to put himself through school, and so on. Thanh wanted the sign to be succinct and to play to Westerners' ideals. We finally decided on, "Hello travelers, my name is Thanh. I am trying to earn money so I can go to school. Please help. Thank you." Thanh liked this advertisement because it could be read quickly, and he thought it would appeal to Westerners' because every Westerner he had ever met "thinks that everybody should go to school."

During this process, another man who works at the café, and who was more tolerant of Thanh, sat down with us. All three of us joked back and forth about the fact that we were writing lies, and about rude or ridiculous things we could write on the sign. As I began writing the lines Thanh had decided on, my landlord drove up to the café. His face was red, his eyes were glazed over, and he was being more verbose than usual. He had obviously been drinking. In slurred speech, my landlord asked me what I was writing. I simply told him that I was making a sign that introduced Thanh to tourists, and stated that he was selling paintings to earn money. My landlord told me that I was not finished writing yet, and that I needed to include a line that told tourists that Thanh “is a no good punk who doesn’t want to go to school, but only wants to go play and eat pussy.” My landlady then emerged from the kitchen and began chiming in about Thanh “eating shrimp” (slang for cunnilingus). My landlord told me to let him write the sign in French (he doesn’t know English) so that he could write it accurately, and told Thanh to stop bothering me. Thanh asked me to finish writing, which I did regardless. As my landlord and landlady hurled insults at Thanh, he did his best to ignore them, and told me in English that they could say what they wanted because he didn’t care. Despite his claim, I sensed that the insults did hurt.

When I had finished writing, my landlord told Thanh to leave, and he did. There were quite a few customers in the café on this particular night, and I observed that whenever the café was busy the owners became irritable, and less tolerant of beggars, the kids selling trinkets and postcards, and the street kids who just hung around. When Thanh would buy a drink, meal, or cigarettes from the café he could sit at the café without being hassled. There were many times when Thanh wasn’t buying anything, and

he would still be allowed to sit at the café. I asked Thanh why he didn't get chased off as strictly as the other kids, and he told me that he and my landlord's son were friends at one time. When Thanh stopped going to school, and started living on the street, the son was forbidden to interact with him, and they stopped being friends. The café owners tolerated him to an extent because they had known him for a long time, and because he periodically bought things from the café.

Several nights later I was again sitting at my landlord's café. Thanh showed up with a big grin on his face, and slipped into the chair next to mine. I asked him what was happening. He asked me if I had seen the groups of five or more police officers patrolling the streets lately. I told him that I had, as I had seen them do before any big upcoming event. The next day was the anniversary of Hue's liberation from the southern forces during the Vietnamese-American war, and Thanh told me that in preparation for the festivities the cops were out on the prowl looking for street kids. The previous night six cops had grabbed him and tried to haul him away, but he squirmed violently and was able to slip out of their grasp and run off. He knew some people at one of the hotels on the tourist drag, and they had let him hide out there for the night. Thanh said that he was no longer afraid of the police because he had recently obtained an identification card that proves he is legitimate, with a family, a place to live, and is registered with the government. He was very proud of this fact because if the police apprehended him now they could not detain him, unless he had committed a crime. He finished telling me his good news, and then happily ran off into the night.

My interviews with Thanh were quite productive because he spoke in a matter of fact manner, he would elaborate on his responses without having to be prompted, he was

thoughtful about his responses, and he would voluntarily talk about related issues. Both of the formal interviews I had with Thanh were held in an open-air café located in a very poor district of Hue near his house, which was on the opposite side of the river from the tourist drag. The first interview took place shortly after Dinh began reestablishing our relationship. The following are excerpts from these interviews.

*I told you earlier that Dinh had cursed me and didn't want to see me anymore. "Yes, I remember." But now he is acting normal again, what's going on? "Why don't you ask him?" I don't think he will tell me. Why do you think? "He's just like that. He's done the same to me a couple of times. Sometimes people change their minds. My business is my business, and other people's business is their business. I only worry about my own business. I think it's best that way."*

*How old are you? "16."*

*What grade have you completed in school? "Seventh grade. After that I couldn't afford it."*

*Would you have continued if you had the money? "No." Why? "I didn't like it, and seven years is enough schooling." Why didn't you like school? "I got into a lot of trouble for fighting. You always had to do what the teacher wanted you to, and I didn't like that. School is so important to all you Westerners. In order to live and make money here you don't need to continue past the seventh grade."*

*How do you make money? "I sell stuff to tourists. I also used to shine shoes, but I can make more money selling stuff, and I get to meet more foreigners that way."*

*Why don't you live at home? "I do stay at home sometimes, and I keep a lot of my clothes there. I can also go home to wash clothes. But our house is really small, and it*

would be boring to stay at home. My mom doesn't make a lot of money, so it would be too expensive if she had to support me at home, and I would have to give a lot of the money I make to her. Although, I still do give some money to her when I have it, just not as much as if I was staying at home."

*Where do you sleep when you don't stay at home?* (Thanh began laughing) "Why, are you in trouble with your wife? I sleep in lots of places. Sometimes behind the wall by the photo shop, there's a place by the bridge where I can sleep, and there are a couple of places on this side of the river. It's safer to sleep on this side of the river because the cops don't bother you over here as much as they do on the tourist drag.

*Have you ever been caught by the cops?* "No, never."

*Are the police looking a lot for street kids before the big festival?* "Yes, a lot. The cops are no good. Going around and rounding up street kids is no good. The kids are just trying to live, to eat, and the cops treat them like dogs."

*Where do the tourists in Hue come from?* "Holland, Belgium, Japan, Australia, England, Ireland, a lot of European countries." *Where do the majority come from?* "It seems to fluctuate between England, Australia, and Japan."

*Is it a good or bad thing that tourists come to Hue?* "It's very good. People can earn money, the city can earn money, and grow and become a developed city like Saigon. Hue can become one of Viet Nam's cities. People in the cities earn more money, so they don't have to be so poor, and their lives would be better."

*Do you think you'll sell a lot of paintings during the festival?* "I don't know. The tourists will first come to Saigon then Hue, and maybe they'll buy paintings in Saigon before they come to Hue." *Tourists coming for the festival won't be in Saigon for long,*

*so they probably won't buy much there.* "I hope so. I have an appointment with two tourists from England at noon. Well, actually they are overseas Vietnamese living in England. They are leaving today so they are taking me to lunch at noon, and I'm pretty sure that they are going to give me some money."

*Hai seems like he hasn't spent much time on the streets. How long have you known him?*

"Hai is not new to the streets, he's been around for two years now, he's just kind of dumb. When I first met Hai I was with my older brother and Dinh. We found him sleeping in one of our spots. We asked him if he knew who we were, and he said 'no' so we beat him up."

*Do you beat up all the newcomers?* "No, but when we woke him up and asked who he was he told us to fuck off. We asked him if he knew who he was talking to, and he said that he didn't and he didn't care, so we beat him up. If someone is nice and gentle when we question him, we will take him with us, and not beat him up. Me, my brother, Dinh, and Phuong were the first ones on the tourist drag. I used to sell postcards on the tourist drag. Now all the tourist boat drivers send their kids to sell postcards, so there got to be too many kids selling postcards. When I first started I couldn't speak English very well, so I would ask Dinh how to ask the tourists to buy postcards. Knowing English is a big deal because most the tourists speak English, so that is the only way to talk to them. Dinh spoke more English than I did, and he had been there longer and knew more people. I had to give Dinh 2000 *dong* for every postcard I sold. I sold them for 10,000 *dong*. If Dinh didn't see me make the sale I wouldn't give him any money. At first, me and Dinh always fought. One time, a *xich lo* driver came and broke us up, and told us that if we didn't knock it off the ghost would come and get us at night."

*Was the xich lo driver trying to scare you with ghost stories?* “No, ghost is slang for cops. So anyway, we became friends.”

*Did you have to give any of your profits to anyone else?* “No.” *Do the kids who sell postcards on the tourist drag now have to give you any of their profits?* “No, I’m not like that, only some people are. If a more experienced person helps a newcomer, and shows them how to do it, then the newcomer might have to give some of his money to the guy who has been there longer, but I’m not like that. One time, Hai asked us how to ask for a cigarette from an English tourist. We told him to say, ‘Fuck you, cigarette.’ So Hai goes up to this big black guy from England, and said, ‘Fuck you, cigarette.’ The tourist got really mad and wanted to beat up Hai. The tourist chased Hai over the Truong Tien Bridge, and Hai had to jump over into the river to get away.” (Thanh was laughing uncontrollably as he told me this story).

“If I had saved the money I got from tourists, I could buy anything I wanted. Tourists aren’t familiar with Vietnamese money (*dong*), and they often give me a lot more than what I am selling is worth. A Japanese tourist once bought 20,000 *dong* worth of postcards from me, but he thought that 50,000 *dong* was equal to 50 American dollars. So the Japanese tourist thought he had actually bought 20 American dollars worth of postcards from me. He gave me a 50 dollar bill, and told me that I could give him the change in Vietnamese *dong*. He thought that I owed him 30,000 Vietnamese *dong*, so that’s how much I gave him back. 50,000 Vietnamese *dong* is only worth two American dollars. I made a killing.” (Thanh was laughing hard again.) “If I had saved all my money instead of spending it to gamble on soccer games, I could buy anything I want. That’s why I don’t gamble any longer.”

*You've stopped gambling?* "Yeah, when I lost my uncle's bike a little while ago was the last time I gambled." *I think you've made a good decision.*

It came time for Thanh to leave, and he asked me for a ride on my bike to the tourist drag. I agreed, and went to pay for our cokes. Thanh told me that he had already taken care of it, and the woman at the counter confirmed this. I told Thanh that I had invited him so I should pay, which is Vietnamese custom. Thanh told me that I had paid last time, and had given him a shirt, so he insisted on paying, and told me that I could pay some other time. The woman at the counter joked that Thanh is very rich, but stingy, therefore I should take advantage of his hospitality when I could. I let the matter drop, and we left.

After the big tourist festival had passed, Hue's tourism industry entered the off-season, and the city quieted down considerably. One afternoon I saw Thanh down by the river with Dinh and several other kids, who were wearing school uniforms. Both Thanh and Dinh seemed a little irritable, and were expending energy roughhousing with the other kids. The school kids knew Thanh and Dinh, and submitted to the rough play. Although the school kids were actively participating, they seemed a little afraid. I asked Thanh what they were doing, and he told me that they were trying to alleviate their boredom since there weren't any tourists around. Thanh then told me in English that, "Everything is bullshit." He then went on to say that he is bored, bored with life. He didn't have anything to do, and wasn't making any money. He began telling me about a tentative plan to go down south to work and make money because there wasn't anything going on in Hue. He then rejoined Dinh and the others, who were chasing each other around, so I left them to their very physical game of tag. During the off-season times



were lean for everyone involved in the tourism industry, including the street kids.

Consequently, many people seemed more stressed and cantankerous than usual, as they vied for the patronage of the few remaining tourists. The street kids not only experienced a decrease in their economic resource, but also lost a primary source of entertainment and became restless. It was not long after this that Dinh disappeared after being involved in the knife fight, and Hai began drinking considerably.

Thanh seemed to cope more successfully with the decline in activity. Perhaps it was because he had a more stable home base, which he could fall back on. However, as the off-season dragged on, and I began making preparations for my departure from Hue, Thanh was also more scarce than usual. When I did see him, he seemed to be down. On my last night in Hue, Thanh was very depressed. He said to me, "When you are able, you must return to Hue and find me. If I am not here, then I will be dead or in jail. But if I am here on the tourist drag then everything will be the same as always, we will have a happy reunion, we will go out and play together, and we will be friends, just like before."

### **Phuong**

Phuong was a gentle, quiet, and mild mannered street kid. Life on the streets had been physically taxing on Phuong. He was not physically strong, and appeared almost frail. His worn face belied his 18 years of age. His family lived in Dong Ha, 70 kilometers to the north of Hue. Phuong had two younger sisters, who still lived at home, and all three were the children of his 80-year-old father's third wife. His father's first wife had died of illness, and his second wife had been divorced because of infertility. Phuong wore a very typical Vietnamese ensemble including a casual collared, button-

down shirt with loose-fitting polyester slacks, and sandals. His physical appearance was no different from any other poor working-class Vietnamese adult. However, unlike other members of the poor working-class, Phuong was very frequently in the company of foreign tourists. Despite his age, Phuong was still considered a street kid by the public, and had not yet achieved adult status; therefore, I have included him in the sample.

Phuong had a third grade education, but was illiterate to the point that he could not distinguish written Vietnamese from written English. He had stopped going to school because his family lacked the necessary funds. He eventually left home and the family farm because of extreme poverty, and his parents' financial inability to support him. He had been on the streets of Hue between four and five years. He knew very little English, and could only carry on very simple conversations using commonly heard English phrases and individual words. During the interviews and many conversations I had with Phuong, I got the sense that he very well could be a little mentally challenged. Despite this, or perhaps as a result of it, he was one of the most successful street kids in regards to interacting with, and benefiting from tourists. I observed that the younger kids working on the tourist drag received the lion's share of generosity and positive attention from tourists. Although Phuong was probably the oldest street kid on the tourist drag, in fact and also in appearance, he was an exception to this norm. In part, this very possibly could have been because the tourists' generosity stemmed from pity, and gentle, non-confrontational Phuong, like the young children, invoked feelings of pity more readily than the more brash teenagers. In conjunction with this, he had the ability to befriend and build lasting relationships with tourists. Phuong never asked me for anything, and I never saw him ask any tourists for anything. He had a paradoxical persona about him of being

very generous, but at the same time very needy, and he frequently received charity without having to ask. Phuong was unpretentious and extremely likeable. The mainstream individuals on the tourist drag were convinced that he was a legitimate orphan, unlike the other kids in the study sample. Thus, relative to the other teenage street kids, Phuong also received more sympathy and tolerance from mainstream society.

I saw and interacted with Phuong less frequently than the other street kids because he was very often touring the country with tourist friends. Phuong had traveled within Viet Nam as much as any other person I met while I was there. Several weeks would pass without me seeing Phuong. When I would ask others about him, without fail, I was told that he was with tourists in Saigon, Hoi An, Ha Noi, or some other distant place.

Phuong started earning money on the tourist drag by shining shoes and begging from tourists. After almost a year on the streets he met some very generous tourists who bought him a *xich lo*. Because he didn't have the strength to ferry the relatively large Western tourists around he would earn money by renting out his *xich lo* to other drivers. Shortly after I arrived in Hue he did begin trying to drive the *xich lo* himself. Because he was not very adept, and still lacked physical strength, his passengers were always local friends or tourist friends. Phuong was proud of the fact that he worked for his money, and no longer had to beg.

I interviewed the other three street kids in my sample before I had my first formal interview with Phuong. I suspected that they had spoken to one another about the content of the interviews because before I started questioning Phuong he began volunteering information I had asked the other kids about. This turned out to be a positive thing, as Phuong did most of the talking. The interview took place in a small bar, located about a

block away from the tourist drag. The bar's design mimicked the larger, more popular tourist bars, with large murals of famous Western musicians, and other icons painted on the walls, and of course, the ubiquitous pool table. The interior was dimly lit, except for the alcove containing the pool table, which was well lit by two lights shaded by U.S. Army helmets that hung over the table. The place was empty except for two employees, and two young women playing pool, whom I identified as prostitutes from their extremely tight-fitting, and revealing Western style clothing, and by the very fact that they were hanging out in a bar. The interview proceeded uninterrupted, save an occasional wink from the women. The following are excerpts from the interview.

"I have family in Dong Ha, which is 70 kilometers to the north...my father is 80 years old, but still works the farm...I have two younger sisters, the youngest is 11 years old, and is still going to school. I had to stop going to school because I didn't have the money to continue. I left home because my parents didn't have any money to support me, and life on the farm was very hard because of the extreme poverty. All the street kids have families, but they lie and say that they don't so the tourists will give them money. When I was young I would tell the tourists that I didn't have a family so that they would give me money. But now that I work I don't need to beg, so when people ask about my family I tell them that I have a mother and a father. Every once in a while, I go home to visit. When I am away from Hue for a long time I'm not only on a trip with tourists, but afterwards I'll go home to visit my family. Just this last time, when I was gone for a month, I went down south with some Canadian tourists, but for the last week and a half I was home visiting."

“Before I had my *xich lo*, I shined shoes. I met two Australian tourists when I couldn’t speak any English. They bought me the *xich lo*, and I earned money by renting it out to other people. The tourists only knew my first name, and I wasn’t able to write my full name for them, so they registered the *xich lo* in the name of a café owner I know, and he said he would look out for me. When I left on my trip to Saigon with the Canadian tourists this last time, I left my *xich lo* with a friend, who said he would watch it for me if he could also use it. When I came back, the guy told me that he had to repair the *xich lo* while I was gone, and that it cost him 500,000 *dong*. He wanted me to pay him 500,000 *dong* before he would give the *xich lo* back to me. I didn’t have the money, and didn’t want to pay because I didn’t tell him to fix the *xich lo*, so he beat me up. See, my hand and fingers are swollen because I was trying to stop him from hitting me in the head, so my hand got hit instead. I had another friend write a complaint to the police for me, but I didn’t think that they would do anything. Surprisingly they did do something, and they got my *xich lo* back to me within about a week.”

