Chapter 40

# Street Boys in Yogyakarta: Social and Spatial Exclusion in the Public Spaces of the City

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Control by dominating agents may be seen as complete, but there is always the possibility of subversion. We cannot understand the role of space in the reproduction of social relations without recognizing that the relatively powerless still have enough power to carve out spaces of control in respect of their day-to-day lives.

Sibley 1995: 76.

A familiar sight in Indonesia's cities is the number of children living and working on the streets and in other public places. The majority of children who are visible working on the streets are boys, between the ages of 7 and 17. There are also street girls, although they are not as visible or prolific as the boys.[1] This chapter examines the behavior patterns of homeless street boys in the city of Yogyakarta, Central Java.[2] By using the boys' survival strategies as an investigative device, it examines the ways in which their lives, experiences, earning opportunities, and identities are socially and spatially structured. The chapter begins by discussing who street children are in Indonesia, and the context in which they appear. It then describes the injustices which the children face from state and society, as well as the more physically coercive methods of domination which affect their daily lives.

   The chapter then explores how, despite their subordination, street boys have developed a "repertoire of strategies" in order to survive (Clarke et al. 1976: 42–5). These strategies include the appropriation of public spaces which have contributed to the formation of a "cultural space": the *tekyan* subculture of Yogyakarta (Clarke et al. 1976). Such securing of space by subordinate groups has been described as the "carving out" or "chiseling away" of spaces of control from the margins of power (Sibley 1995; Clarke 1976; Scott 1990; White 1990; Yeoh and Huang 1996).

   To understand the various settings of the *tekyan* subculture, I draw on selected spatial stories, or "mental maps," which were collected as a participatory research exercise in Yogyakarta (Gould and White 1974; Matthews 1980, 1986, 1992).[3]

These maps illustrate how the children's social marginality is reflected in the places they occupy and documents the images street boys have of the city, in the context of work and leisure. By exploring street children's production and use of space as "geographies of resistance" (Pile and Keith 1997), the chapter identifies some of the places the *tekyan* subculture have "won" for their own survival (Clarke et al. 1976: 45).

## Victims of ''Progress'': Reasons for Street Children

The lives of street children cannot be fully explained without first understanding the context in which they appear. In Indonesia the presence of street children can partly be understood as a result of the country's economic growth strategy during President Soeharto's "development" ("*pembangunan*") and "progress" ("*kema-juan*") era (1966–98).[4] This strategy was aimed at integrating Indonesia into the global economy. It was based on a development ideology of industrialization, economic liberalism, foreign investment, low wages for "comparative advantage" over other countries, and the appropriation of public space by both global and local capital as commercial or leisure space. Such an approach caused Indonesia to experience radical social change, a widening gap between rich and poor, rapid urbanization, and the marginalization of millions excluded from the development process.

It was in this climate that many children drifted on to the streets in order to find alternative channels of income. Financial hardship, however, is not the only reason children start living on the streets. Quite often violence and physical abuse at home force a child to flee permanently, and some of the reasons given by children for leaving home included: being unloved and beaten; alcoholic fathers; pressure to do well at school; absent or separated parents; hostile stepparents; the influence of friends, and the attraction of street children's subcultures.

