

Article

Four decades of Brazilian and international research on street children: A meta-narrative review

by

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Abstract

The last 40 years has yielded a vast body of literature on street children. In this article, we reflect on the knowledge accumulated by several generations of scholars and across two bodies of research. The article's aim is twofold: 1) To conduct a meta-narrative review, mapping out the contours of Brazilian and Anglophone literature on street children since the 1980s until today. 2) To bridge these two bodies of literature through reflections on similarities and differences. In so doing, we identify some overall tendencies in which street children have been described, debated, and theorized and connect the two bodies of literature that often remain separated.

Keywords: street children, street youth, research, Brazil, review

Part of the data used in this article was extracted from the study *Entre a casa, as ruas e as instituições: crianças e adoles-centes em situação de rua e as instituições de acolhimento no estado do Rio de Janeiro* (Between home, the streets and institutions: children and youth in street situations and in institutions), coordinated by Irene Rizzini with the support of FAPERJ – Research Council of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (FAPERJ/CNE, 2017-2020. Ref. nº E-26/202.812/2017).

Introduction

Innumerable fundraising campaigns, policy interventions and research projects targeting children and young people residing on the streets in the Global South have sprung out from the increased focus on children in vulnerable contexts and their rights from the late 1970s onwards. This has culminated in a vast body of academic literature on what has come to be known as 'street children'. Stretching over nearly four decades and embracing a wide range of topics, methodological approaches, theoretical vernaculars, and disciplinary backgrounds, this body of literature has sought to increase our understanding of young street populations. It includes early efforts of counting, classifying, and profiling children encountered in city centers, and later endeavors to describe and understand their street relationships, activities and attitudes. The research has unearthed the many discourses in which children and their families are described and embedded, reinforcing some of these while creating others.

The Latin American continent holds a special position when it comes to street children, being heavily associated with countries such as Brazil in media and policymaking, and most of the early international research initiatives were done in the region (de Benítez, 2011). Although more seldom appraised and referenced in the international literature, dedicated native scholars have engaged in young street populations and contributed to an expanding body of knowledge. In Brazil, local researchers within a wide range of disciplines and dispersed throughout the country have been involved in cutting-edge research since the early 1980s. Despite the growing body of national literature, Brazilian scholars have tended to cite foreigners to address issues related to street children, perhaps as a result of the colonial heritage of attributing more value to what comes from the Global North but also to increase chances of getting published (Rizzini, 2019).

Despite the many efforts of doing research with young people on the street, de Benítez (2011) found in her extensive review of Anglophone literature that it remains fragmented. In addition, studies published by local scholars in local languages are often unavailable for international audiences, further 'silo-ing' knowledge. Hanson et al. (2018) recently argued that Anglophone publications on Global South childhoods tend to be authored by academics from the North, reflecting and reproducing unequal

global power relations. They call attention to the lack of dialogue between North and South, causing limited reciprocal learning across cultural contexts and languages and skewing knowledge production. Inspired by these calls, we aim to contribute the following with this article is: First, to offer a meta-narrative review, mapping out two bodies of academic literature on street children since the 1980s until today, namely research published in Anglophone journals and Brazilian journals. Second, to bridge these two bodies of literature through reflections on similarities and differences.

The starting point of our review is the position that how researchers perceive and interpret the field is never neutral but rather depends on, and is produced by, their methodological approach and theoretical lenses. In research with street children, different realities are discovered, constructed, defined, and re-defined under different paradigms, where some parts are made visible whilst others remain hidden. When we examined the Brazilian and Anglophone bodies of literature concerning street children over the last 40 years, an extreme richness in themes and approaches emerged. Bearing in mind the vast body of literature produced within this time span, a systematic review is beyond the scope of this article. We have instead chosen to conduct a meta-narrative review of what we perceive as main themes. A narrative review is an academic summary combined with interpretation and critique (Green, Johnson & Adams, 2006; Greenhalgh, Thorne & Malterud, 2018; Rother, 2007). A meta-narrative review explores the storyline of a research tradition over time and discerns “how ideas have waxed and waned within different scholarly communities at different points in the development of thinking” (Greenhalgh et al., 2018, p. 3).

Narrative reviews have been criticized for being biased (Ferrari, 2015), ‘cherry-picking’ evidence to bolster a particular perspective. Yet, we support Greenhalgh et al. (2018) in that ‘bias’ is an epidemiological construct that presupposes the dispassionate, instrumental and universal ‘view from nowhere’. Authors of narrative reviews are often experts, making judiciously and purposively selections based on their experience (Green, et al., 2006). The first author of this review has been engaged in research with young people on the streets for 15 years, and the second author for over 40 years, enabling us to reflect on knowledge accumulated by several generations of scholars. Our interpretation is indeed perspectival, positioning ourselves within field (Greenhalgh et al., 2018), where our experience is used as a

strength to identify overall tendencies and capture the *espírito da época*, the *zeitgeist*, of time elapsed, exploring major ways in which street children have been described, debated, conceptualized, and theorized.