*I have seen you carrying a shoeshine kit lately, but haven’t seen your xich lo. Have you rented it out to someone?* “No. The café owner, whose name the tourists registered the *xich lo* under, said I was too weak to drive the *xich lo*, so he thought he’d do me a favor and claim it for himself. He called the cops, and showed them the registration papers with his name on them. The cops came and took the *xich lo* from me, and gave it to the café owner, who gave it to his brother to drive. I wanted to contact the Australians, who gave me the *xich lo*, but the café owner is the only one with their address, and he won’t give me any of their contact information. Everyone knows it’s my *xich lo*, but because of the registration papers no one can do anything about it. The Australian tourists promised

that they would come back to Viet Nam, and that was in 1996. I hope they come back this year so they can register the *xich lo* in my name, and get everything straightened out. When I was younger, other people always use to come and beat me up, but now that I'm older I didn't get beat up anymore, until just recently."

Phuong had several small round scars on his forearm, and one appeared to be fairly recent.

*What are the scars on your arm?* "They're cigarette burns. I do it when I am very sad."

*Does it mark you as a street kid?* "All of us have them, but mafia people do it too.

Sometimes when people see the scars they think we are mafia, so they are afraid of us."

*Where do most of the tourists come from?* "England, France, Holland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Australia, America, Canada, a lot of European countries, but also a lot from China."

Phuong pulled out a very tattered wallet that was full of scraps of paper and worn photographs, which displayed the addresses and images of tourists he had known well.

All of the addresses he had were indeed located in the countries listed above.

*Do you like talking with tourists?* "Yes. It's very good, and lots of fun to get to know them."

*What do you think of tourists?* "There are good people, and there are bad people."

*How do you think tourists and tourism affect Hue and the people who live here?* "There are good and bad tourists."

I restated the questions, being very clear, and asked him to elaborate a little more. Phuong looked confused, and reminded me of an apprehensive schoolchild being asked a question to which he did not know the answer, and was afraid of giving an incorrect

response. He then uncertainly replied, "There are good and bad people who come to Hue." I decided to lighten the conversation, and we talked for a while about pool and music before returning to the interview.

*Does tourism help the people who live in Hue in any way?* (He looked confused again, and didn't know how to answer, so I reworded the question.)

*Do you think that tourism helps Hue to develop?* "Yes."

*Does tourism help people by giving them work?* "Yes."

*Have tourists ever helped you?* "Yes, they have. They have given me money, meals, clothes, a *xich lo*, and they take me on trips, lots of things. I really enjoy taking tourists around, like to the market to help them avoid getting charged way too much. And to bars, and to coffee, so I can help them avoid double pricing. My *xich lo* is worth about one million *dong*, but the Australians were charged three million. This lemonade I'm drinking, a tourist could be charged 20,000 *dong*, when it really only costs 5000. I like to help tourists avoid this."

*Have the cops ever arrested you?* "Once. They took me and held me for two weeks, then they let me go."

*Why bother, if they are just going to let you go?* "Before holidays and big events, they round up all the vagrants and hold them before, during, and then a little after the event. It was a very bad experience because the police were very mean. After the holiday or event has passed, they just let us go."

*Where do you sleep?* "When I had my *xich lo*, I could just sleep in it. During the day I would park it on the sidewalk, and sleep there. When someone was renting my *xich lo*, I slept in that alcove on the corner of the big hotel, but always during the day. The cops

don't go looking for street kids during the day, so they don't bother me then, and it's just safer."

*What do you do with the money that tourists give you?* "I use it to eat, and if I have any extra I go play, and take friends to coffee. When tourists take me places they don't give me money, but they pay for everything: bus rides, hotels, food, and sometimes clothes."

*What do you do when you go on trips with tourists?* "I do what the tourists do. We visit the places tourists like to go and see, we go and eat, and we just play a lot. And when I'm with them I can help them get stuff for the true price, instead of the tourist price."

At this point, we were the only customers in the bar, and Phuong was anxiously eyeing the vacant pool table. I ended the interview, and we played several games of pool. Afterwards, Phuong offered to walk me home. By this time it was 2:00 a.m., and I asked Phuong if he was also going to go to bed. He told me that it was still early, and he wouldn't be going to sleep for a while longer.

Phuong was not dependent on the other group members for his survival, and outranked them all in age, but the others seemed to disregard this fact. Because Phuong was a little slow, and not physically strong he was often on the receiving end of the other kids' rough teasing. The teasing consisted of hitting or kicking, and then escaping before the recipient could retaliate. Phuong was physically weaker and slower than the others, and his retaliatory attempts were always unequal to the offender's attacks, or unsuccessful altogether. Although Phuong was frequently with the other participants, he seemed to prefer the company of the younger street kids, to whom he meted out the same treatment that he received from the older kids.



With the onset of the tourist off-season, I saw Phuong more frequently. In the late afternoon and evening he would walk the tourist drag with his shoeshine kit. During the day I often saw him curled up asleep in the alcove by the corner of the big hotel, instead of in his usurped *xich lo*. Although this location was not very well protected, it was a strategic spot because he was visible to tourists sitting at several of the outdoor cafés. Seeing him lying on the concrete was enough to gain sympathy from almost every tourist who saw him, which usually worked to his advantage. He was less aggressive than the other street kids, and when he saw me sitting at my regular outdoor café he would smile, wave a greeting, and ask me how I was. He would rarely enter the café to sit with me, or any other tourists, until invited. After waking up, he would retrieve his shoeshine kit from its hiding place, and wander over to the row of popular outdoor cafés. Most tourists declined the service he offered, but he would inevitably be invited to join someone for a meal. The invitations were always humbly and gratefully accepted.

Two weeks before I left Hue, I observed Phuong eating lunch with a tourist couple. Later that evening I saw him having dinner with the same couple. Phuong approached me the next day and informed me that he would be accompanying this tourist couple as they visited the southern half of Viet Nam. Phuong had also introduced Dinh's younger brother to the tourists, and they were going to take him too. This was the fifth time since I had known Phuong that he was leaving Hue with tourists, and his ability to get invited on these trips never ceased to amaze me. He told me that he should be back before I left, so we would see each other again.

Approximately a week later I saw Dinh's little brother, and asked him if Phuong had also returned. He told me that he had not gone with Phuong because he wasn't

familiar with the places that the tourists were going. He was afraid that the police would see him traveling without parents, realize that he was a street kid, and arrest him. Dinh's little brother did not know when Phuong would return to Hue, and thought that he might go visit his parents after he finished his trip with the tourists. Phuong did not return before I left Hue, and unfortunately I did not have the chance to see him again.

### **Other Street Kids**

There were not prodigious numbers of street children on Hue's streets. During any given day, there were typically between ten and twenty children on the tourist drag who could be identified as street children following the less parsimonious definitions put forth in the literature. These children ranged in age from seven to sixteen years, and included both boys and girls. These children also interacted with tourists, either through begging, selling postcards and other souvenirs, or shining shoes. The majority of these children differed from the four participants described earlier in the chapter in that they attended school, at least part-time, kept normal hours, slept at home, and were under the authority of their families, who provided for their basic needs. All of these children came from very poor homes, and their work activities on the tourist drag were attempts to contribute to their families' meager incomes. In the following paragraphs, I give brief descriptions of children who were regulars on the tourist drag, and made up the secondary population from which I drew information. The majority of these children would be considered by Kilbride *et al.* (2000) as children "on" the street, rather than children "of" the street. Children "on" the street typically have homes, and parents, but spend the majority of their time on the street earning money to contribute to the family

income, and account for 80% of the world's street children population. Children "of" the street are those children who literally make the street their home, where they are socialized, work, sleep, and live.

There was a group of four girls, who sold postcards on the tourist drag. They ranged in age from eight to twelve years. The girls' parents all lived on, and operated "Dragon Boats" that took groups of tourists on scenic cruises of the Huong Giang River. All four girls attended school part-time. During the late afternoon and evening their parents would send them up to the tourist drag to sell postcards to supplement the family income. The girls were always well groomed, and always traveled in a group. Although these girls did interact frequently with tourists, they were often more interested in playing than working, perhaps because they were less dependent on the money they made from their interactions with tourists.

There were two brothers, ages twelve and thirteen, who also worked the tourist drag. One of the brothers had only one arm, which he would display to tourists before holding his hand out to them for money. The other brother's job was to push their severely crippled father around in a wheelchair, and beg from tourists. Neither brother attended school. They both lived at home with their parents, who made a living from begging. The father, from what I observed, begged successfully. The disfigured son, however, had yet to learn his father's trade well. I attribute his unsuccessful attempts at begging to his approach, and very happy-go-lucky personality, which he did not disguise well. He would often be skipping down the street, laughing and wrestling with a friend or his brother, and when tourists approached he would flash them the side of his torso

that was missing an arm, and attempt a dramatic expression of destitution. Immediately after the encounter, he would continue merrily on his way.

There were also two young, unrelated boys who sold postcards on the tourist drag. They were ages ten, and twelve. Both of their fathers were tourist boat operators. Both boys attended school in the morning, and worked the tourist drag in the afternoon and evening. They had a somewhat tenuous friendship because they were competitors, and they always worked independently. They also kept regular hours, and slept at home on their parents' boats.

A sixteen-year-old boy, who had been severely burned when he was young, sold silk paintings on the tourist drag, and was Thanh's main competition. He did not attend school, and worked the tourist drag from morning till night. Although he slept at home, he spent almost all of his waking hours on the tourist drag. He was well acquainted with the study's four primary participants, but limited his interactions with them because they teased him about the terrible burn scars that covered his body.

There were several children who begged and shined shoes on the tourist drag, but they did not work the tourist drag exclusively. I would observe these youths working on the tourist drag one day, and the next day they were gone. On several occasions, when I was in another part of the city, I recognized a few of these children offering their services to, and begging from Vietnamese individuals in local cafés. I was not able to get any information from these children, and if they did sleep on the streets they did not do so on the tourist drag. There were also several young children who roamed the tourist drag during the day, begging from tourists, and playing. However, I never observed any of these children on the street after 10:00 p.m.

This study's four primary participants made up the core population of street kids (following my definition), who lived, worked, played, and slept on the tourist drag. There were a small number of children who would appear on the tourist drag one day, but disappear the next. I never observed any of these children engaging tourists, but they did keep the company of the four primary participants during their short stay on the tourist drag. When I would ask the participants about these other children, I would be informed that they were friends who were only temporarily staying away from home. This is the only explanation I was given, and was not able to learn anymore about this atypical occurrence, which I observed a total of three times during my stay in Hue.

While I was away from the tourist drag in other parts of the city, I was approached several times by young children begging, or offering a shoeshine. These children were always hesitant to offer any information about themselves, but when I inquired about their parents, several told me that they were at home. On two separate occasions I was approached by very young girls, probably between six and eight years of age, who were carrying sleeping infants. Both instances occurred after dark, and I instinctively asked where their parents were. Surprised by the fact that I responded to them in Vietnamese, the girls gave uncertain glances toward women who were standing on the other side of the street. Both girls hesitantly answered that they didn't know, but I suspected that the women across the street were their mothers, who were watching over them. I was told by two different members of mainstream society that street kids do exist in Hue, but the "true" street children are wards of the state, and are provided means to make money by selling newspapers and shining shoes. It is possible that the children who approached me in different parts of Hue were these "true" street children, but I was

not able to confirm it. Regardless, the only place I ever observed children, who could be considered street kids, congregate in any substantial numbers was on the tourist drag.

## Summary

In this chapter I have endeavored to objectively represent the sample population, and to be transparent in regard to my relationships with the four primary participants in order to allow the reader to judge my biases for him or herself. I have presented the above descriptions, observations, experiences, and interviews in an attempt to give the reader a glimpse into the lives of these street kids. I have demonstrated that the street children population in Hue is reflective of the global situation, with 80% of the world's street children population being children "on" the street, while only 20% are actually children "of" the street (Kilbride *et al* 2000). This sample also demonstrates the broad range of individual variety and lived experiences that exist among street children. While I recognize this diversity, there are also general similarities and patterns that have emerged from the data, and these will be presented and discussed as themes in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion of Core Categories and Themes

As I analyzed the data, themes emerged and coalesced around the street children's separation from home, living and surviving on the street, relationships with others, and their involvement with tourists. In this chapter I identify the core categories that emerged as *Life at Home*, *Leaving Home*, *Life on the Street*, *Economic Activities*, *Relationships*, *Interacting with Tourists*, *Perspectives on Tourists and Tourism*, and *Projected Images and Private Realities*. Under these headings I discuss the related subcategories that ultimately gave rise to the themes.

Due to the fact that the same pieces of raw data suggested multiple categories, and because of the interrelated nature of the themes, it will become apparent to the reader that elements of several categories crosscut different themes. This lends itself to the coherence of the analysis, and results in a more unified model. Furthermore, because the categories and themes discussed in this chapter were drawn from the same raw material as the interview excerpts, descriptions, experiences, and observations presented in the previous chapter, some repetition is unavoidable.

#### **Life at Home**

As I sought to understand the life experiences of the sample population it seemed relevant to inquire about their backgrounds, including relationships with their families and life at home. All four of the participants had domiciled parents, but because of conditions at home they were either forced out, or chose to leave. Regardless, life on the street appeared to be the better option juxtaposed to life at home. The two primary

elements the street kids associated with home life were familial relationships, particularly with their parents, whether good or bad, and economic conditions.

### *Family Relations*

Family relationships in Viet Nam are of utmost importance. Dominating these relationships, and at the core of Vietnamese culture is the parent-child relationship. Child-rearing practices emphasize proper behavior towards other family members, and filial piety especially is ingrained in children from birth. First and foremost, children must honor, obey, and respect their parents. Children are indebted to their parents for their very lives, and therefore, everything that they accomplish during their lifetime. This debt is so immense that it is unpayable. Children are expected to please their parents "all the time and in every way, to increase their comfort, to accede to all their wishes, to fulfill their aspirations, to lighten their burden of work and worry, and to comply with their wishes in all matters, great and small" (Jamieson 1993:17).

Vietnamese children also learn dependence and nurturance, rather than independence. Parents have the responsibility of providing for children's basic needs. Furthermore, parents are expected to instill proper social values, and to be an economic resource for their children. Ultimately, parents are responsible for equipping their children with the tools necessary to succeed as adults. A child's success or failure is a direct result of the mother and father's success or failure as parents (Jamieson 1993). Given the importance of Vietnamese family relationships, and especially the parent-child relationship, when the traditional family unit breaks down it is a traumatic experience at



best. This is the context in which the street kids' home lives, family relations, and the enormity of their subsequent separation from home must be understood.

The familial relationships that figured most prominently in the lives of the street kids were those with their parents. The androcentric nature of Vietnamese culture is apparent in the street kids' focus on their relationships with their father figures, and infrequent mention of their mothers. Thanh was an exception to this norm due to the absence of a father figure in the home, and the fact that he had been raised primarily by his mother. Parental relationships generally exhibited and expressed by the sample population were of two types: dysfunctional, and healthy. Dinh and Hai spoke of their father figures with contempt, and made statements about mistreatment, rejection, and abuse. Phuong spoke of his father, and Thanh spoke of his mother and father with respect and some degree of admiration and reverence. Dinh and Hai's family relationships are representative of the dysfunctional type, and Thanh and Phuong's family relationships are representative of the more normal, or healthy type. These two general types of family relationships exhibited by the participants are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Dinh's father is an alcoholic who physically abused his wife and children. Dinh's most vivid memories of home life were his father's drunkenness and abusiveness. Dinh rarely spoke of his home or family, and when I would push the subject he would become depressed as he related to me his memories of home. Dinh never spoke of his mother or siblings unless asked, and then he would only speak of the abuse they received from his father. Dinh's younger brother had started living on the street as well, and the six children who remained at home were all girls. Instead of taking his brother under his

wing Dinh refused to acknowledge him. I was surprised when Phuong told me that this young street kid was Dinh's brother, so I asked Hai and Thanh, who both verified the information. The only interaction I observed between Dinh and his brother were two instances when Dinh chased his brother away from the area where Dinh was hanging out. This may have been normal adolescent behavior—Dinh not wanting his pesky younger brother tagging along—or perhaps Dinh was trying to distance himself from anything associated with home.

During my first visit to Dinh's home, everyone seemed to be walking on eggshells. Dinh's mother was quietly sweeping the floor in a far corner of the room, and although it was dark out, all of his siblings remained outside. I was not introduced to Dinh's mother, which was unusual, and shortly after we arrived Dinh's father told her to leave the room. I sensed a distinct feeling of uneasiness and fear in the home, which I initially thought was a reaction to the presence of a strange foreigner.