## Survival activities

Once on the street, boys earn their money in various ways in different parts of the city, and all the children have different spaces in which they earn their living and establish friendships. Younger children usually shine shoes along the main street, Malioboro, scavenge for goods to recycle at the railroad station, or beg at traffic lights. Older boys busk with guitars on Malioboro, at bus stops and on bus routes across the city, and at various traffic-light intersections. They also make and sell handicrafts and "park" cars outside a nightclub on Malioboro. In Yogyakarta the different groups of homeless street boys name themselves collectively after the places where they work, sleep, and hang out in the city. They include: *anak Malioboro* (the Malioboro kids), after the main street; *anak Alun-Alun*, (the City Square boys); *anak stasiun* (the railroad station kids), *anak terminal* (the bus station kids); *anak shoping* (the Market kids); and *anak Surgawong* (the Surgawong kids), the children who live under a bridge in the north of the city (Figures 40.1, 40.2 and 40.3). These groups have constructed the symbolic walls of "home" which are invisible at first, but which can be understood as "symbolic cocoons in public space" (Arantes 1996: 86).
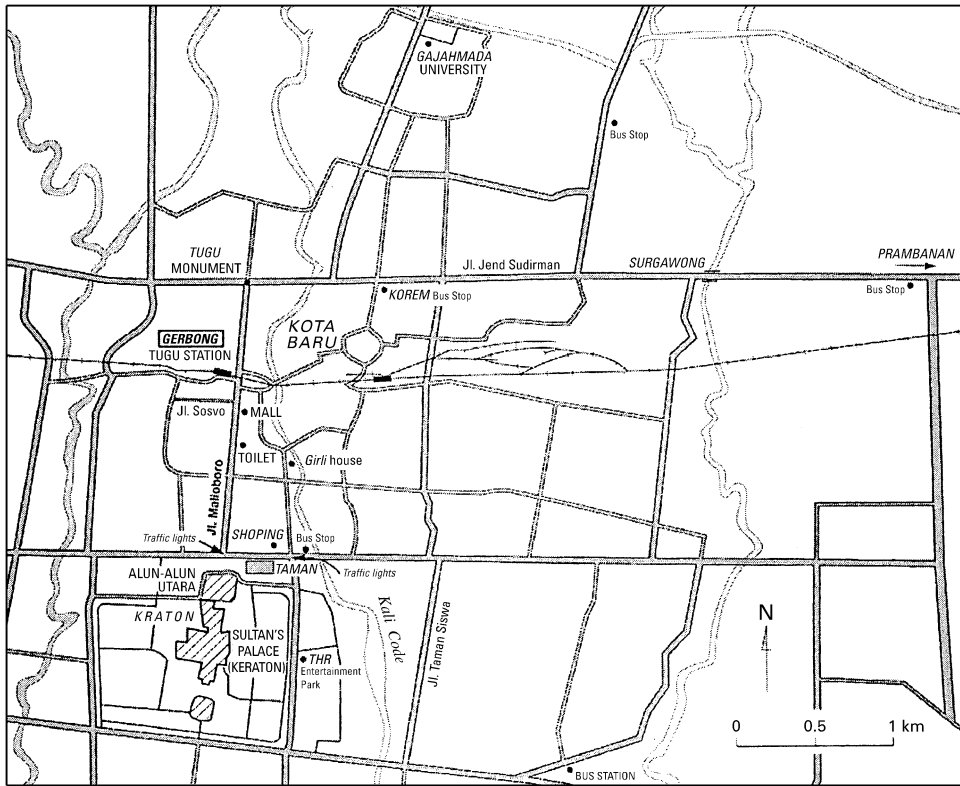
**Figure 40.1**  Yogykarta, central Java: population 472,000. Malioboro Street runs through the center of the city, from the railroad station towards the *Alun-Alun* (City Square) and *Keraton* (Sultan's Palace)

## Social and Spatial Exclusion for Children ''Out of Place''

The social and the spatial are so thoroughly imbued with each other's presence . . . a sustained investigation of the ''out of place'' metaphor points to the fact that social power and social resistance are always already spatial. When an expression such as ''out of place'' is used it is impossible to clearly demarcate whether social or geographical place is denoted, place always means both.

<div align="right">Cresswell 1996: 11</div>

Street children in Indonesia are socially and spatially oppressed and the spaces they occupy are severely restricted by multiple forms of control. This is because street children are perceived as "out of place," even though it is often the processes of mainstream society that cause them to appropriate public spaces in the first place. Massey (1994: 269), conceives of space as being created out of social relations and as "social relations stretched out"; a complex web of relations of domination, subordination, solidarity and cooperation. In addition, "multiple identities . . . and margins . . . are all responses to the political inviability of absolute location"

**Figure 40.2**   Shoe-shiners on Malioboro (© Harriot Beazley)

(Smith and Katz 1993). This describes well how the cultural spaces of street boys in Yogyakarta are created by their relations with authority (police, security guards, and army), and other groups on the street.