Despite that narrative reviews often refrain from listing types of databases, inclusion criteria, etc. (Ferrari, 2015; Rother, 2007), we would like to make some brief notes on the selection process. We focus on influential and illustrative articles that have set the premises for the development of the field, nationally and internationally. Influential, here, is understood by the authors as having well-established reputations and the articles being commonly cited by succeeding researchers. Illustrative entails either bearing common characteristics of much of the literature of a certain period or serving as an example of exception. To increase the transparency of our selection, we have added a table overview of articles included (see appendix 1). International research refers here to articles based on research in the South published in Anglophone journals, by authors located in South or North. This entails that in some instances, Brazilian scholars are referred to in Anglophone literature (e.g., Rizzini, Rosemberg, Andrade) and foreign researchers are once referred in the Brazilian literature (Lusk, Mason). This reveals some level of reciprocal action between the two bodies of literature (in addition to cross-referencing). However, we argue that when cross-publishing, the authors are compelled to follow formal requirements and more subtle academic codes and conventions, adhering to the given reviews to succeed publishing in that context. We have therefore chosen to include cross-references as well. We also note that the Anglophone category could easily be problematized regarding global power imbalances in academia that affect what gets published and where, and who gets read and cited by whom. By determining such category, we are aware that we risk reproducing existing power imbalances, citing what is already cited. However, by including national literature from Brazil we hope to surpass this limitation.

From the mid-1990s onwards, the Anglophone research on street children consolidates into different disciplinary strands. We have chosen to focus on literature within the New Social Studies of Childhood (NSSC) rather than literature within medicine, psychology, social work, and social policy. Within the Brazilian research, social psychology and social work are integral to the literature on street children

(Rizzini, 2018), and therefore included. We use the term 'street children' despite our awareness of the danger of over-simplifying realities and the availability of other and more suitable terms in Brazilian literature (see Rizzini, 2018). We agree with de Benítez (2011) in that using alternative definitions risk dispersing knowledge across disciplines and places.

The article is not an attempt to compare the two bodies of literature but rather to bridge them. To facilitate this, we chose to divide both bodies of literature into two main sections, laying the foundation of the article's structure. This is also in line with a narrative review approach, presenting a chronological summary of the history of a research where clear trends are identified (Ferrari, 2015). Despite being partly chronological—where the first section focuses roughly on the period from 1980s to mid-1990s and the second from mid-1990s onwards—the differences between the sections lie more in the characteristics of epochs than the time-periods per se. Hence the two sections are not chronologically or thematically clear-cut categorizations but share essential characteristics in themes, theories, and methodologies. In addition, each period is divided into one section of Anglophone literature and one section of Brazilian literature. Lastly, we provide a final discussion and recommendations.

Early research exploring children on the streets (1980s to mid-1990s)

During the 1970s, children's welfare was put on the agenda, nationally and internationally. The United Nations (UN) pronounced 1979 to be the International Year of the Child and appointed a committee to draft a convention of children's rights. This reflected and further reinforced an increased focus on children who were considered vulnerable and at risk, or 'children in special circumstances'; a phrase often used at the time. Although children in many places in the world had used the street as a home for centuries, so-called street children in the Americas gained particular attention in the 1980s. UNICEF made street children one of their top priorities and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) introduced themselves as street children's advocates.

In international media and policymaking, Brazil became renowned for its young street population. Their violent lives and deaths came to be depicted in fictional novels and movies, newspapers, documentary films, and human rights reports. The structural

and violent discrimination of young people on the streets was recognized and condemned with the massacre in front the famous church Candelária in Rio de Janeiro in 1993 as its peak. After nearly 20 years of dictatorial military regime (1964-1985), Brazil experienced a far-reaching child-rights movement, including the establishment of the National Movement of Street Boys and Street Girls in 1985. With considerable participation of the children in their first national meeting, attention was drawn to the underlying forces that led them to the streets and the widespread violence they met (Rizzini, 2000). This wave of attention sparked the interest of national and international researchers who started to study the lives of children working, roaming, playing, and sleeping on the street.

International research communities discover the phenomenon of street children

The early period of Anglophone literature about street children was marked by curiosity: Who were these kids? Why did they appear? How did they thrive? Many researchers were connected to international non-governmental work (e.g., Bequele & Boyden, 1988; Landers, 1988; Patel, 1990). The phenomenon of street children was commonly described as a 'social problem' and the literature often resulted in policy recommendations (e.g. Cosgrove, 1990; Hollsteiner & Tarcon, 1983; Landers, 1988). In some ways, scholars reproduced rhetoric from media and charity campaigns, and 'research-based' estimates of street children often served as opening remarks (e.g., Aptekar, 1988a; Cosgrove, 1990; Hollsteiner & Tarcon, 1983).