On several occasions I saw Dinh's father riding his bike on the tourist drag. He would stop and ask me if I knew where Dinh was. The first time this happened I was with Thanh, and although Dinh had been with us a couple hours earlier, Thanh told Dinh's father that he had not seen Dinh in several days. I learned to give the same response when Dinh's father asked if I had seen Dinh, whether I knew his location or not.

I was never able to directly observe Hai with his family members, but from the information Hai gave me he seemed to have a fairly normal relationship with his mother. He told me that they did love and care about each other, and they missed each other while he was away from home. Hai's sister is ten years older than he is, and she had married and moved away several years before Hai began living on the street. Hai saw his sister

infrequently even when he was living at home. Hai's biological father died when Hai was nine, and his mother remarried two years later. Hai's stepfather did not accept him as a son. Hai never directly said that his stepfather physically abused him, but did say that his stepfather was very cruel and mistreated him. After three years, Hai's stepfather completely rejected him, and Hai was forced to leave. Hai returned home as often as twice a month to visit his mother, but his relationship with his stepfather prevented him from remaining at home.

Thanh had a good rapport with his mother, who accepted his way of life to some degree because she recognized that his options were limited. Shortly after I met Thanh, and he agreed to start sleeping at home, his mother was more than happy to accommodate him—even though he would only go home to sleep—because she was concerned with his safety. Her concern for her son was apparent during one of the several occasions that I sat and talked with her and she asked me to please watch out for Thanh while he was away from home. Thanh's relationship with his mother was reminiscent of a young adult living away from home for the first time; she let him go, but still cared and worried about him.

Thanh and his older brother had been close, and they kept each other's company on the street before his brother had been incarcerated. Thanh admired his older brother, and spoke fondly of him. It was very upsetting to Thanh that his brother was still being detained. Thanh also seemed to have a typical teenage relationship with his two younger siblings—he would tease them and tell them to stay out of his stuff.

Thanh was embarrassed and sad rather than angry or bitter that his father had a second wife, and that he lived with her instead of Thanh's mother. During *Tet*

(Vietnamese New Year), Thanh's father came to Hue to visit his family, and I was able to observe their interactions. We all sat crammed into the tiny one-room apartment, Thanh's younger siblings sat on their father's lap while their mother prepared traditional holiday foods. The family sat joking, talking, catching up, reminiscing, and debating about the details of past holidays. Thanh missed his father, and would rather that he lived in Hue with his mother. However, Thanh did not resent his father, and under the circumstances seemed to have a good relationship with him.

Phuong was very proud of his father, and spoke of him with admiration. Longevity is very respectable in Viet Nam, and not only was Phuong's father 80 years old, but he still worked the family farm. Phuong rarely spoke of his mother and two younger sisters, and when he did he only gave minimal information. His mother was at least 20 years younger than his father, although Phuong did not know her exact age, and she also worked on the farm. His two sisters were still living at home, and working on the farm. Phuong told me that his parents were good, hardworking people, but didn't give many details beyond this. Phuong took every chance he got to go home and visit, and from what I gathered he seemed to have a good relationship with his family.

In Lundy's (1995) work on street kids in the United States, she points out that all of her informants came from dysfunctional homes, or had irreconcilable differences with their parents or guardians. This is not the case here. The street kids I interacted with did not exclusively come from dysfunctional homes, and some were able to maintain healthy relationships with family members. Although detrimental family relationships did result in adolescents living on the streets, this is not the sole determining factor here.

*Economic Conditions*

All of the participants were aware of their families' financial status, and there was substantial variability between individual street kids. However, their families' economic differences did not play into their relationships with one another because they were separated from their families, and the street was a very effective leveling mechanism. Every Vietnamese individual I was acquainted with described their country as poor, and the majority also identified themselves as poor. The reader should keep in mind that when I refer to the street kids' families' economic conditions I do so relative to the endemic poverty in Viet Nam, and more particularly in Hue. Economic conditions in the participants' homes can be divided into two categories: poor, and average. Dinh and Hai's families were not affluent by any means, but they did not live in the poor districts, and they were able to afford some luxuries, such as a television, a stereo system, and a motorbike. Thanh and Phuong's families were simply poor.

Dinh's father worked in construction, and made enough money to have a fairly nice house with ample furnishings. He also supported the six children still living at home, and was putting them all through school, which constituted a considerable expense. Dinh's family had a fairly good income, but his father also had a severe gambling habit that was a drain on the family's finances.

Hai's stepfather was a mechanic. Hai told me that his family did not have a lot of money, but they were able to afford an average house, a television, a video cassette player, a motorbike, and to put Hai through school up until the time he left home. These material items may seem insignificant, but in Viet Nam they are status symbols and represent economic capability, especially in the poorer provinces.

Thanh's father worked in a cement factory in Da Nang, but reportedly he was not able to remit any of his income to his family in Hue. Therefore, Thanh's mother was left to support herself and her four children. Their home was an eight-foot by twelve-foot cement room. The mother and two youngest children shared a wooden sleeping platform, about the size of a twin bed, which doubled as a couch. The ceiling of the apartment had been lowered by securing planks of wood to two opposing walls, which created a small attic where Thanh would sleep when he slept at home. Thanh's mother was a veritable mobile general store. She sold everything from cooking pots and condiments to toys and cigarettes. Thanh's mother told me that she made between US \$50 and \$70 dollars a month, and after paying school fees for her two youngest children the family barely had enough money to survive.

Phuong's father was a farmer, and as was typical, the entire family worked on the farm. Phuong's family lived in the traditional thatched home, which consisted of a main living room, two sleeping compartments partitioned off from the main room, and an adjoining wing that housed the kitchen. The home had electricity, but no running water. As the Vietnamese economy began to open up, and the state loosened its strangle hold on private enterprise, small farms generally became more productive. However, Phuong's father's farm was not able to keep pace with the new market economy, and rising school fees soon outdistanced Phuong's family's financial means and he had to discontinue his schooling. Phuong told me that there were times when the family had to subsist entirely on what they produced, leaving no excess to sell for cash. The farm had recently been doing better, and Phuong's youngest sister was able to attend school. However, Phuong

worried that his parents could not work the farm forever, and will rely on their children for support once they are no longer able to provide for themselves.

In the literature on international street children it is generally reported that the economically poor social classes produce street children (Aptekar 1988; Kilbride *et al.* 2000; Marquez 1999). Again, this is not the case here. As illustrated above, street children do not come exclusively from the lower economic strata of society, but from a variety of economic backgrounds. This and other variables that result in children leaving home for the streets are discussed in the following section.

### **Leaving Home**

When I first met the four street kids who make up this study's subject population, I was led to believe that they all were orphans. Therefore, it was not complicated to determine why they were living on the street—they had no homes or families. Upon learning that they all did have families with homes, I sought to discover what caused them to leave home for the streets. Certainly, conditions at home were nowhere near ideal, but there also had to be something about life on the street that made these children consider it a better option than life at home. I have identified two primary forces that caused these children to choose street life over home life. I refer to these two variables as *push factors* and *pull factors*, and discuss them below. Also in this section, I include a brief discussion of maintaining contact with home because none of the participants completely abandoned their homes or families.

*Push Factors*

The forces that compelled the participants to leave home were dysfunctional family relationships, and deplorable economic conditions. Dinh was not forced to leave home, but did so in an attempt to escape physical abuse from his father. I imagine that the abuse must have been severe in order for a seven-year-old child to make the decision to abandon his home and family, which would normally serve as a sanctuary from the unprotected and uncertain environment of the street. Dinh seemed fairly well suited to street life, but this could very well have been due to his tenure on the street, and his familiarity with harsh realities.

Hai, on the other hand, was quite literally forced to leave by his stepfather. Hai's stepfather did not care for him, and did not accept him as a son in any regard. Apparently, Hai's mother was not empowered to the point that she could prevent him from being forced out of the home. Although it is not atypical for a boy as young as Hai to have full-time employment in order to help support themselves, and contribute to the family income, it is not the norm for someone so young to strike out on his own. It is more common for a son to remain in the parents' home well into adulthood, even after marriage.

Thanh was compelled to leave home due to his family's financial inability to support him. Thanh's mother barely scraped together enough money to support the family, and having one less mouth to feed provided her considerable financial relief. The physical dimensions of Thanh's home also encouraged him to spend his time outside, away from home, and the transition from home life to street life seemed less abrupt, and more natural for him. Aptekar (1988) argues that Colombian street children who come



from an African cultural background, in which families tend to be matrifocal, are socialized for early separation from the home, in part to mitigate the family's financial burden. Some of these same dynamics may have been present in Thanh's family, as they tended towards matrifocality because of the absence of a father in the home.

Phuong also left home due to extreme economic hardships. Phuong's family often survived hand-to-mouth. Phuong told me that he and his family often went hungry. Phuong's family was simply unable to provide for their own basic needs. Leaving home increased Phuong's and his family's chances for survival. Phuong was not forced out of his home by abuse, nor did he have a gradual transition from home to the street, but he determined that leaving home was his only viable option.

### *Pull Factors*

Besides the forces that pushed the street kids away from their homes, there were also forces that drew them to the streets. Granted, upon leaving home these children had limited options, but they might have been able to stay with relatives or friends rather than choosing the street. I confirmed that at least Hai and Thanh had sympathetic relatives nearby, who could provide better living environments than their own homes afforded. However, there are several facets of life on the street, and more particularly life on the tourist drag that made this the most attractive option for the street kids, and which factor in to the participants' ultimate decision to leave home.

The street offered these children a certain freedom that is not found in the traditional Vietnamese family. Hai resented that he was subject to the authority of his stepfather, who did not even want him. Dinh rejected his father's authority primarily

because it included the power to physically abuse him. Having to submit to their teachers' authority was explicated by Thanh and Dinh as a primary reason for their dislike of school. On the street, the street kids saw themselves as beholden to no one. They could do what they wanted, whenever, and wherever they wanted to. When asked, all of the participants stated that a good deal of their time was spent playing and having fun. This is an aspect of street life that most likely appeals to all children, but not all children abandon their homes to live on the street because the combination of push and pull factors present in the street kids' lives are absent or less severe in the lives of others.

Existing outside the authority of the traditional Vietnamese family, the street kids were perceived as a threat to the sovereignty and control of this institution, and thus met with disdain and suspicion from members of mainstream society. However, the popular notion that street kids were thieves and thugs also elicited some degree of fear from mainstream society. At home the four participants were subject to forces beyond their control, whether parental abuse or poverty. On the street, the street kids used general misconceptions that bred fear in others to their advantage. Because they were feared (at least by those who didn't know them well) they could talk and act as they pleased, often without fear of reprisal. On one occasion I was walking down the street with Thanh, and he began talking very boisterously and verbally accosting passersby. His behavior made me feel a little uncomfortable, and I asked him what he was doing, and why. He responded by saying, "Don't worry. They won't mess with me because I'm mafia." The street kids, and others used the English word "mafia" to describe a person who did not have to follow the rules because they were feared, usually for their criminal activity.

Living as street children gave the participants a sense of empowerment and control that was absent from their lives at home.

Another alluring facet of street life on the tourist drag was the potential to make money. Dinh and Thanh were very aware of this fact at the outset of their lives on the street. Within the first week of leaving home, tourists gave Dinh enough money to attend school for an entire month. Before Thanh even left home he learned that he could earn large amounts of money on the tourist drag when a Japanese tourist gave him almost as much money as his mother made in a month. Both Dinh and Thanh learned that tourists were very wealthy relative to the average Vietnamese person, and recognized the potential of obtaining considerable amounts of money from them.

Phuong and Hai recognized that there was more work and money available in the cities, of which Hue was the closest to their parents' homes. As many poor, young boys do on the streets of Hue, Phuong began shining shoes. He quickly learned that he could provide his services to tourists at a higher price, so he began concentrating on gaining their business. Hai observed his peers getting money from tourists by establishing relationships with them, or simply begging. Hai saw the prospect of relatively easy money, and followed suit. Although Hai did not experience great success, he had friends who did, and who would share their bounty with him.

Finally, conditions at home necessitated that these kids find someplace else to go, and the street provided an immediate solution. The street was an escape from negative situations that pushed them away from their homes. Whether or not these kids were actively and consciously seeking freedom, fast money, and whatever other aspects of

street life on the tourist drag that appealed to them, they found it, determined it to be a better existence than what life at home offered, and they stayed.

### *Maintaining Contact*

Although all of the participants did live away from home, none of them had completely severed all contact with their families. Phuong seemed to be the most eager to visit his home and family, and took advantage of every opportunity to go. Phuong's visits home could last as long as a week. Thanh's home was within reasonable walking distance from the tourist drag. Because of the proximity, Thanh would visit his mother at home fairly regularly, but rarely stayed over night. Hai went home to visit his mother as often as twice a month, but never stayed longer than a weekend. Dinh rarely ever went home. During the six months that I was in Hue, Dinh only went home twice; once for about an hour, and once for only a few minutes. The street kids' relationships with their families, regardless of economic conditions at home, determined the frequency and length of home visits.

### *Summary*

In wider Vietnamese society, the extended family provided a buffer against the conditions identified above as push factors. The extended family acted as a social and economic support network. Families that experienced economic hardships, and most did, could rely on this support network for assistance, rather than turning family members out on the street. Furthermore, if there were irreconcilable differences between a parent and a child, or other dysfunctional relationships present in the nuclear family, relatives could

intervene and mediate, or even take full responsibility for a child. It was quite common for a child to be raised by grandparents, or aunts and uncles. Most children had options available to them other than the street.

There were not widespread social and economic causes that compelled large numbers of children to take to the street in Hue. Although many people are still very poor, general economic conditions in Viet Nam have been on the rise. Many children worked on the street, often alongside adults, selling various items and services and begging. However, most of these children are not considered street kids because they live at home, and many attend school. The fact that there are not packs of street kids roaming the streets of Hue attest to improving economic conditions, and stable social conditions. This study's four primary participants are exceptions, rather than the norm.

### **Life on the Street**

The day-to-day activities that the street kids were concerned with, and participated in coalesced around four basic elements, or needs. These are *work*, *sustenance*, *sleeping arrangements*, and *recreation*. Although there was variability among the subject population in the manner which these elements were met, experienced, and expressed, all of the participants held in common these fundamental elements of street life. In the street children literature a central issue is the use of drugs and alcohol. I feel that it is appropriate to also include in this section a brief discussion of the sample population's experience with drugs and alcohol.

### *Work*

Whether shining shoes, selling souvenirs, establishing financially beneficial relationships with tourists, or begging, all four of the participants engaged in activities that can be identified as work. The street kids' typical workday began after noon, and could continue into the early morning hours.

Providing tourists with goods or services was the most clearly defined work activity. Phuong and Thanh were the only members of the primary sample population who engaged in this type of work. Phuong offered shoeshine and *xich lo* services to tourists, and although Thanh had worked shining shoes, his core competency was selling souvenir items. Both Phuong and Thanh's primary work activities were providing goods and services, but they also used their sales pitch as a catalyst for establishing potential financially beneficial relationships with tourists.

All four participants worked at establishing relationships with tourists. The primary motive for establishing these relationships was economic gain. However, in these endeavors the lines between work and recreation became blurred. If a relationship failed to produce any financial gain (in the form of money, food, or material items) it at least provided entertainment in the form of conversation, playing pool, or just hanging out in tourist bars. Most of the relationships were short lived, usually only lasting the duration of the tourist's stay in Hue. However, some relationships were more enduring. Dinh had tourist friends in France and Switzerland who sent money to him periodically. Thanh's older brother's Japanese girlfriend had sent his family money, and gave Thanh the means to purchase silk paintings to sell during her return visit to Hue. Phuong had befriended a French tourist couple, who returned to Viet Nam several times. During each

of their visits, they sought out Phuong and took him traveling with them. Hai had not yet succeeded in establishing beneficial relationships with tourists on his own, but he did benefit from his friends' success.

Begging was generally not a preferred work activity for the sample population, primarily because it was not as lucrative as the other options. Thanh, Phuong, and Dinh claimed that they had resorted to begging when they were younger, and I directly observed Hai participate in this work activity. Very young children, and adults with severe and apparent physical disabilities were successful beggars. However, basically healthy looking teenagers typically met with disapproval when they attempted to beg from tourists.

Some of the street kids' work activities may not be considered conventional, but as they made their livelihood through these means they can very legitimately be called work. The work activities described above did require certain skills and knowledge. I do not refer to the knowledge required to give a quality shoeshine, but to salesmanship. In order to be successful the street kids had to have some understanding of tourists' values, and the ability to present themselves in a manner that played to these values. With the exception of Hai, the street kids who participated in this study were quite adept at accomplishing this. The participants' established work routines and activities are further discussed and elaborated in the section, "Interacting with Tourists."