*Social apartheid*

In Indonesia social control and efforts to intervene in civil society can be detected in the operation of surveillance systems, such as the obligation to have an identity card (KTP). A KTP requires a birth certificate, a family register card and a family address which most homeless children do not have. Although children under the age of 17 do

**Figure 40.3**   City-square kids (© Harriot Beazley)

not need an identity card, they are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of their parents. When children have no parents or family registration card, they are outside the state-controlled system, and officially do not exist. There is no way for a child to get a KTP if they have no contact with their family. They are thus nonpeople for ever. As a result they cannot enjoy the benefits of state acceptance such as the right to an identity, an education, a home, healthcare, or any other basic rights specified by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and ratified by Indonesia in 1990 (Ertanto 1994).

In addition to this exclusion by the state, street children are also marginalized by the negative perceptions held by mainstream society, who view homeless street children as social pariahs infesting the city streets. This is because they are seen to be abandoned by their families, and to have lost their kinship ties which are the basis for locating people within Javanese society (Ertanto 1993). Further to this, public spaces such as shopping centers have been constructed as commercial spaces, where the new middle class does not wish to be confronted by poverty and dirty homeless children. Their presence is also perceived as a threat to national development, as it contradicts the desired image of a developing, modern nation, which the government and big businessmen wish to portray to potential foreign investors. Through a discourse of deviance street boys are consequently presented by the state and the media as a defilement of public space, an underclass which needs to be eradicated, and as "criminal." The construction of this criminal image is exemplified by the use of labels in the press such as *preman* (hoodlum), and GALI (*Gabungan Anak Liar*, "Gangs of Wild Children").

*Spatial apartheid and social cleansing*

Boys working on the streets are thus considered to be "out of place," and public spaces are controlled in a way that has been described by White (1996: 39) as "spatial apartheid based upon socioeconomic status." In Indonesia street boys are frequently evicted from public places and face the daily threat of violence and abuse by agencies of the state during their national "cleansing operations." These operations are used as a means to "discipline and educate" street social life, and to "eradicate street hooliganism and restore the public's sense of security" in major cities.[5] The children have their own word for these street raids: *garukan*. Police are responsible for confiscating and destroying street children's means of livelihood (musical instruments and goods to sell), for verbal abuse, severe beatings, torture in custody, and other mistreatment which street children repeatedly receive. "Cleansing" campaigns are often focused on bus terminals, shopping centers and other public areas, and as these are commonly occupied by street boys, they are often caught in the nets of the "sweep" operations. One reason for this is that everyone in Indonesia is supposed to carry their KTP at all times and face the possibility of on-the-spot checks. A child without any form of identification can be arrested.

Detentions by police after "cleansing operations" have sometimes resulted in death, and cases have been documented where "suspected criminals" have been shot attempting to flee from police, due to a *bahaya sikat* (shoot to kill) policy (Amnesty International 1994a).[6] In 1995 it was reported that the police shot and killed hundreds of *suspected* criminals in major cities, including Yogyakarta, during anticrime campaigns, and street children have been shot in such crusades (Amnesty International 1994b, Kusama 1995: 94).[7] Amnesty further reports that "those at greatest risk are individuals from marginalized groups, and those who . . . cannot get access to, legal counsel" (Amnesty International 1996). Such groups include street children.

## *Tekyan*: Subculture of Resistance

Street children are therefore both spatially and socially oppressed, and portrayed as a "problem" which needs to be solved. Public space, however, is an essential means of survival for street boys, as it is where they can access resources to alleviate their needs. In an attempt to find solidarity in the face of this persecution, homeless street boys in Yogyakarta have created their own distinctive social world: *tekyan*, a subculture with its own system of values, beliefs, hierarchies, and language. Meaning "just a little but enough," *tekyan* is a name used with pride in the boys' private language, and is a form of resistance to the names with negative connotations, such as *gelandangan* (vagrant), or *gembel* (poor, shabby and squalid), which are given to them by society (Berman and Beazley 1997).[8] The creation and maintenance of this street boy subculture can be seen not as a *problem*, but as a *solution* to the variety of problems children face in a world which is hostile to their very existence. Following Hebdige (1979: 81), "Each subcultural 'instance' represents a 'solution' to particular problems and contradictions." Through belonging to the *tekyan* street children are able to create positive self-identities for themselves and to escape feelings of shame. It is a way of "resisting and challenging the fraudulent claims of dominant groups" (Bondi 1993: 87).

## Mental Maps

The search for emancipation from social control instills the desire, the longing and in some cases even the practices of searching for a space ''outside'' of hegemonic social relations and valuations. Spaces ''on the margin'' become valued spaces, for those who seek to establish differences.