Antipodes

Although it was later assumed that the early research primarily drew on adult informants whilst children were silenced (Ennew & Boyden, 1997), this was only true in a few of the articles we reviewed (see for example Swift, 1991). Standardized psychological tests and psychological developmental theory sometimes worked as benchmarks in studies (Rizzini, 1996), as for Hickson and Gaydon (1989), who concluded that street children rarely resolved successfully the first crisis in Erikson's stages of development (p. 89, see also Aptekar, 1988a). Although ignored by succeeding scholars, several researchers conducted in-depth ethnographic studies in street ambiances (Aptekar, 1988b; 1989; Tyler et al., 1987). These studies often provided more nuanced portraits of children living on the streets, as elaborated below.

Scholars emphasized a need to know more about street children to develop adequate policies, seeking to ‘understand the *true characteristics* of the children’ (Aptekar, 1989, p. 427, emphasis added) as they were perceived as ‘distinctly different’ from other poor populations (Patel, 1990, p. 10). This involved creating typologies (see for instance Cosgrove, 1990). Street children were compared with, and perceived as the antithesis of, ‘normal’ children (Panter-Brick, 2002). For instance, South-African street children were summarized as not adhering to ‘the values of the dominant culture’, living in ‘a negative environment that is ugly, crowded, filthy, noisy, and disorderly’, and lacking ‘a conceptual development that does not fit the expectations of a middle-class oriented educational curriculum’ (Hickson & Gaydon, 1989, p. 92). A hegemonic understanding of childhood—where parents protect their children from work, educate them and provide material goods and leisure time—served as a guiding principle in evaluating street life (see also Swift, 1991).

Lack of agency and determinism

As previously argued by Rizzini (1996) and de Benítez (2011), the presence of children in urban centers was often seen as a direct consequence of rapid urbanization, overpopulation, and urban poverty (e.g., Hollsteiner & Tarcon, 1983; Lusk, 1989; Patel, 1990). Equally emphasized were family relations and the supposedly increase in single-headed households:

[Street children] can expect hunger and disease to become a pattern of living if another male partner (stepfather) is not found soon. Very often, too, even if such a man does appear on the scene, he is hardly willing to consider these children of another man as his own. Not uncommonly, physical or sexual abuse coupled with exploitation lead children to run away from home. (Hollsteiner & Tacon, 1983, p. 18)

Children were seen as pushed to the streets by family poverty, neglect, and violence (e.g., Hickson & Gaydon, 1989; Landers, 1988; Lusk, Peralta & Vest, 1989). Parents were blamed for the socio-economic conditions they were victims of (Ursin, 2019). Succeeding scholars claimed that research in this period portrayed street children as abandoned (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003), yet many studies rejected such understanding (see Aptekar, 1994 for examples). Ahead of time, Aptekar (1988b) also questioned normative understandings of childhood and family, arguing that boys in poor communities were raised in matrifocal households and nomadic ways of life.

Street life was commonly perceived as forced, in lack of alternatives: 'Few children expose themselves to this setting by choice' (Lusk, 1989, p. 58). Hickson and Gaydon (1989) brought to the fore the importance of freedom, autonomy and mobility among street children, themes extensively explored by later scholars, but perceived this as deterministic: 'For these children, there is no real freedom, and no way to escape oppression and victimization' (p. 90). In general, there was limited acknowledgement of children's agency, rendering them as passive and pitied victims. Likewise, children's presence in the labor market was perceived as involuntarily and unfortunate. Bequele and Boyden (1988) argued that street children 'are obliged to work: the survival of their families often depends on their earnings, and this overriding responsibility leaves them no choice' (p. 158). Children's work activities were described as involving exploitation, harassment, and social and physical risks (ibid.). Children's work was perceived as a marginalized and a marginalizing activity, being dangerous and a hinder to children's development (Swift, 1991).

The street ambience was described as violent, characterized by illegality, crime, drugs and prostitution (e.g., Bequele & Boyden, 1988; Hickson & Gaydon, 1989; Lusk, 1989), whilst peer relations were often perceived to be ruled by survival instinct and brutality:

On the street competition is keen and stealing or fighting are considered only slightly more risky than any other activity. Clouded by an aura of hunger, suffering, exclusion, and loneliness survival on the street is reserved only for the fittest. (Landers, 1988, p. 38)

The prognosis of street children was often pessimistic, reasoning that they were 'resistant to rehabilitation and bereft of aspirations' (Lusk, et al., 1989, p. 300) and most likely to be 'permanently damaged psychologically' (Bequele & Boyden, 1988, p. 155). Yet, ethnographic studies provided more nuanced and positive images of the lives of young people on the street. In Colombia, children were found to exhibit psychological health and resourcefulness (Tyler et al., 1987) and 'functioning much better than was commonly believed' (Aptekar, 1988b, p. 286) due to sophisticated and supportive social networks. These findings would initiate a paradigm shift.

Brazilian researchers explore the lives and conditions of street children

During the dictatorship, children of the urban poor, commonly labeled 'minors', 'abandoned' and 'delinquents', experienced mass institutionalization. Along with the democratization of the country and the following de-institutionalization in the 1980s, this segment of the population became increasingly visible in urban centers. Local researchers wondered: Who were these children? Where did they come from? Why did they leave home? Earlier labels were discarded in favor of 'street children', a term that first appeared in Brazilian publications in 1979 (Gonçalves, 1979; Ferreira, 1979).