### *Sustenance*

In order to sustain life the street kids, of course, had to eat. The most common method of fulfilling this need was the expenditure of money they had obtained through

their work activities. Many of the cafés on the tourist drag sold food to the street kids at extremely cheap prices, regardless of the café operators' disapproval of the street kids' way of life. A few of the more sympathetic café proprietors would sometimes go as far as giving food at no charge to street kids who were loyal patrons. On a few occasions, the street kids took this for granted, and would eat and run before the café operator gave them permission to forego payment. However, these occasions were rare because such behavior made café owners leery of the street children, and jeopardized the potential for charity in the future. When café owners were reprimanding a street kid, or complaining to me about the street kids' behavior, they would often recount times in the past when a particular street kid had eaten and left without paying. If the street kids were currently on relatively good terms with café operators, they would be allowed to scavenge the uneaten food left behind by patrons. I also observed several instances when café owners would put uneaten food in bags and offer it to a street child, although the child was typically not allowed to sit at the café while eating the food.

Often times, tourists with whom the street kids had begun establishing relationships would invite one or more of the street kids to have a meal with them, without being prompted by the recipient. Hai was the only participant who prior to establishing a relationship explicitly begged for food, or money to buy food by placing one hand on his stomach and holding the other out towards the tourist. The other participants employed more savvy techniques. The first method consisted of striking up a conversation with tourists at a café, and then in the course of conversation the street kid would let the tourists know that he was hungry. The other technique, which may not have always been a conscious act, was to simply stand a short distance off from the café



and hungrily watch the tourists eat. This sometimes resulted in a free meal, and also facilitated relationship building.

Although the street kids had several options available to them for getting food, none of the options were guaranteed, and hunger was not a foreign concept for these kids. During the tourist off-season, the street kids' options were greatly reduced. As the number of tourists decreased so did the chances of free meals. The street kids' ability to purchase meals also decreased in the off-season because a reduction in tourists meant a reduction in work, and therefore a reduction in the availability of cash. During the off-season, the street kids of the tourist drag were most familiar with going hungry.

### *Sleeping Arrangements*

When considering their sleeping arrangements, street kids were most concerned with their safety. The times and places the street kids slept were primarily in response to the dangers that were inherent to sleeping in the unprotected environment of the street. Sleeping on the street exposed the kids to the dangers of being apprehended by the police, and being molested by ill-meaning individuals. The sleeping habits maintained by the street kids directly reflected their fears of falling victim to these misfortunes.

The sleeping arrangement most readily available to the street kids was the street, in the wide sense of the word. Cement walls approximately six feet high, which ran parallel to the sidewalk, surrounded most of the large buildings on the tourist drag. Street kids often climbed over the walls, and slept directly on the other side, tucked into the corners and remaining invisible to passersby. Street kids also slept in more exposed areas of the street, such as nooks and crannies of buildings facing the street, and unprotected by

a wall. All of the participants had friends who worked on the tourist drag, and who owned motorbikes. While these friends were working, the street kids would sometimes drape themselves over the motorbike's seat and sleep. While Phuong had his *xich lo*, he could park it on the sidewalk and sleep in the seat, usually accompanied by another street kid. I observed one instance when an exhausted street youth simply curled up on the sidewalk, and fell asleep, seemingly oblivious to all the activity around him.

The exposure of the street kids' sleeping places give the impression of high vulnerability, but the times at which the street kids slept greatly reduced any risks. The only times I observed police patrols on the tourist drag were between noon and midnight, and then only during preparations for holidays, festivals, and other tourist events. The sample population typically slept between 4:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., thus avoiding being seen sleeping on the street by the police. It was not uncommon for mainstream individuals to take a nap in plain sight of others during the day, so the sight of a sleeping youth in a fairly public area did not seem suspicious, as long as it was during daylight hours. During preparations for holidays etc., the street kids always opted for the more protected sleeping areas, or slept away from the tourist drag altogether. Dinh claimed that he did not sleep at all during these times.

The street kids' sleep habits were also conducive to their work activities. During the day most tourists engaged in sightseeing, or were otherwise occupied in tourist activities. At the end of the day many tourists frequented the bars and cafés, and would stay out partying into the early morning hours. Much of the participants' interaction with tourists occurred during these hours, and they needed to be sharp, alert, and well rested.

The street kids' unusual sleeping habits also provided protection from being accosted while they slept. The typical Vietnamese workday begins very early, and the tourist drag would come alive with activity between four and six o'clock in the morning. The presence of other people was an effective deterrent to those who would cause the street kids harm while they slept.

In exceptional times of need, the participants had other options they could fall back on. The wife of a tourist bar owner was very sympathetic and fond of Dinh. When Dinh needed a more protective place to sleep, after closing she would allow him to stay in a small room adjoining the bar, unbeknownst to her husband. Phuong and Thanh had friends who worked at a hotel on the tourist drag, and who would give them a place to stay in special circumstances. During periods of heightened police activity, both Thanh and Hai could return to their homes for a few days until things had settled down. However, these were last-ditch measures, and the street kids most frequently depended on their well-established sleeping strategies.

It is not my intention to portray the street kids' sleeping arrangements as safe and sound. Although the kids had adapted their sleeping habits quite effectively to the circumstances in which they found themselves, the fact remains that they were exposed to a very uncertain and unprotected environment, and the possibility of harm was, and still is very real.

### *Recreation*

Whenever I asked the any of the participants what they did with their time, the first response was always related to playing and having fun. As with any teenager,

recreation was foremost on the street kids' minds. The street kids participated in several forms of recreation that were common to Vietnamese youths in general. When money was available, the street kids would entertain themselves by going out to eat, or to have coffee. The most popular game among the four participants was pool, which was also very popular among other Vietnamese youths, and they played every chance they got. There were numerous local pool halls in Hue, which were almost exclusively patronized by adolescents. It was quite cheap to play a game of pool, and the participants had become fairly accomplished pool players. Roller skating, attending soccer games, and watching movies at a small late-night theatre were also very popular among the sample population. The participants were also avid gamblers. Gambling seemed to be Viet Nam's national pastime, and it was not considered a vice, unless it completely consumed an individual. Even young children from mainstream society were adept at playing card games, and I was bested by several of them on numerous occasions.

When money was scarce the street kids would find more practical ways to entertain themselves. This often included swimming in the river, harassing others, and basically goofing around. Recreation fulfilled the same needs for the street kids as it does for anyone. However, I observed that the street kids seemed very passionate about their recreational activities, and pursued them with more gusto than other youths. Dinh helped to shed some light on this phenomenon when he told me that the reason for his extreme playfulness was to help him forget the terrible sadness in his life. Thanh also offered me some insight to the issue on one occasion when he was involved in some serious goofing off, and an intense game of tag. He told me that his behavior was a result of his being "bored with life." The Vietnamese word he used, *chan*, is an extreme form of the word

“bored” and can also be interpreted to mean “sick and tired of”, or “fed up with.” The street kids’ recreation not only served to provide a release of tension, change, and variety to the monotony of everyday life, but it became a way of life for them in an attempt to counter the many depressing realities that they faced on a daily basis.

Tourists also provided the street kids with a source of recreation. As mentioned above, when the street kids interacted with tourists, the distinction between work and play often became fuzzy, and sometimes indistinguishable because the street kids were seeking both. The most common types of recreation the street kids participated in with tourists were accompanying them to, and hanging out with them in tourist bars, playing pool in the tourist bars (which they could do free of charge), and simply holding conversations with tourists, often times over a drink or a meal. Dinh and Phuong had also accompanied tourists on excursions to tourist sites outside of Hue, although Phuong’s travels were much more extensive. Economic reasons were the primary motivation for street kids to become involved with tourists, but entertainment was a very close second.

### *Drugs and Alcohol*

Many researchers report that substance abuse is prevalent among street children populations around the world (Aptekar 1988; Kilbride *et al.* 2000; Lundy 1995; Marquez 1999). The most popular drug of choice internationally is reported to be shoe adhesive, because it is cheap and readily available. Shoe adhesives were also available from any of the several shoe repair kiosks on the tourist drag, but none of the street kids reported ever having sniffed glue, nor did I ever observe it. All of the participants reported having used

marijuana at least once, however, they all agreed that they did not like the effects of the drug because it made them feel very paranoid. Possession of other commonly controlled substances, such as cocaine and heroine, carried very stiff penalties, including death, if caught by the police. Therefore, these drugs were not readily available to the street kids in Hue, and none of them had ever experimented with these drugs.

The drug used most regularly by the participants was alcohol. However, their use of alcohol was typically very limited. While hanging out in the tourist bars, I witnessed numerous occasions when a tourist would offer to buy one of the street kids a beer (there is no minimum drinking age in Viet Nam). Dinh and Thanh would unconditionally turn down the beer in favor of a soft drink. Hai and Phuong would sometimes accept a tourist's offer, but they would drink in moderation, and I never observed them consume enough beer to become inebriated. This may have been due to the high cost of beer, especially in relation to the inexpensive homemade rice liquor that was commonly consumed. Dinh's reasons were more personal because of his negative experiences with his father's abuse of alcohol. If I ever drank a beer with my meal while Dinh was present, he would admonish me to limit my consumption to one bottle in order to avoid becoming drunk. Thanh explained that he did not like to drink much because he preferred to remain in control of all his faculties. I did witness all of the participants drink rice liquor at least once, but these instances were limited to special occasions, such as holidays, and usually in response to a toast, which all males present were expected to answer. When rice liquor was available, Hai would sometimes drink enough to become inebriated, which would strain his relationship with Dinh. After Dinh's disappearance, Hai did begin drinking rice liquor more regularly and in greater amounts. He would join

the small groups of older men, who sat huddled around oil lamps while they drank and coarsely conversed on the tourist drag late at night. For the most part, however, drugs and alcohol were not a central issue in the street kids' everyday lives.

### **Economic Activities**

All of the street kids were involved in obtaining and spending money. Above, I have mentioned several of the ways in which they accomplished this. In this section I will further discuss and elaborate on the street kids' economic activities. The section is organized around their two primary economic activities, which are obtaining money and spending money.

#### *Obtaining Money*

The street kids obtained money through their work activities of providing goods and services to tourists, receiving cash from tourists with whom they had established relationships, and begging. These were the most expeditious methods of obtaining ready cash. Relationships with tourists that turned out to be more enduring continued to produce cash returns after the tourists had left Hue. In order to make this work, the street kids had to have a means of keeping in touch with the tourists, and an address where the letters containing money could be received. Dinh and Phuong were able to accomplish this through two sisters who were very sympathetic towards their plight, and who also owned and operated an Internet café on the tourist drag. The older of these two sisters had studied English in college, and was able to help Dinh and Phuong compose and read email. The sisters also allowed Dinh and Phuong's tourist friends to send letters to the

Internet café. Thanh could simply use his home address to receive letters from his tourist friends. As Hai had yet to establish a long-term relationship with a tourist, this was not an issue for him.

Often times, instead of giving the street kids money, tourists would buy them clothing and footwear, or give them articles of clothing that the tourist had brought from home. The most common footwear worn by the street kids were thongs or similar open-back sandals, and sometimes nothing at all. The street kids' clothing was not fancy by any means, and it was well worn, but it served its purpose. By tourists' standards, however, the street kids' clothing and footwear was poor, so tourists would buy or give them more fashionable items of clothing, and tennis shoes. The street kids would wear the gifts while the tourist was in Hue, but would sell the items as soon as the tourist left. The street kids could get up to 30,000 VND for a nice shirt, 50,000 to 100,000 VND for a fashionable pair of pants, and up to 200,000 VND for a flashy pair of sneakers. The participants were quite practical when it came to clothing, and it was to their economic advantage to remain so.

The street kids also obtained money by gambling. They would wager money on soccer games, cards, and pool. When the street kids gambled, however, they also risked losing money; therefore they did not depend on gambling as an economic mainstay. The street kids considered gambling to be more of a recreational activity, with the potential benefit of making money. Pool was the safest bet for Dinh and Thanh because they were very accomplished pool players. They would often challenge a tourist to a friendly game of pool, and if it was their first encounter with the tourist they would allow the tourist to win the initial game. After the first game, the kids would suggest playing for money.



Often the tourists would not accept the bet because they did not want to take money from street kids. If they were turned down, then they would suggest playing for a drink. Often times the tourist would still refuse to make any wager on the game, however, I did observe several tourists accept the challenge. When the street kids' wagers were accepted it was by college-age males, who more often than not had at least a few beers in them. During the second game, Dinh and Thanh would play to their full capacity, and only once did I see either of them end up buying a tourist a drink. Phuong and Hai were not avid pool players to the same degree that Dinh and Thanh were, and I never observed them wager money on a game of pool, unless they were playing doubles supported by Dinh or Thanh.

#### *Spending Money: Immediate Needs and Long-term Planning*

After obtaining money the street kids would first take care of their immediate needs and wants, which consisted of eating and entertainment. The participants' immediate desires took precedence over everything else, and I was often amazed at the prodigious amounts of money that they could spend in a relatively short amount of time wining and dining themselves and their friends. This often resulted in a cycle of feast and famine.

Their benefactors, who often wanted the money spent on specific things, sometimes dictated the street kids' expenditures. In these instances the tourist would, for example, accompany the street kid to a clothing store or require proof that they had spent the money on the agreed upon item. In the event that the purchased item was non-

perishable, and not a necessity, the street kid could simply sell the item after the tourist had left.

The street kids were not the only ones who engaged in this economic activity. Upon learning that one of my landlady's sisters slept on a wooden plank in the café, a sympathetic tourist gave her a large sum of money, and instructed her to buy a mattress. The tourist obtained a promise from her that she would use the money to buy a mattress, and that she would show it to him after she had purchased it. She readily agreed, bought a mattress, slept on it for a few nights, and promptly sold it when the tourist left Hue. Another man, who had lost both of his legs in the Vietnamese-American war, made a living by begging, as he conspicuously struggled up and down the tourist drag with the aid of two wooden blocks. Again, a sympathetic tourist bought the man a very expensive three-wheeled bike that could be completely controlled using only his hands. When the tourist left, the man sold the bike because he could make more money if tourists saw him awkwardly ambulating with his two wooden blocks; he also made a hefty profit from the sale of the bike. The street kids, as well as others, would keep the gifts while the tourists were present in order to please the tourists, and make them feel good about themselves. Selling the gifts after the benefactor had left was not considered deceitful or underhanded. The street kids, and other individuals, simply justified it as a misunderstanding on the tourist's part of what they really needed, or wanted.

Despite this, selling a gift was considered disrespectful, and such activities were not widely advertised. Tourists were commonly considered cultural outsiders, and so the same rules did not apply to them. However, if there was a well-established relationship, and continued contact between a foreign tourist and a Vietnamese individual, then tokens

and gifts were typically kept. This is an area where the street kids departed from Vietnamese cultural norms. Regardless of the depth and duration of a relationship, the street kids would sell gifts and use money for purposes that the benefactor did not intend, as long as the benefactor was no longer present. The street kids would deceive tourists, with whom they had long-term relationships, in order to appease, and receive continued support from them.

As indicated above, the participants did not engage in much long-term financial planning. The future was uncertain, and the street kids lived for the moment. Dinh, who was the most impulsive spender, on two occasions in particular, exemplified this behavior. The first was when he received a considerable amount of money, which he was supposed to use to buy silk paintings to sell, from his tourist friend in Switzerland. Within a week the money was gone, and he was back to relying on his wits and others' charity for food. The second was when he went on a bender in Da Nang, and spent the equivalent of a three-month middle-class income, which he received from a tourist friend in France, over the course of a few weeks.

Although the four participants did not practice sound money management, they did engage in economic activities that can be recognized as financial investments. Whenever they received a large amount of money, they would very often invest a good portion in gold jewelry. A gold ring or necklace could be more easily concealed, and transported than a large wad of cash. Gold was a good investment because it did not depreciate, and could always be sold for at least the same price for which it was purchased. Gold jewelry, however, was typically only a short-term investment, and it

would be sold as soon as a their cash was depleted. The street kids, thus, never earned high returns on their gold investments.

Thanh and Phuong also made investments that were more long-term than gold jewelry. They secured the means to provide tourists with goods and services. Although their shoeshine kits, Thanh's souvenir items, and Phuong's *xich lo* were purchased by tourists, or with money received from tourists, they did make the efforts to obtain these means in order to provide themselves with a source of income that they had more direct control over than the charity of tourists. Hai also recognized that obtaining a means for earning money would provide him with more financial security and independence. However, Hai lacked the discipline to use the money that he received from begging, and from Dinh to buy a shoeshine kit or another means to earn money. At one point I offered to give Hai half of the money necessary to purchase shoeshine supplies if he would come up with the other half. In one day he was able to get the money, but he opted to use the money to go skating instead. Dinh had simply experienced too much success investing in relationships with tourists to bother with more conventional means of earning money.

Investing time and effort in establishing relationships with tourists was the one potential long-term financial strategy that all the participants held in common. Because most of these relationships were short lived, and provided economic support only for the duration of the relationship, the street kids had to serially invest in different relationships to sustain themselves. These serial relationships sometimes provided the street kids with discretionary funds, but for the most part only gave them the means to survive day -to-day. It was the rare relationship that endured beyond the tourist's stay in Hue that provided the street kids with a periodic financial boon. The street kids had to continue to

cultivate these relationships through correspondence, but this required considerably less effort than the ongoing endeavor of initiating new relationships. At times when funds were low, and the participants were surviving hand-to-mouth, they could always look forward to when another twenty, fifty, or hundred dollars would arrive in the mail, and they could once again live like kings for a short while. The four participants exchanged contact information with almost every tourist they had built a relationship with, in hopes of continued contact and economic gain. For this reason, I consider the time and effort expended in building these relationships, notwithstanding their uncertainty, as long-term investments.