<div align="right">Harvey 1996: 230</div>

"Mental maps" drawn by the children were assembled to understand the street boys' production and use of space in the city, and their geographical responses to their marginalization (Gould and White 1974; Matthews 1980, 1986, 1992). Cognitive maps mark off space and indicate how the public space is managed, used, and experienced by different children in the same group. I asked the children to draw a map or picture of the parts of the city where they spent most of their time, the places which were important to them and which they knew best.

The mental images that the street boys built up of Yogyakarta reflected not only their surroundings but many aspects of their lives, with the patterns of information they used to define their environment varying with their age and length of time in the city. In parallel with Gould and White's (1974) study in Sweden, and Matthews' (1986) study in Britain, the geographical knowledge of the street boys in Yogyakarta appeared to grow outwards from the well-known places as the children got older, and a more complete mental image of the environment developed over time (Matthews 1986: 125; 1980: 172). For example, the majority of the younger Malioboro boys' maps suggested that they felt at home in restricted areas, as all the details were in the immediate vicinity of the toilet area, which is a meeting and hanging out place, and the center of gravity for many street boys (Figure 40.4). The younger boys' pictures also paid more attention to detail than the older boys' maps, and they personalized their accounts by drawing friends and particular features which they saw as significant, but which older boys did not include (Figure 40.5). This accords with Matthews' research which revealed the young child's concern with the minute and the incidental as compared to the adult world's perceptions (Matthews 1980: 172; 1992: 136).

As their experiences extended from the central area, the older boys indicated a much broader mental territory, and incorporated the bus stops and bus routes where they busked during the daytime, and also places where they went to hang out and to look for entertainment. Twelve-year-old Agus's map was particularly fascinating in its conception of space in the city as it was all related to the various bus routes he traveled along when he was busking (Figure 40.6).