Digging into the complexities of street life

The Brazilian research of this period focused on mapping the profile of young people encountered on the street. The first initiatives focused on the most visible children, those involved in activities on the streets (e.g., Cheniaux, 1982; Silva, 1983) and did not differentiate much between different groups. One of the first major studies involved simple questionnaires given to 300 children and young people on the streets of Rio de Janeiro, outlining their characteristics and basic information about family background, street life, and access to education (Rizzini, 1986). Such studies were essential in rejecting previous understandings of these children as delinquents and abandoned. Researchers became more sensitive to the complexity of street life, starting to differentiate between young people who lived on the streets and those who passed their days on the streets and returned home at nights (Lusk & Mason, 1993). It became clear that many young people who had left their homes remained supported by their families despite weakened family ties due to poverty and conflicts (e.g., Fausto & Cervini, 1991; Rizzini, 1991). Some scholars also studied the attraction that the streets had over some children. Vogel and Mello (1991), for instance, discussed the phenomenon of the 'empty house', entering the streets, and connections with street gangs. They argued that in addition to the conditions that pushed children and young people to the streets, there was a pull effect, in search of food, security, support, and affection. They described the fascination for the street and gangs as a

dramatic process that the boy at home is subjected to and that can make him, over time, to transform into a working boy, or start the metamorphosis, which in the end will have converted him into a street boy. (p. 135, authors' translation).

Street life was rendered a process of alteration in a hardening atmosphere.

Documentation of social cleansing

What emerged by the late 1980s and became extremely observable during the 1990s, was the academic attention to, and discussion about, the violence that young people on the street were exposed to. The literature reflects a clear ambivalence about street children and youth in the Brazilian society:

It was at the same time a decade which began with a thirst and a hope for changes that would lay out the principle of the guarantee and defense of the rights of children and adolescents, and a decade marked by intolerance and episodes of violence against these same children. (Rizzini, 2019, p. 26, authors' translation)

Some researchers sought to unveil the discrimination these children encountered through ethnographic accounts (e.g., Silva & Melito, 1995). Brutal executions of children and youth in urban centers in the 1990s, including the aforementioned massacre in front of the Candelaria church, shocked researchers. An important task of the research community and NGOs became to register these killings according to the profile of the victims (age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class), quality of police investigation, profile of identified perpetrators, and media coverage (MNMMR, 1991; CEAP, 1993; Dimenstein, 1995), accentuating the structural and severely racist dimensions of the killings. Cruz-Neto and Minayo (1994) were among several academics to point out that these killings were part of a partly accepted social cleansing.

Young people living on the streets in the child rights era (mid-1990s onwards)

Awareness about, and the formalization of, children's rights resulted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. As opposed to earlier policy-documents only securing provision and protection, children were now granted participatory rights. This was in line with emerging ideas in the NSSC, bringing renewed attention to children and childhoods from the late 1980s onwards.

Developmental psychology and socialization theory were criticized for perceiving children as passive recipients of societal values and rules. Scholars within the new paradigm recognized children as social actors with agency, childhood as worthy of study and as socially constructed, varying in time and place (James & Prout, 1990; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Sarmiento, 2003). Previous research with street children was criticized for favoring adult experts' perspectives and interests (Ennew &

Boyden, 1997), and for research on rather than with the children. Scholars now argued for so-called child-friendly research designs in street studies, choosing methods that enabled children's participation (Connolly & Ennew, 1996).

In Brazil, the participation of social movements and NGOs led to a progressive transformation of laws protecting young people, the Child and Adolescent Statute, signed into law in 1990. The Statute refers to children and adolescents, not to 'minors', 'offenders' or 'abandoned' as previously (Rizzini, 2011). A constitutional obligation to family, society, and the State to ensure, with absolute priority, the rights of young people was incorporated. The Statute provoked profound changes in the roles of public and private entities dealing with street children. The 1990s were thus a decade of ambivalence, where children came to be seen as subjects of rights but also as suffering intolerance and extreme violence (Rizzini, 2019). From this period on there were significant changes in public policies, particularly on social, economic and health sectors, that reflected more progressive approaches to deal with poverty and inequality issues.