## **Relationships**

There were numerous relationships that the street kids negotiated, maintained, cultivated, and even avoided, all of which played a significant role in shaping their lives. The most prominent relationships in the participants' lives were those with their families, the authorities, mainstream society, tourists, and one another. Because family relationships have been discussed at the beginning of this chapter I have omitted the topic from this section, and readers should refer back to the "Life at Home" section for details and discussion concerning the four participants' family relationships. I also include a discussion of my relationship with the participants at the end of this section.

### *The Law*

The only authorities the street kids interacted with directly were the police. The street kids' relationship with the police was not good. The police viewed the street kids

as no good vagrants, who were a nuisance at best. However, no real steps were taken to resolve the “street kid problem.” The negative attitude of the police towards street children is an international theme that pervades the literature. In some extreme cases, police have taken horrific steps to eradicate street children by mass murder (Aptekar 1988; Marquez 1999; Kilbride *et al.* 2000). Fortunately, the situation in Hue has not deteriorated to this point.

The police would patrol the tourist drag looking for street kids before, and during holidays, festivals, and other tourist events because they were considered an eyesore. Street children apprehended during these times were taken and held in a juvenile detention center, then simply released after the event had passed. While in police custody, street kids were subject to mistreatment and abuse. Street kids arrested for committing crimes, such as stealing or injuring another person, could be detained indefinitely; a predicament experienced by Thanh’s brother, and currently facing Dinh when I left Hue. The street kids had no legal or social recourse when it came to police harassment and brutality. If caught, even if only suspected of being a street kid, it meant almost certain physical abuse. The reality of this all too common injustice was evinced by the bruises Dinh bore, and his matter-of-fact statement that “here the cops beat you up.”

The street kids, unsurprisingly, had an extreme dislike for the police born out of the mistreatment they suffered at the hands of the police. They referred to the police as dogs, and evil spirits. Thanh expressed the street kids’ general attitude towards the police, stating, “The cops are no good. [We] are just trying to live, to eat, and the cops treat [us] like dogs.” The participants would often make defiant statements about not

fearing the police, and would regale me with stories of how they had escaped their blundering adversaries. But, their disdain, and defiance of the police, which they only expressed in private, was tempered by a healthy fear of what the police could, in reality, do to them.

### *Mainstream Society*

Most studies indicate that the general public reacts to street children with mixed feelings of loathing, suspicion, fear, and pity (Aptekar 1988; Kilbride *et al.* 2000; Lundy 1995; Marquez 1999). In Hue, few mainstream individuals ever expressed to me feelings of pity towards the street kids. Most mainstream individuals described the street kids as no good, irresponsible delinquents, who wandered about looking for opportunities to take advantage of others. Members of mainstream society made their feelings about the street kids with whom I interacted very clear to me on a daily basis, as I was regularly lectured about their immoralities. Individuals would make such statements as, "They really aren't true street children because they have homes and families, but they choose to live on the street because they like getting into trouble, and are no good." I was also told, "You shouldn't go around with those punks, they will rob you blind. Don't you realize that they are no good?" My landlady made it very clear that the street kids were not allowed near her home, and added, "Those little devils cause a lot of trouble here at the café, they steal every chance they get, and they bother the tourists. If you hang around with them they'll get you into trouble too." When a woman who sold convenience items from a kiosk on the tourist drag discovered that she was missing a bottle of liquor, she charged

Hai with the theft because he was in the vicinity, and according to her “is a no good street kid.”

There were, however, a few individuals who were sympathetic towards the street kids, and the participants had established relationships with them. The participants could rely on these networks of sympathetic individuals for food, shelter, protection, and other support. These individuals’ general attitude towards the street kids was expressed well by one of the sisters who operated the Internet café when she stated, “They may not be the best kids, and sometimes they behave badly, but it is because they have had bad lives, and it’s not their fault.” Although the majority of the mainstream individuals outwardly disapproved of the street children, and often reprimanded them for their lifestyle, their actions sometimes implied pity. This sympathy would most often be expressed as discounted food prices, and allowing them to solicit patrons and take unused food from café tables. The discrete acts of charity from members of mainstream society who disapproved of the street children may have been due to their realization that the destitution and poverty that accompanied life on the streets was not that far removed from them, as they also struggled to make ends meet.

Although most mainstream individuals disapproved of street children, they did make sympathetic comments about those street kids they believed to be true orphans, for example, “It’s okay to give him money because he doesn’t have a mother or father.” The ideal Vietnamese family unit consists of a father, a mother, children, and often grandparents, as well as aunts and uncles. The parents are expected to provide for the children, and when they are too old to work, the children then support the parents. Children are subject to parental, and more particularly patriarchal authority.



Furthermore, a child is expected to defer to elders outside of his or her family. Children with parents who chose street life defied this highly regarded cultural value, and were severely disapproved of because of their violation of the established patriarchal family order. Those street children who were orphans, or believed to be orphans, were more deserving of sympathy and charity because they did not deliberately disregard the sovereignty of the patriarchal family unit. However, orphans were still expected to defer to their non-relative elders, and any sympathy would be quickly withdrawn if they failed to do so.

The street kids reacted to mainstream society, for the most part, with contempt. They did not adhere to the same cultural formalities that were expected when interacting with elders. The four participants had become accustomed to interacting casually with elder foreigners, and they would often extend this casualness to their interactions with elder Vietnamese individuals, which would result in a stiff reprimand. The participants would respond to chastisement with swearing, laughter, mocking, and other disrespectful behavior, especially if they were in groups of two or more. If the rebuking individual was acquainted with the street kid, this behavior would only goad them to further action, which typically entailed chasing the street kid away, and sometimes a slap in the head. The street kid would retreat, calling out curses and empty threats. If the victim of the street kid's verbal assault was not acquainted with him, he or she would give the youth a surprised glare, and out of fear, bred by the popular notion of street kids being thugs, would continue on his or her way, avoiding further confrontation.

Those individuals who sympathized with, and treated the four participants well were adopted by them into a sort of surrogate family, and respected accordingly. The

participants referred to these individuals with fictive kin terms, and these constructed surrogate family relationships resembled biologically based interdependent family relations found in wider Vietnamese society. Although Vietnamese almost always use kin terms when addressing others in casual conversation, when I asked the participants about their relationships with sympathetic members of mainstream society, instead of referring to them as friends, or even close friends, the participants claimed that they had become actual relatives. Several authors report that street children in other parts of the world also engage in this same type of behavior in order to replace the social support structure that their biological families did not provide (Aptekar 1988; Kilbride *et al.* 2000; Marquez 1999).

### *Tourists*

Similar to the participants' relationships with mainstream Vietnamese society, their relationships with foreign tourists heavily depended on how the individual tourist perceived the street kids. I identified three general tourist responses to the street kids on the tourist drag. The first was disapproval, similar to the general attitude of mainstream Vietnamese society. This view is well represented by one tourist who described the sample population as "a nuisance, no good, lazy freeloaders." This tourist went on to compare the street kids on the tourist drag with street kids he met in Ha Noi, saying, "Those kids in Ha Noi are truly industrious. They were desperately trying to sell postcards to earn money so they could attend school." This very well could have been the case, but it is just as likely that the kids in Ha Noi presented a more believable sales

pitch, and played to this tourist's values more successfully than the street kids on the tourist drag.

The second type of response was one of neutrality, or apathy. These tourists viewed the sample population as typical teenagers, behaving as teenagers do anywhere in the world. These tourists felt that the street kids were no more or less worthy of either sympathy, or malice than anybody else. One tourist stated, "Sure they're punks, but aren't all teenagers? They remind me of a typical teenager [back home]. I do my best to ignore the teenagers' bullshit back home, and I do my best to ignore the teenagers' bullshit here. They're just teenagers—I'm indifferent to them." I found that the tourists with this perspective had experienced little or no direct interaction with the street kids, and might have viewed them differently had they been more aware of their past and present circumstances.

The third type of response was that of sympathy and pity. These tourists perceived the street kids as victims of Viet Nam's endemic poverty who were simply trying to survive, and were under the impression that the street kids were homeless orphans. One tourist illustrated this perspective, imbued with Western overtones: "These kids are different from the street kids in [my country]. In [my country] there's lots of opportunities, and just about anybody can make it if they try. They could get off the streets if they put their minds to it, if they really wanted it. Viet Nam is very poor, and they've suffered some recent wars. These street kids don't have the same advantages, and as orphans don't have much other choice." This assessment of the street kids was partly accurate, and it is this impression that they hoped to give tourists. It was these

tourists with whom the street kids were able to successfully establish financially beneficial relationships.

As illustrated by Lundy (1995), street kids present Westerners with a paradox. Street kids violate Westerners' understanding of childhood, and the expectations of children's role in society, which results in conflicting responses toward street kids. Westerners expect children to be under the authority and protection of an adult guardian. Children are expected to be in school, and limit their activities to areas such as playgrounds, parks, yards, and homes. Furthermore, children should not be unsupervised in exposed, and uncontrolled environments like the street, especially at night. Because street kids do not fulfill the socially acceptable role of children they are stigmatized, and mainstream society responds to them with fear, suspicion, disdain, and rejection. However, because they are children adults feel the need to nurture and protect them. When street kids are presented as vulnerable, misguided, and mistreated children, they elicit feelings of concern, sympathy, and pity from mainstream society. This was the way in which Western tourists also responded to Vietnamese street children.

Whether or not a street kid was able to establish a beneficial relationship with a Western tourist was based on the individual tourist's particular mix of fear, suspicion, concern, and sympathy. However, the street kids' success was also dependent upon their ability to capitalize on the tourists' feelings of concern and sympathy, while downplaying behavior, and images that might elicit feelings of fear and suspicion. To achieve this, the street kids would exhibit values that resonate with Westerners, and exploit them. One of the easiest Western values for the street kids to exploit was education. Tourists with whom the street kids had established relationships were often willing to part with

relatively large sums of cash if they believed the money would finance a child's education. Another Western value, which was more difficult for the street children to negotiate, was that of hard, honest work. Westerners generally believe that nothing comes for free, and if you work hard you will succeed, even if you start at the bottom of the economic ladder. This "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality made it very difficult for able bodied adolescents to outright beg successfully from tourists, so they had to find a way around it. A very common method of exploiting this value was to ask for money that would be spent on securing a means of earning an income, such as souvenir items to sell, a shoeshine kit, or even a *xich lo*. Finally, the street kids could also appeal to the Western perspective that the entire country was economically disadvantaged, and lacked the opportunities available in more developed nations. In this context, the street kids could exploit tourists' sympathy and charity by presenting themselves as homeless orphans, who slept on the street, and legitimately had no way of earning money—they had no bootstraps on which to pull.

The street kids viewed tourists as economic and recreational resources, but Western tourists were also novelties to the street kids, despite the fact that Westerners had become a very common sight on the tourist drag. The street kids found tourists' fancy backpacks, and specialized travel clothing, which some tourists wore, to be very interesting, and they examined it every chance they got. They were also mildly fascinated by Westerner's physiques, including their abundant body hair. The street kids would often comment on the hairiness and thickness of my limbs compared to theirs, while they palpated my arms and rubbed my facial hair stubble. For the street kids, being

in the company of tolerant Western tourists was virtually like having their own free-range petting zoo.

The tourists entertained the street kids, but the street kids also entertained the tourists. Some tourists were simply amused by the street kids, who they viewed as young hustlers. Others found them to be charming, and enjoyed their company. Some tourists salved their consciences by giving charity to the street kids, who they recognized as needy. Others were seeking an authentic, exotic experience, and interacting with local street children fulfilled this desire. Whatever motivated the tourists who established some form of relationship with the street kids, whether they were seeking this type of interaction and experience or not, all those I spoke with felt that it enriched their Viet Nam experience.

Although the street kids' relationships with tourists were generally transitory and motivated by economic and recreational benefits, they did establish relationships that resembled more enduring friendship. The standard used by the participants to judge the tourist's level of friendship and commitment was the amount of correspondence from the tourist, and the continuance of periodic financial support after leaving Hue. This is not simply a shallow, money-centered standard, but follows an established cultural norm. If friends genuinely care for one another, they keep in contact, and if they are concerned for the other's welfare, and have the means, then they also assist each other financially. The kids considered those tourists who took on these obligations to be true friends. Relationship building and maintenance will be further discussed in the following section, "Interacting with Tourists."

### *Relationships with One Another*

The group dynamics exhibited by the sample population were quite complex. The four participants frequently kept one another's company, and although they were a tight knit group of friends, they did not form an exclusive group, or gang. All of the participants had friends outside their central group, who ranged from other street children to full-time students whose parents were members of mainstream society. Some of these additional friendships were common to all four participants, and some were particular to only one. In this section I concentrate solely on the relationships between the four primary participants.

The street kids' relationships provided them with the elements of a typical teenage friendship: company, someone to play with, someone to relate to, and someone to share experiences. Their friendships also provided economic support in the form of sharing and reciprocation. When one of the participants had a substantial amount of money, he would treat the others to food, coffee, cigarettes, and recreation. They also shared other material items, for example, the shirt I gave Dinh was in turn given to Hai because he was in need. After Phuong lost his *xich lo*, Thanh let him use his shoeshine kit, as Thanh was then selling silk paintings. Although the participants were not financially dependent on one another, with the exception of Hai, they were obliged as friends to give assistance when they had the means.

The street kids also provided one another with several forms of protection. The first was direct physical protection in the case of confrontation with others. They also protected each other by withholding information from others. For example, when Dinh's father ever asked one of his friends if they knew his whereabouts, the answer was always

“no.” This practice of withholding information often made it difficult for me to validate my data with the street kids. When I attempted to cross-check information about, or an observation of another street kid, the initial response was always, “Why don’t you ask him?” They also provided each other with protection by communicating information among themselves. This information could include areas where the police were patrolling, the current disposition of a café or tourist bar operator towards the kids, or if someone was looking for one of the other group members, etc. This information network was very important to the street kids, and was maintained even on occasions when they were not on the best of terms with one another due to a disagreement or fight.

There was no firmly established hierarchy within the group, except between Dinh and Hai. This was primarily due to the fact that Dinh, Thanh, and Phuong could operate, and were financially independent of one another. Although Thanh and Phuong recognized Dinh’s lengthy tenure on the tourist drag, they did not defer to him. Dinh and Thanh viewed each other as equals, and were more aggressive than the others, which infrequently resulted in minor conflicts between the two. Phuong was physically and mentally unequal to the others, and often received the lion’s share of their teasing. However, because of Phuong’s success on the tourist drag he was generally not viewed as inferior to them. Because Hai lacked the means to reciprocate and share with the group he was not always held in the same regard as the other group members, but Thanh and Phuong did not expect him to defer them, and he typically did not. However, there was a very distinct micro-hierarchy between Dinh and Hai. Because Hai was very economically dependent on Dinh he was obliged to defer to him. In order to receive



continued financial support from Dinh, Hai submitted to Dinh's dictates, and his verbal and physical reprimands, which could be harsh.

For the most part, the four participants were a group of close friends. They had their ups and downs, but their relationships were strong enough to endure their disagreements. With the absence of Dinh, the group dynamics could very likely change. The biggest potential change that I foresee is Hai being forced to become more independent, or trying to establish a relationship of dependency with Thanh, which Thanh most likely would not tolerate. Because of the uncertainty of the street kids' existence, it is impossible to hypothesize further with any degree of confidence.

### *My Relationship with the Participants*

My relationship with the street kids was somewhere in between tourist, sympathetic member of mainstream society, and close friend. Initially, I was treated as any other foreign tourist, and the participants went through the same motions with me as they did other tourists (which are elaborated in the following section) in attempts to exploit me as an economic resource. They related to me their plight as homeless orphans, and informed me of their need for money for school, to buy shoeshine supplies, or to simply eat. I was also invited to meet them for pool, and other recreation at the tourist bars. However, as time progressed, and I became more familiar to the four participants, they began to recognize that I was not a typical tourist. Although the participants recognized me as a Westerner, they gradually stopped basing their interactions with me on Western standards and values, and considered me to be more of a cultural insider. From this point my friendships with the four participants began to deepen. They would

often seek me out, and include me in their recreational activities that did not involve tourism and tourists. They would invite me to join them for something to eat or drink, to play pool, or go roller-skating at their favorite local establishments away from the tourist drag. During these occasions, they would follow the Vietnamese custom of paying for the activity because they were the ones who invited me, or *vice versa*. Also during these occasions, they would forego any pretense, as they freely spoke about their latest tourist exploits, or run-ins with the law and members of mainstream society. They were also comfortable enough with me to divulge sensitive information about their past and present circumstances that they otherwise kept concealed. That the participants considered me to be a good friend was confirmed when I was invited to Dinh and Thanh's homes. Other tourists and members of mainstream society would not have this invitation extended to them because it would discredit the participants' claims of being homeless orphans. Furthermore, Thanh was the only other group member who even knew the location of Dinh's home. Although I suspect that the street kids thought it was quite fashionable to have some American tagging along with them, who they could treat as one of their own, we did establish genuine relationships of trust, and friendship.