As well as Malioboro Street, the older boys included places where they hung out, such as the toilet; *Rumah Girli* or *Cokro* (the NGO *Girli's* open house for street boys); the *THR* (the public entertainment park where live *Dangdut* music is played); the *Taman* (the city park where street girls, gay men, and transvestites hang out); and *gerbong* (the area where prostitutes and transvestites operate at night) (Figures 40.7 and 40.8). Sexual activity is an intrinsic part of street life, and street children have shifting sexual identities (Knopp 1995). This is because sex fulfills multiple needs for the children (including survival sex, comfort sex, and sex for protection), with multiple partners (transvestites, peers, street girls, adult men, tourists, and prostitutes), in different places in the city.
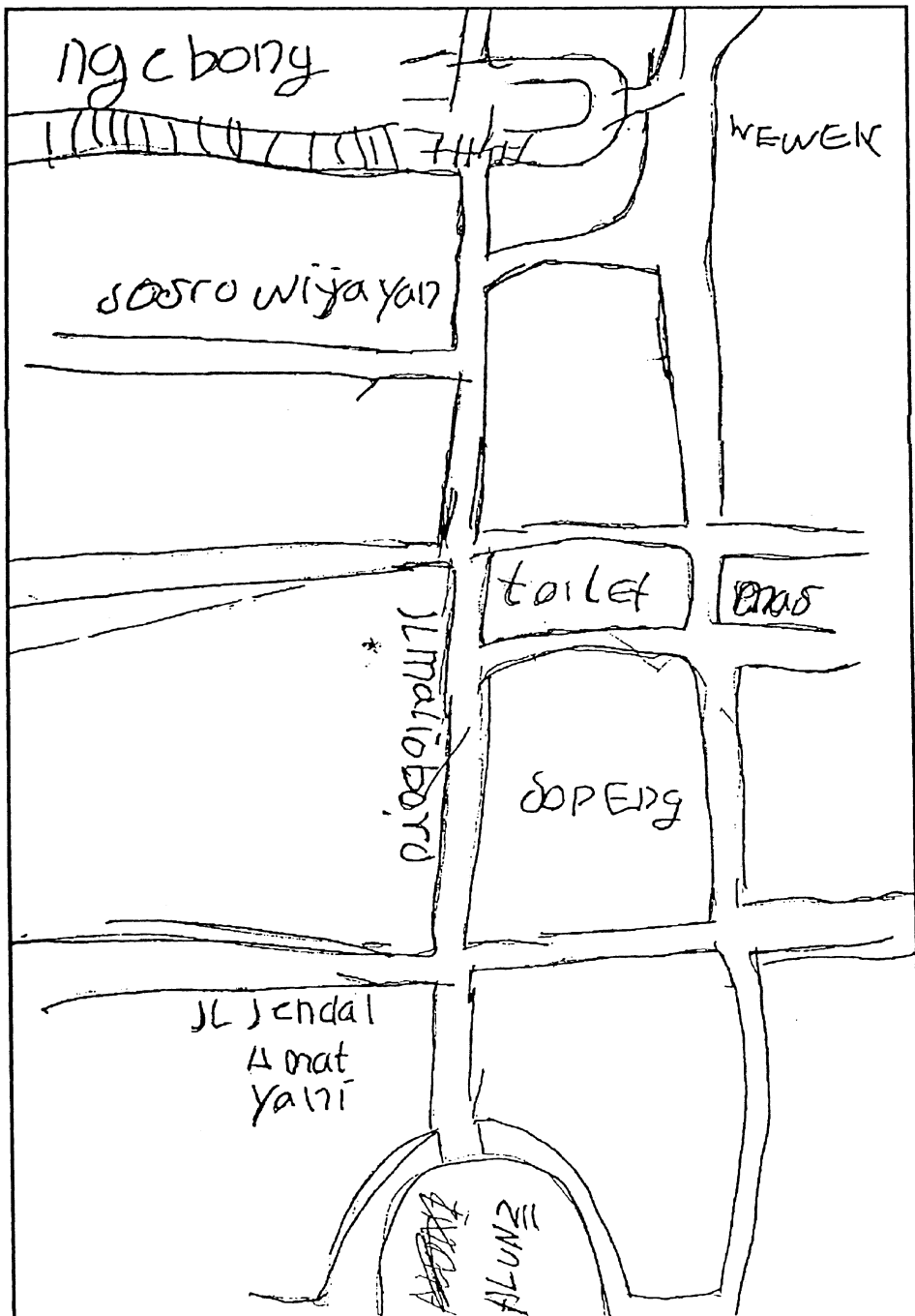