The recognition of street children's agency and resilience in international research

Inspired by the main tenets of the NSSC, researchers in the mid-1990s perceived street children as competent actors and valid research participants; street life as worthy of research; and the discourse of 'street children' as socially constructed. This implied the following criticism of previous research: 1) perceiving street children as abandoned and as passive victims, 2) focusing on 'characteristics' of the singular 'Street Child' rather than on the diversity of lives and experiences, 3) using inappropriate methods, silencing their voices, 4) exaggerating numbers, and 5) drawing on normative assumptions of childhood rather than acknowledging the pluralism of childhoods (e.g. Connolly & Ennew, 1996; Ennew, 2003; Panter-Brick, 2002; Rizzini, 1996). Previous research and fundraising campaigns were claimed to dehumanize street children through a dominating narrative of misery, ignoring crucial aspects of street life (Moura, 2002; Panter-Brick, 2002; Rosemberg & Andrade, 1999). In line with social constructivism, scholars begun scrutinizing the term 'street child':

[A] poor, ragged child running unsupervised along an unpaved road in a favela or playing in a field of sugar cane is just a 'kid' [...]. That same child transposed to the main streets and plazas of town, however, can be seen as a threat or a social

problem: a potentially dangerous (or potentially neglected) *menino de rua*, a 'street kid'. (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998, p. 358)

It was argued that children living on the street became problematic mainly because of their presence as being 'out of place' (see also Connolly & Ennew, 1996).

The agentic street child

In contrast to earlier publications, the emphasis came to be on children's agency in the mid-1990s onwards, rendering street life to be a choice rather than a last resort. As Beazley (2003a) argued about Indonesian children: 'their decision to leave an impoverished, boring or abusive home should [...] be understood as the child's own solution to a personal predicament' (p. 108).

The determinism and victimization of 1980s was replaced by an increased attention for children's competence, creativity, and versatility. This entailed a shift in focus from which challenges children encounter to how they solve them. Researchers documented the manifold ways of coping with poverty, marginalization and oppression by unearthing children's 'resilience', 'coping strategies' and 'survival tactics' (e.g., Abebe, 2008; Beazley, 2003a; Butler, 2009; Conticini, 2007; Davies, 2008; Ennew, 1994; Evans, 2005; Panter-Brick, 2002; Van Blerk, 2005, 2013).

Street life as empowerment

Street life and relations were to a larger extent portrayed in positive terms. The street, researchers argued, was a place to escape domestic violence and poverty, earn money, cultivate friendship, and enjoy leisure opportunities not available in marginalized communities (e.g., Conticini & Hulme, 2007; Lucchini, 1996; Rizzini, 2007). Street work was seen not as 'an obligation but usually a choice made by an individual child' (Lucchini, 1996, p. 236), offering opportunities and life skills (e.g., Bar-On, 1997; Davies, 2008; Huggins & Rodrigues, 2004). This echoed the wider discourse within Childhood Studies, where child work came to be perceived as enabling children 'to interact with peers and adults, gain skills that will help them in other aspects of their lives, and help them learn responsibility and other positive values' (Aufseeser et al., 2016, p. 243). Yet others emphasized the downsides, such as Abebe (2008) explaining that children are forced to beg to alleviate the poverty in their households, missing out on schooling and better jobs in the future.

Peer relations were described as providing support and security without adult supervision (e.g., Bar-On, 1997; Ennew, 1994). Conticini (2005) reported Bangladesh children to form groups marked by 'an open, informal, partially democratic structure, where membership is largely voluntary and based on trust, care, reciprocity and convenience' (p. 73). Other and more negative aspects of street life, such as intergroup violence and crime, were underreported. For instance, Bar-On's (1997) concluded that 'research uniformly shows that few street children are involved in criminal activities' (p. 70). When drug use is described, it is often interpreted as sensible acts in a street context, empowering children (Davies, 2008). According to Beazley (2003b), drug use 'relieve hunger pangs, boredom and feelings of being ashamed. [It] is also about seeking enjoyment, reinforcing solidarity and creating a sense of belonging and status within the group' (p. 196). This stands in stark contrast to descriptions of deviant behavior among street children within social work (e.g., Lalor, 1999; Trussel, 1999), and has also been criticized by scholars within Childhood Studies, a point we will return to.

International scholars documented discrimination towards street children by police and other state authorities through racist discourses and revanchist urban policies (e.g., Swanson, 2007; Van Blerk, 2013) and physical violence and death squads (e.g., Beazley, 2003a; Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998). The continued presence of children and youth in the cityscape was interpreted as resistance against social control (e.g., Abebe, 2008; Beazley, 2000; Davies, 2008; Young, 2003). Instead of understanding children's migration patterns as forced, mobility has to a large extent been understood as empowering, providing enhanced opportunities of identity work (Beazley, 2003b; Van Blerk, 2005), livelihoods and survival (Abebe, 2008; Evans, 2005), and safety and freedom (Butler, 2009; Van Blerk, 2012).

The Anglophone literature on street children within the NSSC, and later within Childhood Studies, has nuanced the deterministic views in earlier publications, supported by extensive documentation of children's agency and resilience. However, Tisdall and Punch (2012) argue that the concept of agency has not been sufficiently problematized within Childhood Studies, thus we risk undermining structural constraints and substituting vulnerability with responsibility when depicting the lives of

street children. This is in line with Gigengack's (2008) critique, arguing that scholars' obsession with agency has led to descriptions of successful rather than failing survival strategies on the street. According to him, much of the research has obscured damaging dimensions of street life. In addition, some scholars have begun nuancing the picture of street children's agency by documenting how their everyday geographies are heavily marked by urban governance (e.g., Swanson, 2007; Van Blerk, 2013).