With our friendships, however, did come certain expectations and obligations on my part. I was held to a higher cultural standard than other foreigners. During holidays I was expected to observe Vietnamese traditions, including visiting the participants' homes and families, presenting proper gifts, eating the proper foods, and understanding the significance of it all. I was expected to understand cultural idioms, as well as the abundant slang terms used by the street kids. I was also expected to follow proper protocol when being invited out, or when I invited them out, including the frequency of

my invitations. Whenever I violated any of these, which I most often did by trying to pay for an activity that I had been invited to participate in, the kids would shake their heads disapprovingly, and tell me that I should know better.

Despite our friendship, the four participants considered me an economic resource. Although the street kids recognized that my discretionary resources were not as abundant as foreign tourists' typically were, they did perceive me as wealthier than themselves. Therefore, my reciprocation, and tokens of friendship were expected to reflect this. When I did not meet their expectations, the street kids were not discrete in expressing their disappointment, and on one occasion Dinh even became angry. This was a difficult aspect of my relationship with the four participants. I often found myself wrestling with trying to fulfill my obligations as a friend, but also trying to avoid being taken advantage of by these kids, who survived by subtly exploiting others.

Another point of stress in my relationships with the participants was that I needed to gain approval from members of mainstream society for practical reasons. The four participants, to some extent, wanted me to behave as casually and carefree in mixed company of mainstream individuals and street kids as I did when only in the company of the latter. However, Thanh, Hai, and Phuong understood that I had other obligations and responsibilities. They were more tolerant of my reserved behavior when interacting with members of mainstream society, and they would even tone down their own behavior as appropriate. Dinh, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy interrupting, making jokes at the other's expense, and generally being a nuisance in these situations. I would respond by mildly reprimanding him, and telling him that he was behaving inappropriately, to which he would react incredulously. These exchanges would always result in me being

chastised for keeping the company of “no good” street kids, and me having to find Dinh, who usually left pouting, and explaining to him why he couldn’t behave the way he did in these particular situations, and then nursing his hurt feelings. After our temporary falling-out, Dinh did begin to tolerate my reserved behavior in the company of mainstream individuals, as the other three participants had done. I suspected that doing so was an attempt on his part to help reconcile our relationship.

I present my relationship with the participants as one of friendship, and I feel that our friendships were genuine. However, the initial motivations for our relationships, whatever they evolved into, were economic gain on behalf of the street kids, and obtaining privileged information for my research. Although our relationships progressed beyond these points, the economic and information transactions still occurred. Regardless, I feel that these transactions are justified because they did take place in the context of friendship, they were consensual, and they were mutually beneficial.

### **Interacting with Tourists**

The street kids most frequently interacted with tourists at cafés and tourist bars, although Phuong had interacted with tourists in a wider variety of settings during his travels with them. The street kids’ interactions with tourists were generally divided into two stages. The first stage was the initial approach, either by the street kid or the tourist. The second stage consisted of building and maintaining the relationship.

### *The Approach*

The four participants primarily initiated contact with tourists at tourist bars and cafés. The street kids would typically individually approach the tourists, which was less threatening than “ganging up” on the tourists, and attempt to engage them in conversation. I observed Thanh and Phuong initiate contact with tourists sitting in cafés by offering their goods and services. Whether or not the tourist agreed to buy the goods or services, I would always hear Thanh and Phuong follow up by asking where the tourist was from. The street kids would then use this information to further the exchange by telling the tourist about a friend from the same country, asking if the tourist knew a particular acquaintance from the same country, or informing the tourist that he or she was the first person they had met from that particular country, and then proceed to ask the tourist about the country. After learning this semi-personal information, the street kids would begin asking about the tourist’s travels, how long he or she intended to stay in Hue, what the tourist thought of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese people, and so forth. The tourists who abided the street kid’s questioning would eventually begin asking him about himself. The tourist would typically ask the street kid where he lived, about his family, and about his schooling. Without fail, the tourist would be informed that he was a homeless orphan, struggling to survive on the street, and could not afford to attend school. This initial interaction would typically conclude with the street kid telling the tourist that he could show the tourist where the lively tourist bars with free pool were located.

I saw and heard Dinh and Hai use this same conversational approach, but they would go straight to asking about the tourist’s country of origin, skipping the step of

trying to sell goods or services. I also observed Hai approach tourists by begging, but this method did not foster relationship building, and tourists usually did not respond positively to this approach. The former approach was basically a less direct form of begging. However, it was more sophisticated in that the street kids were not directly asking for anything, but were making their needs known to the tourists through conversation. Ultimately, both approaches relied on the charity of tourists, and the ability of the street kid to present himself as deserving of their charity, which the former method more effectively achieved.

The conversational approach was an effective and well-established method of initiating contact with tourists among the tourist drag's street kids in general. On one occasion, I observed a group of four young girls selling postcards utilize this exact method as described above, excepting that they approached the tourist as a group, which was common for the girls. They were very convincing up to the point when they informed the tourist that they could not afford to attend school, as two of them were wearing their school uniforms, which the tourist found amusing.

The setting at the tourist bars was more social and casual, so the tourists were less defensive, and more open towards the street kids' approaches. The street kids often brought patrons to the bars, so the proprietors were fairly tolerant of the kids, and their presence in the bars was common. In the bars, the street kids altered their approach strategy only slightly. Here, I witnessed that interaction was often facilitated through a game of pool (Thanh and Phuong never transacted formal business by attempting to sell their goods and services in the bars). Also, a more direct approach of simply striking up a conversation with tourists was more easily accomplished in the bars than at the cafés.

With the exception of the initial catalyst, the sequence of questions and responses followed the same pattern described above.

Sometimes it was the tourists who initiated contact. I witnessed several instances when a street kid, who was hanging around a café hungrily watching tourists eat, was invited to join a tourist for a meal. A conversation would ensue, with tourist and street kid exchanging information about themselves with one another. At the bars, tourists would often approach the street kids by asking what a young kid was doing there, and if their parents knew where they were. These concerned tourists presented the street kids with ideal opportunities to carefully explain their plight in detail, and they rarely went away from such encounters without receiving some form of charity from the tourist. It was encounters such as these that resulted in Phuong receiving his *xich lo*, and Dinh's lucrative relationship with the Swiss tourist, Maurice.

The tourists who were interested in interacting with the street kids varied considerably. They ranged from college-age males and females traveling in small groups, to young heterosexual couples, to middle-age single travelers, who were generally male. What they did seem to have in common was either a desire for an authentic cultural experience through interacting with locals, a genuine concern for the kids' well-being, or they were amused and/or charmed by the street kids, or a combination of these. Exploring tourists' explicit, and implicit motivations for interacting with street kids is beyond the scope of this study, and was not a primary area of investigation. Further comment on the subject in the present study would, therefore, be uninformed.

*Building and Maintaining Relationships*

After successful contact with a tourist had been made, the street kids would then attempt to further build the relationship through repeated contact. The extent to which a relationship with a tourist progressed was in a large part due to the amount of time the street kids spent with the tourist, which was often determined by the tourist's trip itinerary. Some relationships were very transitory, lasting only the duration of the first encounter. These short-lived relationships were, however, beneficial to the street kids, often providing them with a meal, a drink, or a small amount of cash. They also provided the street kids with extemporaneous recreation, such as a game of pool, or simply a conversation.

Other relationships lasted the length of the tourist's stay in Hue, which typically ranged from a few days to a week. At the conclusion of the first encounter, the street kid would often attempt to initiate further contact by telling the tourist that he could guide them around Hue to all the tourist sites, take the tourist to little known but delicious restaurants, show the tourist charming little local coffee shops, challenge the tourist to another game of pool on the following evening, or even take the tourist to one of the other bars. If the opportunity to make these invitations did not arise before the initial encounter ended, the street kid would return to the café or bar where the first meeting had taken place, in hopes of seeing the tourist again. If he was able to locate the tourist again, then he could suggest further recreational activities, or simply make plans to meet the tourist at the same bar for more pool. I was never present when Phuong would be invited to join tourists on extended trips outside of Hue, and when I asked him how he



accomplished this he simply replied, "I don't know, they just invite me to go with them." His ability to get invited on these trips, thus, remains a mystery to me.

All of the participants, except Hai, reported having been invited to stay with tourists in a hotel. However, this was not a regular occurrence. The aspects of a hotel stay that were most appealing to the street kids were access to international television, and the thrill of sneaking past hotel personnel in order to avoid being thrown out. When asking the participants about their hotel stays with tourists, I brought up the issue of sex. They reported that they had never engaged in sexual activity while staying in hotels with tourists. I was told that if the participants did not feel comfortable around, or trust the tourist, then they would not accept the offer to stay in the hotel. All of the participants further claimed to be virgins, stating that they were too young to have sex. This did not stop them from talking and joking freely about sex, and making boastful plans for when they were older. However, both Thanh and Phuong told me in private that they really planned to have sex with their wives only.

At the conclusion of a relationship that lasted several days, there would typically be a farewell meeting. The tourist would invite the street kid to lunch, dinner, or a night of pool at a bar. Addresses would be exchanged, the tourist would thank the street kid for showing them around Hue, or for showing them a good time at the bars, and often the tourist would give him a variable amount of money or other gift. Many of the tourists would send a postcard from somewhere else in Viet Nam, or another Southeast Asian country, thanking the street kids again for a good time. I translated numerous such postcards for the participants, but this was very often the last communication they received from the tourist.

The rare relationship that endured beyond the tourist's stay in Hue began the same as the short-term relationships. Although the time the street kids spent guiding these tourists around Hue, taking them to restaurants, etc. tended to be lengthier and more involved, the primary difference seemed to lie with the individual tourist. During their time with the street kids, these tourists were exceptionally impressed by, concerned for, and became attached to the street kids. I never met any of these individuals, so it is somewhat problematic to comment on their characteristics in any detail. However, I did translate several of their letters and emails for the street kids, and I draw my information from these sources. For the most part, they were single, white males. The exceptions to this were a single white female, a single Japanese female, and a white heterosexual couple, all of whom kept in touch in Thanh. There was also a white heterosexual couple, who kept in touch with Phuong. This couple returned to Hue while I was there, and took Phuong traveling with them, but I did not get the opportunity to meet them.

From the letters and emails that I translated for the street kids, I got the sense that these individuals were genuinely concerned for them. The tone of their correspondence was very parental in nature, telling the kids to behave and stay out of trouble. Anytime money was sent, it was usually accompanied by instructions telling the youth not to spend it frivolously, but to use it to secure a means of earning money. Some of the letters also instructed the street kids to use the money to purchase needed clothing or food. I am sure that it was psychologically healthy for the street kids to know that there were people who truly cared about their well-being, however, the aspect of these relationships that they enjoyed most was the money, which was very often spent contrary to the benefactor's wishes.

Establishing, cultivating, and maintaining beneficial relationships with tourists were very prominent activities, and experiences in the lives of the street kids. The processes these relationships entailed were not simple. An individual street kid could be negotiating several different concurrent relationships with tourists, with each relationship at a different stage. These street kids had become adept at managing their relationships with tourists, on which their survival often depended.

### **Perspectives on Tourists and Tourism**

#### *Tourists*

As illustrated earlier in this chapter, the street kids viewed tourists as economic and recreation resources. However, the street kids' perspectives of tourists did extend beyond this to the tourists' more human, or personal traits. In this section I focus on the street kids' perceptions of these elements.

I limit my discussion of the street kids' perspectives to Western tourists because the tourists with whom the street kids interacted were almost exclusively Westerners. When referring to foreign tourists, the street kids would often use the term *nguoì tay*, which means Westerner. Although the majority of foreign tourists in Viet Nam are other Asians, they were largely inaccessible to the street kids. For example, Japanese tourists often traveled in large tour groups that were shuttled around the city by bus, and then only to specific sites. During my entire stay in Hue, there were only four instances when I observed Japanese tourists on the tourist drag. According to Viet Nam's National Administration of Tourism's statistics on foreign tourist arrivals in Viet Nam, Chinese

tourists are the most abundant. (I broadly identify Chinese to include Taiwanese, individuals from Hong Kong, Malaysian Chinese, as well as Mainland Chinese.)

However, I found it odd that I only encountered a total of five Chinese tourists in Viet Nam. I met two Chinese tourists in a large luxury hotel in Hue, and three others at a bus stop three hours south of Hue, in Hoi An. I never identified even one Chinese tourist on the tourist drag. Perhaps I simply failed to recognize Chinese tourists, who seemed to be absent from tourist centers throughout the country. Or just as likely, Chinese tourists come to Viet Nam for the purpose of visiting relatives, rather than touring the country. The Chinese tourists very likely stay with their relatives, and are familiar enough with the tourist scene in Viet Nam that they are able to avoid the relatively high priced tourist areas. Whatever the reason, Phuong was the only participant who made any reference to Chinese tourists, and this was only in the context of telling me where tourists come from.

The street kids viewed Westerners in general, and Western tourists in particular as wealthy. The street kids were aware that relative to Viet Nam, it is considerably expensive to live in the countries that produce tourists. Notwithstanding this fact, tourists still had the financial means to indulge in leisure activities that are very expensive. Purchasing plane tickets to Viet Nam, traveling the length of the country upon arriving, staying in hotels for extended periods of time, eating out daily, and buying souvenirs—all at inflated prices—while potentially losing money by not working, requires greater amounts of money than many Vietnamese see in a lifetime. The street kids, as well as other Vietnamese individuals, were often amazed and envious of tourists' seemingly unlimited purchasing power. Even though the participants considered me to be poor relative to tourists, they could hardly fathom how I was able to secure the financial means

to support my family and myself for six months without working to earn an income. The extent to which a tourist was generous with his or her wealth was a prominent factor in the street kids' assessment of that individual.

In Viet Nam, individuals are often judged based on the amount of *tin h cam* ("feeling" or "sentiment") they possess. One concrete way to express *tin h cam*, especially if one is wealthy, is by giving material items or money, which shows concern for the recipient's well-being. The street kids believed that tourists who brushed them off, or ignored them, were afraid of them, or were simply conceited jerks. Those tourists who did engage in conversation, or other activities with the street kids, and did not share their wealth were viewed as stingy, bad, and lacking *tin h cam*. Because the tourists had more, the street kids expected them to give more.

Another important element of *tin h cam* is the continuation of relationships through communication, in the form of phone calls, letters, or visits. Tourists who had established relationships with the street kids, but did not remain in contact were apparently lacking *tin h cam*, regardless of how good the tourist had been to them while in Hue. If the tourist does not remain in contact with the street kid, then the tourist obviously didn't really care much for him.

The street kids' attitudes towards tourists as human beings were constructed using the above criteria. When I would ask the participants what they thought about tourists, I would always be told that like any other people, "there are good tourists, and bad tourists." Dinh illustrated the assessment of good and bad people based on their *tin h cam* when he told me of one tourist who gave him considerable amounts of money during his stay in Hue: "I gave him my email address, but he never writes or keeps in contact, so he

is not so good. There are a lot of people who are liars like that, they say they will keep in touch or send money, but they never do.” Dinh went on to describe the traits of good people, or those who possess *tin h cam*: “I only have two friends who don’t lie to me...they are both very good to me, they keep in touch and send money.” Hai also expressed this attitude with his statement, “the good tourists sometimes give me money, but...a lot of them don’t like street kids, when I try to talk to them they’re rude and want me to leave.” This standard was, however, not reserved exclusively for tourists, but applied to everyone, illustrated by Hai’s further comment, “Some of the café owners will sometimes give me something to eat, but just the good ones.”

One interesting view held by the street kids was that all Westerners are obsessed with academic education. The street kids viewed Western tourists as well educated, but at the same time lacking practical knowledge, or “street smarts”, and the kids often successfully exploited this. Thanh made the statement, “Every Westerner I have ever met thinks that everybody should go to school. All I have to do is tell a tourist that I can’t go to school because I don’t have any money, and they’ll give me money.” During Hue’s biggest annual tourist festival, a tourist, with whom Dinh and Thanh had become acquainted, had her pocketbook stolen. Dinh and Thanh knew the adolescent who committed the theft. By threatening to turn the youth in to the police they were able to retrieve the pocketbook, and return it to the tourist, who gave them a cash reward. Commenting on the incident, Thanh said, “Tourists really aren’t very smart. They’re always getting their stuff ripped off because it’s easy to do.” On another occasion, Phuong was relating how he had helped some tourists avoid getting charged double at the market earlier that day. Dinh responded to the story by saying, “Vietnamese are very

clever. Tourists don't know how much anything really costs. Everybody charges them double, and they can get away with it because tourists don't know what's what." Most tourists get scammed or robbed because of their unfamiliarity with the circumstances, and they are targeted because of their relative wealth. However, due to others' accounts, and the street kids' direct experience with tourists, they viewed tourists as generally gullible, and easily duped.