**Figure 40.4** Bambang's (aged 11) map of Yogyakarta: Focus is on the Malioboro and toilet area, as well as *ngebong* (*Gerbong*), by the train tracks; Sosrowijayan street (where tourists and backpackers stay); *Sopeng* (the local market); and the *Alun-Alun* (City Square)
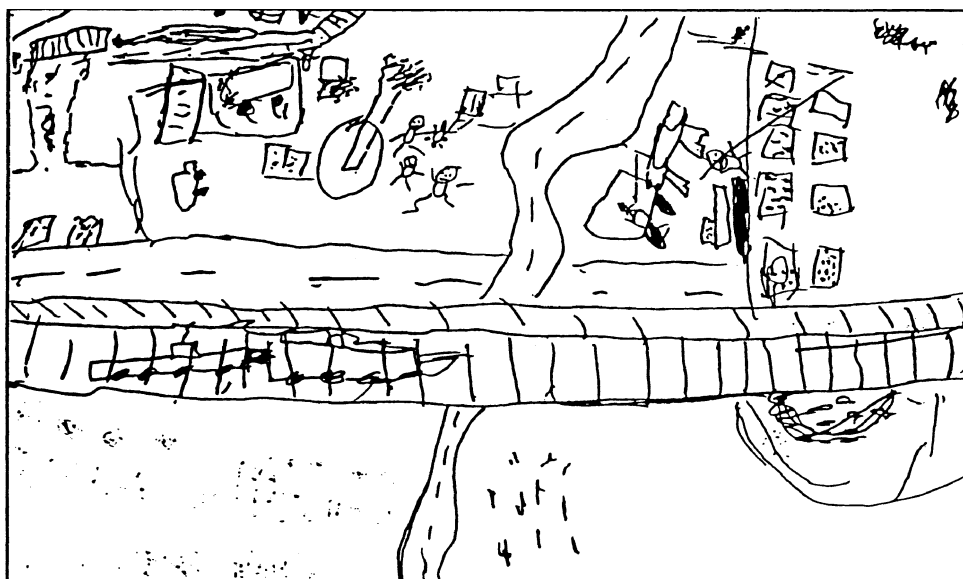
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**Figure 40.5** Sorio's (aged 10) map of Yogyakarta. Sorio has drawn the toilet area (top left of the map), the railroad station and railroad tracks. Malioboro Street runs through the center of the map. Sorio personalizes his account by drawing a train on to his map, as well as food stalls, a horse-drawn cart, and children playing under the tree outside the toilet on Malioboro (note that one of the children is carrying a tambourine for busking)
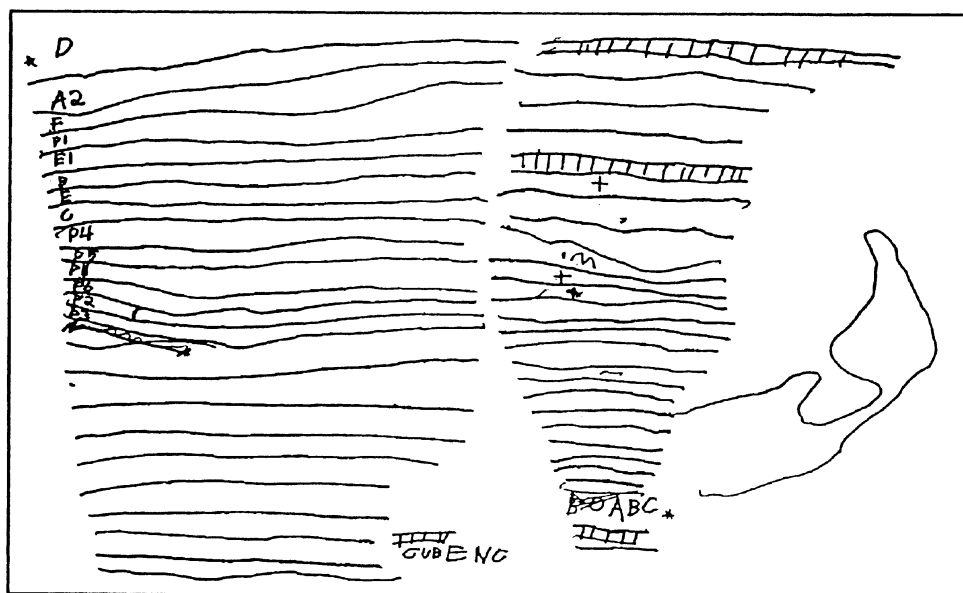