Increased understanding of the risks of street life in Brazilian literature

An essential part of the democratization process and human rights movements in Brazil was the liberation pedagogy introduced by Paulo Freire. This pedagogy came to influence both the work with, and research on, children and young people on the street in the post-dictatorship years (see for instance, Gomes da Costa, 1991). Street children were portrayed as "small heroes", where their flight from home was understood as an act of liberation from violence and oppression, whilst so-called street educators fought for an equitable, democratic, and quality education for these children.

Ambiguous family relations

In this latter period, Brazilian researchers sought to understand the family conditions and factors causing home-street migration. A large study conducted by researchers and street workers, involving a narrative approach with over 200 young people on the street, highlighted the spatial mobility, relational ruptures and string of emotional losses in the lives of street children (Rizzini et al., 2003; see also Paludo & Koller, 2008; Barros et al., 2009). The study found that their lives were marked by inhumane conditions, poverty, violence, and human right abuses, and concluded that the notion of freedom, commonly reported, should be understood as an ideal of autonomy rather than a reality. Having a so-called unstructured family (with absent and/or neglecting parental figures and family rearrangements) was found to go hand in hand with the idealization of a united and happy family (Tfouni & Moraes, 2003; Yunes et al., 2001; Ferreira et al., 2014). Silva and Avelar (2014) stress that street children's families do not correspond with the nuclear family model but are marked by ambiguity and fragile affective relations. Barros et al. (2009, see also Medeiros et al., 2002) found that these families tend to be large, with histories marked by violence, affective

and financial need, threats in the community, loss of relatives, drugs and child labor, causing great vulnerability for the children. Whilst the maternal figure remains important, fathers tend to be absent and stepfathers aggressive (see also Arpini, Quintana & Gonçalves, 2010). Despite the emphasis on challenging home environments, many researchers described street life as marked by a continued family bonds, though fragmented and weakened (e.g., Paludo & Koller, 2008). Although the socio-economic conditions were accentuated in this body of literature, poverty is often presented as a 'black box' without historical roots and structural factors.

Negative correlation between street life and schooling

In comparison to the previous period, fewer researchers paid attention to the educational dimension of street life. Among the exceptions is Silva (2005), who argued that the educational system was not adapted to street populations, ignoring their capabilities and capacities whilst excluding them through rigid organizational and disciplinary measures of closed spaces, fixed hours, permanent vigilance, and formal evaluation of pass/fail. A large quantitative study by Ferreira, Nogueira Jr., and Costa (2010) showed that the more children attended school, the younger they were, and the less time they spent on the street or worked. Other studies reported youth to find their return to education necessary to meet their life goals (e.g., Cirino & Alberto, 2009; Claro et al., 2014). Cruz and Assunção (2008) concluded that the family and local community contribute to children's engagement in street work, resulting in increased exposure to violence and reduced motivation for schooling. While many children express that they find their work as jugglers at traffic lights fun and pleasure, relieving anguish and covering personal expenses, Cirino and Alberto (2009) argued that street work damages their biopsychosocial development and educational progress.

Hostilities and risks of street life

Being economically exploited is one of several risks in street life (Cirino & Alberto, 2009). As many others, Cirino and Alberto (2009) highlight street children's vulnerability to verbal, physical, sexual, and sometimes fatal aggression by gangs, the police and mainstream society. The Brazilian literature also documents safety strategies employed by street children, such as organizing themselves in small

groups (e.g., Nogueira & Bellini, 2006; Rizzini, Neumann & Cisneros, 2009). Some studies, as the one conducted by Paludo and Koller (2005), find that young people on the street are not only victimized but commonly also victimizers. Another common topic of study among local researchers is drug use. Cirino and Alberto (2009) reported drug use among street working youths, arguing that it was a way to gain group acceptance and sense of belonging (see also Ribeiro et al, 2003). Reasons for using drugs listed in a literature review by Claro and colleagues (2014) are social poverty, homelessness, and fragile and abusive family relations. Although drug use may alleviate everyday suffering, it results in a lack of perspectives and abandonment of education, play and other interests (Claro et al., 2014; Moura, et al., 2009) and impedes return to family and domiciled life (Ribeiro et al., 2003).

In the Brazilian literature, there are several studies that explore sexuality and gender relations in the street ambience. Some researchers found that sexual intercourse is perceived as something natural and positive about street life (e.g., Medeiros et al., 2001; Nogueira & Bellini, 2006). Despite this, sexual activity among street youths is often labeled as sexual precociousness and linked to a lack of use of contraception and prevention against sexually transmitted diseases, the use of sexual acts as exchange for protection, drugs or other favors, and experiences of sexual abuse (Medeiros et al., 2001; Nogueira & Bellini, 2006). In their study with adolescent mothers, Gontijo and Medeiros (2009) question the ways in which adolescent pregnancy is perceived as a 'problem' or 'risky' and argue that many young mothers experience pregnancy and motherhood as satisfactory and reparatory. Motherhood can establish relations of love and affection, often previously lacking in the girls' lives.