The street kids' perspectives of tourists were drawn from, and limited to their collective experiences with tourists. They had learned Western values, and also to interact with Western tourists in a manner that was more familiar to Westerners. In order to successfully exploit the tourists' values of education, hard work, or simply their sympathy, the street kids had to interact with tourists in a manner with which the tourists were comfortable. Instead of beginning an exchange with a tourist by telling him or her of their plight, and directly asking for assistance, the street kids would initiate a conversation and drop subtle hints. During these conversations, the street kids would respect the tourist's personal space, and although they would show interest in the tourist by asking general questions about him or her, the street kids would avoid inquiring about the tourist's private affairs. Conversely, when interacting with other Vietnamese, it is appropriate to maintain very close physical proximity, and even rest a hand on the other person's shoulder or knee. It is also appropriate to ask very personal questions about the other person, which would often be considered an invasion of privacy by Western standards. The street kids also knew to reserve their more rowdy behavior, and crude jokes for the bar, and then usually in male company only. The street kids also knew that they could offer a cigarette to a foreign female without her taking offense. Such an offer

to Vietnamese women would be offensive, for whom smoking is socially inappropriate. These are a few examples of Western values and behavior that the street kids had learned, and sought to exploit. Although the street kids were quite adept at incorporating these into their interactions with Western tourists, the way in which they interpreted their experiences with tourists was fundamentally shaped by their socialization in Vietnamese culture, and on the streets. As demonstrated earlier, when evaluating a tourist as a human being, the street kids held them to the standards and values espoused by Vietnamese culture. Therefore, the street kids had not been assimilated into Western culture, but were able to act out a dual perspective, shifting when necessary, and using their insights to their own benefit, while maintaining their core Vietnamese perspective.

### *Tourism*

The street kids' perspectives of the tourism industry in general, typically did not extend beyond its immediate consequences regarding themselves. When asked about tourism, all of the participants responded by saying that it is a good thing, primarily because it brought tourists who provided them with economic and recreational benefits. Regarding tourism, Dinh stated, "I like meeting tourists and going to play with them...people also get money from tourists." Hai stated that tourism is a good thing "because [tourists] have money. Sometimes tourists will buy me something to eat, and we go to the bars with them and play pool." When I asked Phuong about tourism, and how it affects Hue in general, he seemed confused, as if he had never thought about it before. He also concentrated on tourism's immediate results regarding himself, "[Tourists] have given me money, meals, clothes, a *xich lo*, and they take me on trips,



lots of things.” In asking the street kids about the potential, and realized effects of tourism in Hue, I was hoping for more thoughtful, and in-depth comments. Their responses helped to ground me in reality, and I remembered that they are teenage boys, trying to survive in the harsh environment of the street. The participants were generally unaware, and unconcerned with the broader implications of Viet Nam’s tourism industry. They recognized that tourism brought tourists, who potentially brought benefits for them. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the participants did not respond with commentaries on the potential environmental and social ills of tourism, or its position in the national economy. Thanh’s response, however, did address some of tourism’s broader issues. Thanh stated, “It’s very good. People can earn money, the city can earn money, and grow and become a developed city like Saigon. Hue can become one of Viet Nam’s cities. People in the cities earn more money, so they don’t have to be so poor, and their lives would be better.”

The participants’ positive responses regarding tourism supports Chambers’ (1997) claim that local populations affected by the industry do not always, and only view it as a negative force. Along with crime, corruption, and prostitution, street children could be considered to fall under several researchers’ category of “social pollution” resulting from tourism (Haley and Haley 1997; McLaren 1998). Although tourism does not necessarily produce street children, the fact that it supports this phenomenon could be considered a negative social effect of tourism. The street children would argue that this aspect is not at all one of tourism’s negative consequences, but a positive one, as it provides them with their means of survival. I can also state with a high degree of confidence that the street kids do not consider themselves to be “social pollution.”

Policy makers, and researchers alike, often fail to incorporate local stakeholders, especially those groups considered to be marginal, in attempts to identify solutions for minimizing negative cultural, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism, while maintaining, or increasing its economic benefits in the areas where it occurs. Thus, there has been a call for greater representation of local stakeholders' voices in the formulation of solutions (Nunez 1989; Cater 1994; Chambers 1994, 1997). I concur that the real solutions being sought can be better achieved with the inclusion of tourism's local stakeholders'. However, if these local voices are to be considered, they must first be identified. I submit that this has yet to be accomplished, as marginalized groups, including street children, are excluded from the current lists of local stakeholders put forth in the tourism literature.

### **Projected Images and Private Realities**

The street kids interacted with three general categories of people. These categories consisted of the general public, tourists, and one another. Depending on the group of people with which the street kids were interacting, they would reveal different facets of their identity, whether genuine or pretentious. The self-images presented to the local public, and tourists, often belied the street kids' private feelings and realities. The self-images exhibited by the street kids are discussed in this section as *public masks*, *tourist masks*, and *private faces*.

### *Public Masks*

The image the street kids presented to mainstream society was one of toughness, and invulnerability. Because of mainstream society's strong disapproval of the street kids, they were, in fact, very vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse. The street kids projected an image of toughness, or of being dangerous in order to buffer this potential abuse. The English word "mafia" was used to describe an individual who was recognized as dangerous because of their criminal activity. I was told that "mafia" could eat at cafés and leave without paying because the proprietor wanted to avoid becoming the recipient of such an individual's ill will. "Mafia" could also behave as they wished in public without fear of reprisal. To convey this image to others, the street kids often referred to themselves as "mafia," and marked themselves as such by scarring their forearms with lit cigarettes. They also exhibited the behavior that one would expect of "mafia." The street kids would respond to disapproving looks, or verbal reprimands with a string of curses and threats. This sort of behavior typically dissuaded individuals, who were unacquainted with the street kids, from further confrontation.

Acting tough also helped the street kids maintain a sense of pride, honor, and self-respect, known in Asian societies as "face." The street kids perceived that being tough and dangerous was more honorable, and respectable than being weak, and vulnerable to others. Whenever I alluded to begging, Dinh and Thanh would become defensive, because begging is not a respectable livelihood. Phoung also proudly reported that he no longer begged, but worked to earn his money. Begging was associated with very young children, and adults who were physically maimed. These individuals were characterized as weak, and vulnerable, and did not possess great amounts of "face." However, these

individuals were better tolerated by mainstream society. The street kids opted to portray themselves as tough, partly because it would have been difficult for relatively healthy adolescents to successfully assume the role of beggar, but also because it made them feel better about themselves.

The street kids also endeavored to maintain a public image of being uncaring, and invulnerable. During one occasion when Thanh was being bombarded with insults and scorn, he tried to appear indifferent, stating, "They can say whatever they want. I don't care." When I discovered that Hai was not an orphan, and asked about his relationship with his mother, his initial response was that he did not miss her, and she did not miss him. After the police had brutalized Dinh, he simply shrugged it off acting like it was no big deal, when it was obvious that he was in pain.

The image the street kids presented to the general public was an act of defiance against those who despised and vilified them. However, the street kids also perpetuated popular notions and misconceptions about themselves by using these to their advantage. Although the popular belief that they were no good thugs often resulted in them being rejected by mainstream society, it also helped to insulate them from otherwise uninhibited ill-treatment.

### *Tourist Masks*

The street kids projected a different image to tourists than they did to mainstream society. If tourists perceived the street kids as thugs, they would avoid them, which would make establishing beneficial relationships with tourists very difficult. Therefore, the street kids presented themselves to tourists as friendly, and needy. This was

accomplished through engaging in friendly conversation with tourists, and during the course of the conversation the street kids would inform the tourists of their poverty, hunger, homelessness, and lack of family. Phuong made the statement, "All the street kids have families, but they lie and say that they don't so the tourists will give them money." The street kids presented these images to tourists specifically to elicit charity from them. The street kids learned what was important to foreign tourists in order to market their images more successfully. Thanh demonstrated the street kids' knowledge of Westerners' ideals when he asked me to assist him in writing a sign that would increase his silk painting sales. All of the possibilities Thanh considered included elements of either poverty, homelessness, being an orphan, trying to put himself through school, or a combination of these. The image that Thanh was attempting to project was one that would reverberate with the Western tourists' worldviews.

When interacting with tourists, the street kids also added a jovial component to their personas. In the company of tourists, the street kids would joke and laugh, and presented themselves as very cheerful. In part, this was an attempt to entertain tourists, and gain their favor in order to encourage further contact—no one likes a party pooper. However, their behavior was also an attempt to remedy their own melancholy. The participants often told me that engaging in nonsense, and playful behavior helped to mitigate the depression that they must otherwise endure. If there were no tourists, Dinh stated, "I would be very sad. I wouldn't have anyone to play with, or talk to...it would be too depressing to wander around by myself."

*Private Faces*

When interacting with one another, and myself, the street kids would often joke, and play. However, during the course of interviews, and numerous conversations, they frequently became quite serious, depressed, and even despondent as they reflected on their lives. Although the cigarette burns on each of the participants' arms were a symbol of toughness, each of them told me that they had done it because of severe depression. After relating depressing or harsh experiences to me, the participants would engage in raucous bouts of joking, or would be eager to go to a bar and play pool in attempts to take their minds off of reality for a while. Dinh would only talk seriously about his life experiences if I agreed to the precondition that we could go and play afterwards, so he could "forget and be happy."

Although the street kids presented themselves to mainstream society as tough and invulnerable, and to tourists as cheerful, these images only masked their realities. Dinh and Hai were mistreated, and forced out of their homes by an abusive father, and stepfather. Phuong got beaten up, and taken advantage of by uncompassionate, self-serving adults. Both Phuong and Thanh were victims of extreme poverty. And they all were subject to mainstream society's disdain, and the police's brutality. These grim realities are difficult to confront, especially because they are beyond the street kids' control. However successful these street kids were in portraying a tough, or cheerful façade to themselves and others, their underlying reality was pervaded by uncertainty, fear, vulnerability, and sadness.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusions**

In this study, I have described, and elaborated the realities, and lived experiences of a small group of street children, as shaped by their participation in tourism. Through this research, I sought to answer the question, "How does tourism affect and shape the lives of street children involved with the industry?"

The present research contributes to the body of anthropological tourism studies, and ethnographic research of street children. The present study is unique in that it illuminates previously undocumented and intersecting aspects of these two areas of research, which have hitherto been approached and considered separately, and distinctively. In the following paragraphs, I propose a unifying theoretical construct descriptive of the lives of my informants, as shaped by their participation in tourism.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

As I considered the data, and the themes that it produced in an endeavor to construct a descriptive model, it became apparent that the different aspects of the street kids' lives and activities coalesced around tourism. Social, economic, recreational, geographic, and even temporal realms of the street kids' lives were either influenced by, or a direct response to tourism. The categories that do not support this hypothesis are those that address the participants' separation from home.

Tourism did not provide the push factors that resulted in the street kids' separation from home, their subsequent homelessness, and life on the street. Conditions at home, including extreme poverty, abuse, and irreconcilable differences with family

members are what initially compelled the participants to leave. Once on the street, however, tourism helped sustain them and also presented the alluring possibilities of receiving large sums of money, and a good time. Tourism, therefore, did generate pull factors that drew the participants to the street, and particularly the tourist drag, and helped keep them there.

The street kids' participation in tourism, and their experiences with foreign tourists did have social consequences. The street kids spent considerable amounts of time in the company of Western tourists. Through frequent contact with these tourists they learned aspects of Western culture, which served to facilitate successful interactions with Westerners. Although the street kids were not assimilated, per se, into Western culture, they did understand it to the point that they were able to act out Western perspectives, and incorporate Western values in their exchanges with foreign tourists. Nevertheless, the ways in which the street kids interpreted their relationships with foreigners were fundamentally based on core Vietnamese cultural values, such as the amount of time, energy, and material resources a tourist invested in the relationship. Tourists were also judged on their level of commitment to the street kids. Empty gestures and promises that go unfulfilled, such as "We'll have to get together" or "I'll keep in touch", which are often exchanged by Westerners as simple pleasantries, are not received well in Viet Nam. The street kids took tourists' promises at face value, and if the tourist did not come through then he or she would be considered a liar. The street kids could imitate Western behavior, but at core they maintained a Vietnamese ideology.

The street kids' interactions with tourists also affected mainstream society's perceptions of them. Street life, and all it entails, is contrary to the Vietnamese



expectations of children and adolescents. Therefore, being identified as a street kid was synonymous with deviant behavior. Furthermore, because the street kids employed begging, and other more subtle methods of soliciting handouts, they were perceived by mainstream society as scheming, opportunistic freeloaders, which exacerbated the dominant culture's negative attitude towards them.

Tourism played a significant role in shaping the street kids' relationships with the police. In preparation for tourist events the police would specifically patrol Hue's tourist centers, with the intent of "cleaning-up" the streets of unofficial businesses, beggars, prostitutes, street kids, and anything else that could be considered an eyesore. If the street kids chose not to participate in the tourism industry and confined their activities to the other side of the river, away from the tourist drag, they could avoid harassment by, and confrontation with the police. Participating in the tourism industry as a street kid resulted in harsh treatment by the police.

The street kids' economic activities were a direct response to tourism. Whether selling goods and services, begging, or establishing relationships, the street kids' work activities revolved around tourism. Although they sometimes received charity from sympathetic members of mainstream society, they were still very dependent on tourism for their living. The street kids' reliance on tourism became very apparent during the off-season. As the number of tourists decreased, so did the street kids' cash flow, and caloric intake. The street kids' specialization in the tourist market left them to eke out an existence during the off-season. During these lean times they continued to depend on tourism, as they eagerly waited, and hoped for assistance from long-term benefactors.

The street kids' economic world was tourism, and it often determined whether or not they ate.

Aptekar's (1988:85) characterization of Colombian street children as "young in age and old in experience" can be appropriately applied to the street kids of Hue's tourist drag. These street kids have seen, and been subjected to experiences that are foreign to most mainstream adults, let alone children. These experiences are responsible for their uncertainty and depression, which lay just beneath their tough and cheerful surfaces. As a result of the street kids' harsh realities they pursued recreation with an urgency. Through heightened levels of playfulness in their recreational activities they sought to escape unpleasant memories, and present pain. Tourists were a key source of this recreational opiate. This is again illustrated by the off-season, and absence of tourists. Lacking a primary, and their preferred recreational outlet, the participants became notably irritable, agitated, and depressed. Suffering recreational withdrawals, dire economic conditions, and being faced with the stark reality of their existence, the street kids sought other means to help them "forget and be happy." These other means often consisted of crass and raucous behavior in greater amounts, and degree than normal. However, this behavior could deteriorate into more self-destructive activities, such as drinking and serious fighting. Tourism did not cause this behavior; rather it was the street kids' harsh life experiences, which tourism only seasonally suppressed.

The street kids' involvement in tourism not only helped shape the social, economic, and recreational realms of their lives, but also determined, to a great extent, where and when their life experiences would unfold. The locus of the street kids' activities and experiences was the tourist drag. Their social, work, and recreational

activities revolved around tourists, and they naturally gravitated to areas with high tourist concentrations. Due to conditions at home the four participants felt it necessary to find someplace else to go, and they chose to make the street their home, which they determined to be the best option. They chose the tourist drag in particular because the tourists who congregated there provided them with economic and recreational resources, which were substantial enough to make them stay.

Besides being the locus of the street kids' social, economic, and recreational activities, the tourist drag is also where they slept. Although the street kids slept on the street because of limited options, this behavior also served as a physical presentation of the destitution they endeavored to communicate to tourists. Furthermore, tourism had an influence on when the street kids slept. The four participants' particular involvement in tourism required them to keep unusual hours. Tourists were most accessible to the street kids during the evening and early morning hours, which is when the tourist bars and cafés were most lively. The street kids' dependence on tourism made it necessary for them to be awake and alert during these times in order to successfully interact with tourists.

In summary, I have described how the lives of a small group of street children are impacted and shaped by their participation in the tourism industry, even to the point of their being dependent upon it. Although they held the marginal status of street children, tourism provided them with some degree of economic viability, and also helped them cope with the hard hand they had been dealt in life. The seasonality of benefits the street kids received from their participation in tourism, and the fact that tourism helped sustain their lifestyle, which caused them to be marginalized by mainstream society, can be considered negative aspects of tourism. However, tourism cannot be blamed for the

street children's undesirable circumstances, and is generally a positive force in their lives because of their circumstances.

Because the study did not take place in a laboratory setting it is impossible to remove, or alter any of the variables that have resulted in the street kids' present circumstances. Making claims that the absence of tourism would improve their lives by forcing them into occupations that are not seasonal, more conventional, and better received by others would be mere speculation. However, the sustainability of the participants' livelihood at the time of the study is questionable. Although street kids and their activities pose no real threat to tourists, as they enter adulthood tourists will no longer be charmed or amused by their roguish behavior, but will more likely feel threatened or swindled—some tourists already do. In order to survive they will have to either adapt, or completely change their strategies, or they will be selected against.