**Figure 40.6** Agus's (aged 12) map of Yogyakarta. The letters and numbers relate to the numbered bays at the bus terminal, and the lines are the bus routes which branch out from the terminal and run through the city

## Places as Pivotal Points

The maps show that the marginality of the places occupied by the children in Yogyakarta reflected their social marginality. The children appropriated these spaces for their own use, and the territories became their urban survival niches, where they could earn money, obtain food, and find enjoyment. People marginalized and stigmatized by rigid laws and attitudes claim and share spaces in the city which are available, even if it is a temporary use of space like the street (Murray 1993). These places are important for marginalized people to form a collective identity in opposition to oppression. The street can therefore be understood in terms of "specific territories which can be mapped according to specific activities carried out by specific groups" of street children (White 1996: 142).

In their maps the children developed a system of meaningful places which gave form and structure to their experiences in the world (Relph 1976: 1). There were two sites in particular which were meaningful for many street boys, and which all the children marked on their maps: the *stasiun* (the railroad station), and the toilet on Malioboro. These were pivotal points for the *tekyan* subculture, and were places which were essential for the children's survival and emotional well-being. They were what Matthews refers to as "mean centers of gravity" (1980: 174) or "beacons" (Matthews 1992).

### Malioboro

*Jalan Malioboro*, or Malioboro Street, is the geographical and economic center of Yogyakarta. It is the main tourist and shopping avenue, and is all the more strategic due to Sosrowijayan Street, where many of the European tourists and backpackers stay. With its craft markets, food stalls, brand new shopping mall and shops, it is seen to play an important role in Indonesia's tourism business, for both foreign and domestic tourists. It is where diverse elements of the city are brought together in close, regular contact, and as indicated in the children's maps, it is at the center of many of the children's lives. The craft stalls are open all day until 9 p.m., and then the *lesehan* (food stalls) come out for the rest of the night. This is when the children work, until the early hours. Malioboro is a mass of "interconnected territories" of shoe-shiners, buskers, pickpockets, and vendors (Arantes 1996: 86). Along the mile-long stretch of road the younger boys shine shoes and older boys busk at the numerous *lesehan*, while people sit on rattan mats eating, chatting, and listening to the street musicians.