A new 'turn'? – the way forward in researching children and youth on the street

After four decades of national and international research and policymaking and three decades with the UNCRC, young street populations continue to be present in urban Brazil and elsewhere. Although spectacularism has faded, the topic is still on the international agenda, as illustrated by the UN Human Rights Council resolution on street children and the ways in which the Committee on the Rights of the Child regularly raises the issue of children in street situations in its dialogue with State parties (UN, 2012). The meta-narrative review presented in this article discloses the richness of the research conducted and disseminated the last 40 years whilst

reminding us to be careful of making generalizations and oversimplifications. It also witnesses of low level of communication between the Anglophone and Brazilian bodies of literature, and when it occurs, it is mainly the Brazilian authors who make connections to the international literature and not vice-versa. In addition to potential language barriers, this might be the result of increasingly neoliberal academic systems, where scholars have less time to conduct lengthy fieldworks, explore local literature and learn local languages. At the same time, Brazilian researchers commonly experience obstacles in both accessing publications and publishing their research in Anglophone journals, due to language barriers, high journal fees and more subtle traces of colonial power hierarchies, deeming some scholars, studies and universities better than others. Lastly, global academic search engines put high weight on citation counts in their ranking algorithm, strengthening the Matthew effect (Larivière & Gingras, 2010): As highly cited articles appear in top positions, they gain more citations while new articles appear in the bottom, receive less attention and fewer citations. These factors create and maintain academic echo chambers.

In both bodies of literature, the early period of research was marked by a quest for knowledge to map the profile of the children visible in the cityscape, and the use of standardized psychological tests and psychological developmental theory was common. In the Anglophone literature, children were portrayed as victims of rapid urbanization, overpopulation and poverty, families were pathologized, and street life presented as a last exit. Facets of street life—work, peer relations, and leisure activities—were described in pejorative ways. During the 1990s, the international community of researchers gradually replaced their deterministic outlook with a focus on children's agency, empowerment, and resilience. The same facets of street life were increasingly described in positive terms while destructive aspects and actions such as drug use and crime involvement were undermined. Whilst the Brazilian literature shares some of the tendencies in its descriptions of street children as 'small heroes' and analyses of the street environment as consisting of a range of pull factors, native scholars engaged in a broader set of topics. The Brazilian literature provides a more composite picture of street life where topics such as work, sexuality and drug use are both valorized and problematized. In both bodies of literature there are descriptions of the violence and discrimination young people on the street encounter and documentation of their survival and safety strategies. However, street

children are rendered both victims and victimizers in the Brazilian literature, as their involvement in crime, drugs and violence is explored to a larger extent.

The tendency to romanticize street life among international scholars might be a consequence of the overemphasis on the agentic child in Childhood Studies (Gigengack, 2008; Hammersley, 2017; Ursin, 2019). Childhood Studies is primarily anchored in the social sciences disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and geography, which have worked 'comfortably together' for decades (Alanen et al., 2018, p. 134). The Anglophone literature from the 1990s onwards has been somewhat disconnected from, for instance social work research, which often depicts more deviant dimensions of street life (see Lalor, 1999; Trussel, 1999). In fact, Childhood Studies have recently been criticized for being too insular and not engaging with other disciplines, facilitating a standardization and reproduction of certain master narratives, such as the casual use of 'children as agents' (Alanen et al., 2018; Tatlow-Golden & Montgomery, 2020). In some respects, the Brazilian body of literature is more heterogenous and provides more nuanced glimpses of street life. This might be due to a stronger interdisciplinarity in the field, also embracing social work and social psychology research (Rizzini, 2018).

Thematic distinctions between the two bodies of literature may also reflect that they are anchored in different contexts and communicating to different audiences. This is of particular relevance in domestic scholarships, where prevailing national concerns and public policies are more relevant. Early studies on street children published in Anglophone journals often involved cooperation with NGOs. During the 1990s, a chasm opened between research and policy. This was partly due to an academization of research and an increased critical gaze by scholars on the work of policymakers, including strong criticism of derogatory descriptions and previous 'guesstimates' of number of street children. In Brazil, this tight connection and cooperation between research and praxis maintained, perhaps due to academia having strong ties to political movements (Wallerstein et al., 2017). Brazilian academics have often conducted Freirean-inspired *pesquisa-ação* (research-action), which aims to inform public policy and contribute to improvement of the conditions of vulnerable populations. There is no strict boundary between research and policy-work and NGOs employ people with PhD and execute high-quality research. The

strong interconnection between research, activism, practice, and praxis results in research focused on policy-relevant issues and include policy-recommendations, disseminated not only to academia but also to politicians, journalists, educators, and other professionals. This might explain why there is more research on topics such as drug use and sexually transmitted diseases in the Brazilian literature compared with the Anglophone literature within Childhood Studies. It might also raise a timely question of whether international researchers are less aware of public policies and feel less committed to solving the social problems they study, as they might be more geographically and culturally distanced from their fields.