Although it is not my intent to disregard negative aspects of tourism, I do support Chambers' (1997) claims that the effects of tourism are not always and only negative, and that each unique circumstance in which tourism occurs should be given individual consideration. Tourism supports the street kids' way of life. It provides them with a livelihood, and has allowed them to escape negative conditions at home. If tourism was absent the viable options available to the street kids would be greatly reduced, and their circumstances would be less favorable than at present. Because the street kids are not legitimate orphans they would not have access to social services such as orphanages. Dinh and Hai may be forced to remain at home and endure severe abuse. The living that Thanh and Phuong would be able to make on the street selling goods and services to local people would be no better, and probably worse than the extreme poverty they faced at

home. Although the street kids are not criminals, they did have the capacity to become criminals, especially given that they already exist on the margins of mainstream society. Without any other means of financial support, the street kids could potentially turn to crime and become wards of the criminal justice system. Tourism does not provide an idyllic life for the street kids, but it at least gives them an alternative.

Although the street kids are largely benefiting from tourism, the long-term effects of their involvement in tourism have yet to be realized. As the street kids enter adulthood and are no longer able to establish beneficial relationships with tourists, they may have a difficult time making a transition into the adult working world. The street kids lack discipline and education, and the skills they do possess would be difficult to market in mainstream society. If they fail to establish themselves in the mainstream adult working world the street kids could potentially turn to illicit activities. Because the street kids have become familiar with Western tourists and their values, and also view them as easily taken advantage of and wealthy, tourists could become the target of theft or fraud.

Further down the road the potential negative effects of tourism in wider Vietnamese society could become realities, which may also adversely impact the street kids. In instances where tourism development has followed the globalization and imperialism models, global corporations have forced small local enterprises out of business. It is these small local enterprises that give the street kids access to, and allow them to interact with tourists. If these local enterprises are replaced by big business, which tends to heavily mediate tourism activities, tourists will very likely be directed away from unmediated interactions with locals, especially those considered to be "less

desirable.” Street kids would no longer have access to tourists, and could no longer benefit from them.

On a broader level, this study addresses practical concerns, and theoretical interests that are central issues in the anthropological study of tourism. Chambers (1997) argues that tourism, and the host/guest relationship need to be recognized as mediated phenomena. While I agree that in many cases tourism is mediated by individuals and institutions that stand outside the host/guest relationship, this is not a universal that can be applied to each unique circumstance in which tourism occurs. The street kids (hosts) and tourists (guests) directly negotiated their own relationships, and mediators were absent from their transactions.

Chambers (1997) submits that tourists generally desire the traditional host/guest relationship, which entails going to a strange, exotic place and making genuine contact with the natives—perhaps interacting with the street kids fulfilled this desire. However, Chambers questions the relevance of the host/guest relationship because tourism, in its current form, is a mediated activity. Based on the interactions between street kids and tourists presented in this study, I argue that the concept of “hosts and guests” remains relevant. The street kids do challenge the conventional notion of “host”, which has generally been applied to such individuals as hoteliers, restaurateurs, shopkeepers, craftspeople, and performers. However, instead of considering this concept to be obsolete, it should be revised or expanded to include those “non-conventional” groups, and individuals who continue to experience unmediated exchanges with tourists.

In this same vein, the interactions between the street kids and tourists bring into question the balance of power that is generally assumed by the host/guest relationship.

The relationships and interactions that the street kids had with tourists did not disempower them. Although the tourists did exploit the street kids for the purpose of recreation, and gaining an authentic cultural experience, the street kids also exploited the tourists. That the street kids were able to exploit tourists by manipulating their values was indeed a form of empowerment. Furthermore, the host/guest relationship between tourists and street kids was often reversed. During meals, recreational outings, and extended trips, the street kids were tourists' "guests." In these situations, though often instigated by the street kids, the tourists took on the characteristics and responsibilities of "host."

On an even broader level, this study questions the theories of globalization (Long 1996; McLaren 1998; Puntenney 1990) and imperialism (Brandon 1993; Chambers 1997; Nash 1989) in the context of tourism. The street kids have learned aspects of Western culture, but they have not been fully acculturated. They act out Western values when necessary, and use their insights to exploit these values. Although the street kids may be considered a global commodity in that tourists in Hue "pay" for their experiences with street kids as they seek authentic cultural exchanges, Western culture has also, to some extent, become a commodity or article of trade for the street kids. Once the street kids obtain this commodity, or learn Western values, they can exploit them for financial gain. This challenges certain aspects of the globalization and imperialism theories put forth in the tourism literature. At core, the street kids maintain a Vietnamese perspective, and exhibit Western values when it is economically advantageous to do so. They have not replaced their Vietnamese cultural values with values adopted from Western culture, and they do not perceive their own culture to be inferior to Western culture. If anything, they

perceive Western culture to be lacking in commitment, loyalty, and genuine *tin h cam*. Although the balance of economic power weighs heavily in favor of the tourists, who simply have more money than the street kids, the balance of power at the level of relationship negotiation shifts in favor of the street kids because of their ability to manipulate and exploit the tourists. The street kids came away from their transactions with tourists with more resources than they entered with, while the tourists went away with less cash in their pockets than they had before the exchange. Furthermore, the profits that the street kids generated by their participation in the tourism industry were not leaked out of the country, but went directly into their pockets, and subsequently spent in the local economy.

This study, on a general level, also addresses Western values about children. Aspects of the street kids' lives, such as their not attending school, their lack of adult supervision, their general disregard of adult authority, engaging in activities and frequenting places believed to be inappropriate for children, the way they made a living, and their general existence in an exposed, and uncertain environment are in sharp contrast to the Western worldview of childhood. It is this very worldview, and the values it embodies that enabled the street kids to exploit Western tourists, which ultimately helps perpetuate the street kids' way of life. Given the street kids' circumstances, many of the aspects that street life entails are positive things in their lives, with the significant exception of existing in the exposed environment of the street, which made them vulnerable to the very adults who are supposed to be responsible for children's well-being. I am skeptical about the applicability of Western values and expectations for all children, in all circumstances. I submit that we need to be flexible in our Western zeal to



dictate what is best for all kids, as articulated by Aptekar's (1988:211) provocative question: "Are these children merely the poor and outcast examples at the impoverished end of childhood? Or are they, perhaps, illustrative of expanded possibilities of childhood?"

## **Recommendations**

As this study is the first to elaborate on street children's participation in tourism, further research on this topic is certainly warranted. In addition, I recommend the following areas for further study:

- Identifying tourism's local stakeholders, including marginal groups involved in the industry;
- An examination of the tourism industry's informal sector; and
- A reexamination of the host/guest relationship, which has yet to be fully apprehended.

The ideal solution to the street children issue would be to remedy the conditions that result in children living on the street. In brief, this would entail providing financial relief for impoverished families, and counseling to help reconcile dysfunctional family relationships, or foster care if counseling was ineffective. This could most effectively be achieved by enacting policy at the state level. Government authorities view street children as a problem; therefore, government agencies should take on the responsibility to facilitate a solution.

Moving down the ideal solution scale, the next best thing would be providing children on the street with a safe place to sleep, education and vocational training, a

means to earn money, and food. This solution could also be facilitated by government agencies. However, there are several international charities operating in Viet Nam. A good number of these charities specifically focus on assisting underprivileged children. (For details visit the US-Indochina Reconciliation Project's homepage at [www.usirp.org](http://www.usirp.org).) This solution is well within the scope of these organizations, and might be better achieved by groups that are primarily concerned with the well-being of children.

Failing this, there are some relatively simple steps that can be taken, which would greatly improve the quality of life for kids on the street. First and foremost, the police must discontinue their policy of harassing and abusing these children. Inasmuch as the street kids pose no threat to the tourists from whom they make their living, they should at least, in this regard, be left to their own devices. These kids are resilient and resourceful; they have managed to survive without support from their families or the state, and will probably continue to do so.

In order to cultivate sustainable development in Viet Nam's tourism industry Haley and Haley (1997) recommend that the Vietnamese government create economic and social indicators that focus on national well-being, encourage participation of all major stakeholders through public consultation, and form advisory boards with all stakeholders as members. In making this recommendation, the authors probably did not take into consideration tourism's invisible stakeholders. Examples of these invisible stakeholders are the individuals who run small outdoor tourist cafés, operate small mobile booths selling convenience and souvenir items to tourists, prostitutes, and street kids. Authorities consider these individuals and their enterprises to be undesirable presences in Viet Nam's tourism industry. This is reflected in the police's attitude toward them as

eyesores that need to be cleaned up. On several occasions I witnessed police patrols “clean up” the tourist drag in anticipation of large numbers of tourists. On one of these occasions in particular, I was sitting at a small outdoor café that was flanked by two very similar cafés. These small cafés had no inside seating, and all of their tables and chairs were arranged on the sidewalk, and sheltered by rain flies. The café owner received a phone call from her sister, who worked further down the tourist drag, tipping her off that the police were coming. The café owner came running out of the café shouting “Police, Police!” Workers at all three cafés sprang into action, frantically trying to stuff all their chairs, tables, bicycles, and any other belongings into the cafés’ interiors. But they were too late. The police pulled up in a jeep with a truck-like bed, and began throwing chairs, tables, bicycles, and anything else that wasn’t nailed down into the back of the jeep. For a finale, the police slashed the rain flies, then cut them down. Before leaving, the police gave all three café owners a fine. The café owner told me that if they paid the fine the confiscated items would be returned, but then only after several months, when the police had finished using them. She went on to explain that it was less expensive to simply replace the confiscated items.

Given the relationship between these invisible, or marginal stakeholders and the authorities, it is not likely that they would be included in public consultation processes or be invited to sit on an advisory board. However, the Vietnamese government does consult academics and individuals considered to be experts in the field of tourism. These individuals need to be made aware of the invisible stakeholders, their interests, and the consequences of their participation in the tourism industry. Once this is accomplished, these academics and experts can play the role of advocate for the invisible stakeholders.

A condition of the street kids' participation in this study was that I would not present my research and findings to authorities or other individuals in Hue. If this were otherwise, it is doubtful that any recommendations would be heeded, or any findings used to the street kids' advantage. Therefore, I make the following recommendations to individuals and institutions that can act as advocates for these children. Conditions at home are what initially compelled the street kids to leave home. Therefore, I do not recommend that the street kids be forcibly returned home. Detaining the street kids in juvenile detention centers would not be a positive option either, especially because of the street kids' reports about the unfavorable conditions there. Furthermore, the practice of apprehending the street kids, holding them for short periods of time, and then releasing them suggests inadequate social services and resources required to hold the kids for any substantial duration. Adolescent street kids will soon have to enter the adult working world because they will no longer possess the characteristics that enable them to successfully exploit tourists. I suggest that tour companies would do well to employ former street kids in a capacity that could tap their hands-on experience in tourism, their understanding of tourists, and their insights into Western culture. Because most Vietnamese tourism companies are state owned, and employment with these enterprises is highly competitive it is highly unlikely that they would employ former street kids. There are, however, many foreign-based tour companies operating in Viet Nam, many of which employ local guides. Several of these tour companies seek cultural exchanges, and promote local development through tourism. The street kids' real world "training" could be a great asset to these tourism enterprises, and securing employment in an industry with

which they have become familiar from the ground up can facilitate a smoother transition for the street kids into adulthood.

The purpose of this study was ultimately to answer the call for more research focused on marginal groups impacted by tourism, and help make their voices heard (Nunez 1989; Chambers 1994, 1997). The consideration of local perspectives can potentially provide new directions for research, suggest novel solutions to the problems created by tourism, and reveal that what some outsiders consider to be problems, many insiders do not. Furthermore, this study gives cause to reconsider the established understanding of who tourism's local stakeholders are, and suggests that this understanding is incomplete.

Finally, on a more humanitarian note I echo Aptekar's (1988:211) exhortation to "reconsider the nature of children and how adult society is responsible for the well-being of those they choose to call children." Street children often engage in behavior, and participate in activities that violate the borders of culturally accepted realms of childhood. However, it is necessary to do so in order to cope with the harsh realities of street life. Although these children's realities have hardened their exteriors over time, the fact remains that they are children, and they are vulnerable. It is my hope that this study will benefit these vulnerable children, if only by enhancing others' awareness and understanding of them, and their plight.

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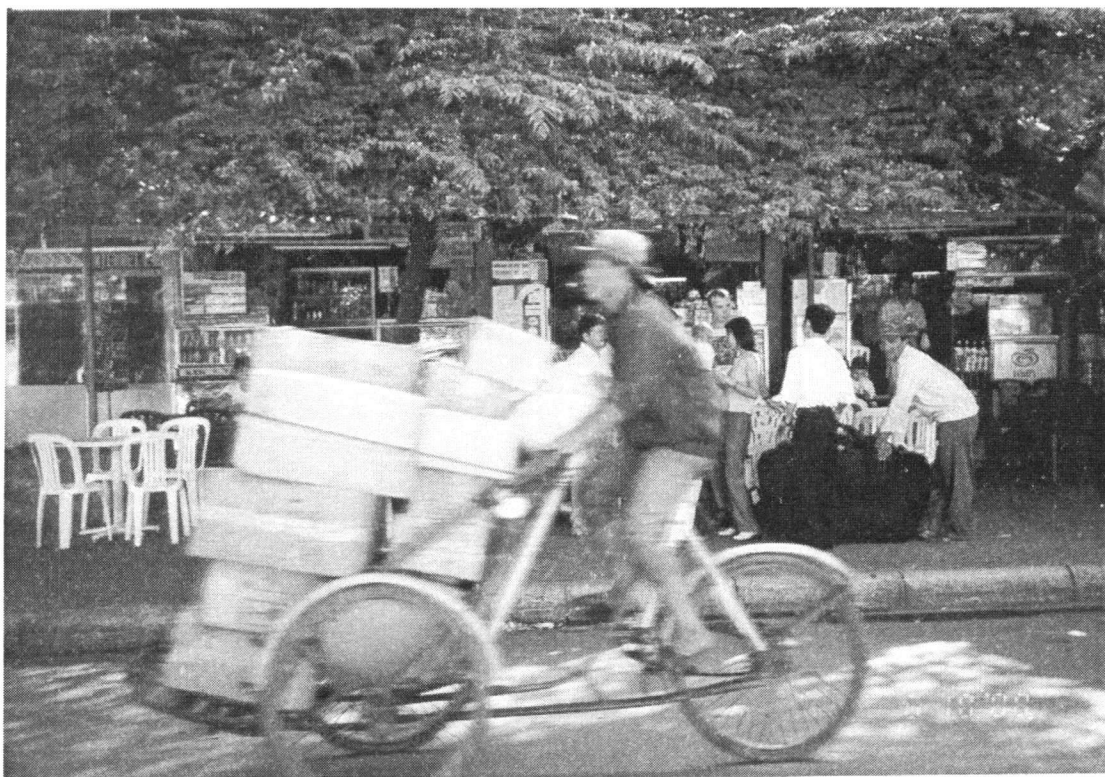
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## **Appendices**

Appendix A  
Photograph of a *Xich Lo*



## **Appendix B**

### **Possible Interview Questions**

Why are you on the streets?

How long have you lived on the streets?

Tell me about your family?

Do you have family close by?

What grade have you finished in school?

Why did you stop going to school?

What do you do since you don't go to school?

How do you make money?

Where do you sleep?

How, what, and where do you eat?

Have you ever been arrested?

Are you afraid of the police?

Do the police ever come looking for street kids?

What would the police do if they caught you?

How long have you been interacting with tourists?

Why did you start interacting with tourists?

How do you first begin a relationship with a tourist?

Do tourists ever give you money?

How much money do you typically get from a tourist?

What do you spend the money on?

Do you share the money with friends?



Do you have friends who also get money from tourists?

Do your friends share their money with you?

What do you think of tourists?

Why do you think tourists come to Viet Nam, and particularly Hue?

Is it a good thing, or a bad thing that tourists come to Hue?

For who, and why?

Where do tourists come from?

How would your life be different if there were no tourists?

Do others benefit from tourists?

What do you want to do when you get older?

### **Appendix C**

#### **Informed Consent Script Given Verbally To Participants**

I am researching tourism in Hue and would like to use your views, opinions and experiences in my thesis, which will result from the research. I will gather this information through our discussions, conversations and interactions during my stay in Hue, and these will be included in my thesis. You will not be compensated for your participation.

Your name will not be used, and your identity will remain confidential. The thesis is not going to be written for sale or commercial gain, but will be available at the university library in Corvallis, Oregon, USA. None of the information I collect from you will be made available to the local public, or authorities.

Oregon State University maintains strict guidelines and protocols concerning research that involves human subjects. The guidelines and protocols are in place to protect your interests and well-being. If you choose to participate in the research you may withdraw at anytime, and for any reason without consequence. If you do not want to participate in the research our interactions will remain confidential, and will not be included in my thesis. Refusing to participate will not affect our relationship.