In the Anglophone literature peer relations on the street have been highlighted as valuable, commonly portrayed as a substitute family, while the relations of street children with their biological families are seldom studied (for exceptions, see Van Blerk, 2012). The body of research has been said to portray children as ‘isolated islands’, ignoring attachments and affiliations to extended family and local societies (Van Blerk, 2012). In disregarding local practices for care and survival, this body of research draws on, and strengthens, individualistic and ethnocentric notions of children and childhood (cf. Wyness, 2012). Furthermore, it reinforces a view of the South as infantile, orphaned, and abandoned, where (responsible) adults are absent (Meintjes & Giese, 2006). In the Brazilian literature, on the other hand, biological families—single mothers in particular—are often perceived as root cause for children leaving their homes. This resulted in what was recently termed ‘the blaming of the family’ (Rizzini & Couto, 2018), rather than problematizing the structural conditions in which they raise their children.

Children (and adults) are commonly unaware of existing discourses, processes, and structures surrounding them, and how these impinge upon their lives. Child-centered research has its weakness in just this: the unobservable remains unexplored (Ursin, 2019). The researchers’ task and competency lie in exploring and analyzing the encounter between micro-experiences and macro-movements in valid, theoretically sound, and ethically acceptable ways (see also Hammersley, 2017). As Gigengack (2008) argues, Childhood Studies scholars have been too occupied with the child here and now, based on the call to focus on “the present, ongoing social lives of children rather than their past or future” (James et al., 1997, p. 4-5). Short-term

fieldwork and microstudies involve great risks of simplifying processes and ignoring underlying structures in street studies (de Benítez, 2011).

Although the socio-economic conditions are accentuated in both bodies of research, unemployment, homelessness, marginalization and poverty are presented as ahistorical 'social evils' and as main causes of children working and sleeping on the street rather than as consequences of historical roots. Few efforts have been made to, for instance, understand the connection between poverty and domestic tensions and to unwrap reasons behind the latter (for instance that single mothers are economically dependent on men, making it harder to leave in case of domestic violence). Other relevant factors—such as discrimination and social exclusion in the labor market, housing market and everyday life in general, poor quality of public schools, low public security, presence of drugs and criminal networks—are rarely made visible. A common challenge of both the Brazilian and Anglophone research is to connect the everyday lives and conditions of street children, their families and local communities to the wider historical, political, social, and economic structures. This not only raises questions about the validity of the research, as reality is simplified and distorted, but also enables normalization and depoliticization of extreme economic inequality and social injustice and violence on a local, national, and global level.

Appendix 1

	Anglophone literature	Brazilian literature
1st period	Aptekar, 1988a, 1988b, 1989 Bequele & Boyden, 1988 Cosgrove, 1990 Hickson & Gaydon, 1989 Hollsteiner & Tarcon, 1983 Landers, 1988 Lusk, 1989 Lusk, Peralta & Vest, 1989 Patel, 1990 Swift, 1991 Tyler et al., 1987	CEAP, 1993 Cheniaux, 1982 Cruz-Neto & Minayo, 1994 Dimenstein, 1995 Fausto & Cervini, 1991 Ferreira, 1979 Gonçalves, 1979 Lusk & Mason, 1993* MNMMR, 1991 Silva, 1983 Silva & Melito, 1995 Vogel & Mello, 1991 Rizzini, 1986, 1991
2nd period	Abebe, 2008 Aptekar, 1994 Aufseeser et al., 2016 Bar-On, 1997 Beazley, 2000, 2003a, 2003b Beazley & Miller, 2016 Butler, 2009 Connolly & Ennew, 1996 Conticini, 2005, 2007 Davies, 2008 Ennew, 1994, 2003 Evans, 2005 Huggins & Rodrigues, 2004* Lucchini, 1996; Moura, 2002* Panter-Brick, 2002 Rizzini, 1996* Rosemberg & Andrade, 1999* Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1998 Swanson, 2007 Van Blerk, 2005, 2012, 2013 Young, 2003 Rizzini, 2007*	Arpini, Quintana & Gonçalves, 2010 Barros et al., 2009 Cirino & Alberto, 2009 Claro et al., 2014 Cruz & Assunção, 2008 Ferreira, et al., 2010 Ferreira, et al., 2014 Gomes da Costa, 1991 Gontijo & Medeiros, 2009 Medeiros et al., 2001 Medeiros, et al., 2002 Moura, et al., 2009 Nogueira & Bellini, 2006 Paludo & Koller, 2005, 2008 Ribeiro et al, 2003 Rizzini et al., 2003 Rizzini et al., 2009 Silva, 2005 Silva & Avelar, 2014 Tfouni & Moraes, 2003 Rizzini, 2019

*Cross-publishing authors, that is Brazilian authors who publish in Anglophone journals and foreign scholars who publish in Brazilian journals.

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