### Toilet

The toilet is situated at the center of Malioboro, next to the tourist office, and forms a very definite image in the minds of all the children. It is a meeting place for Malioboro boys, a place to go to when not working, where the boys can relax, sleep, gamble, or hang out with friends. It represents a "cultural space" which has been "won" by the *tekyan* subculture for leisure and recreation (Hall and Jefferson 1993: 42). It is also a place where the boys hide their possessions, such as their shoeshine kits, guitars, and clothes. Outside the toilet there is a rattan mat which the boys put out to sit on. The mat serves to "mark" the place as a sign that it is an "owned" space.
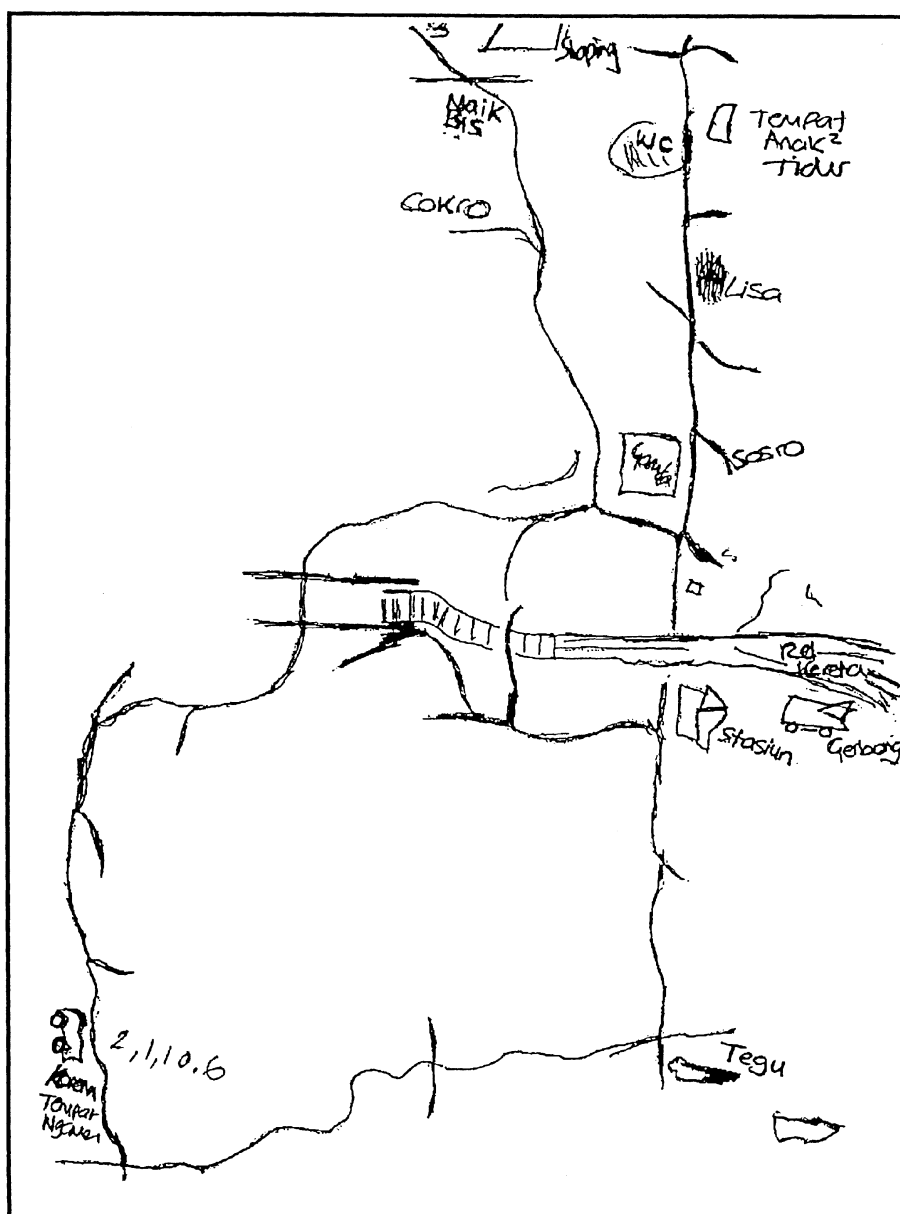
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**Figure 40.7** Hari's (aged 15) map of Yogyakarta. As well as *Shoping* (the local market) and the WC (toilet) on Malioboro, the map shows the bus stops and bus routes on which Hari worked: Korem/*Tempat Ngamen* (Korem/busking place, the numbers relate to the bus/route numbers); and Naik Bis. He also marks *Cokro* (the NGO *Girli's* open house); Lisa (a favourite food stall) and the *Tempat anak tidur* ("the place where the children sleep") on Malioboro; Sosro (the tourist street); the *stasiun* (railroad station) and *Gerbong* (depicted by a *gerbong*/railroad car), and *Rel Kereta* (train tracks). (Note: the writing on the map is my own as Hari cannot read or write, and he asked me to mark the map as he instructed.)
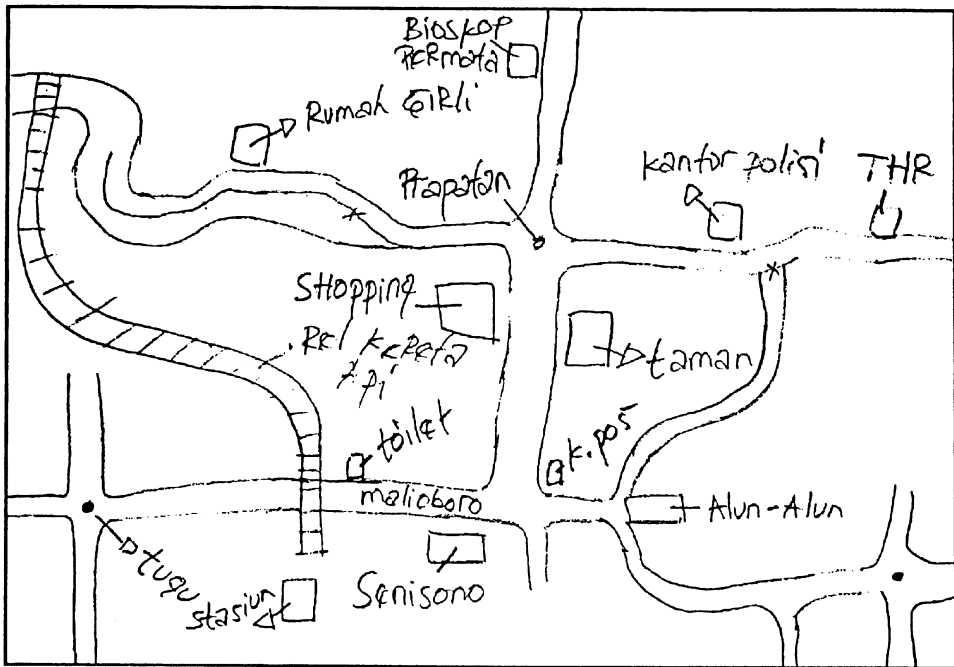
**Figure 40.8** Edo's (aged 16) map of Yogyakarta. Edo has marked the Toilet on Malioboro, *Rumah Girli* (NGO open house); the *Alun-Alun* (City Square); *Shoping* (local market); *kantor polisi* (police station); Bioskop Permata (a cinema); two *prapatans* (traffic light intersections); the *Taman* (City Park); the THR (the People's Entertainment Park); and the *stasiun* (railroad station). Note the prominence of the *Rel Kereta Api*, "the railroad tracks" running through the city.

The toilet is a very masculine space, and a sense of belonging or not belonging contributes in an important way to the shaping of social space at the toilet. The boundaries around the toilet are policed by the older boys who are more dominant in the peer group. This power is superseded, however, by a more powerful force which occasionally visits the toilet area and is described by the boys as *penyakit* (the disease). This is the police or army who periodically arrive at the toilet to "clean up" the area, often kicking or beating the children who cannot get away. In a similar way to the "vigilante" off-duty police in Brazil, Colombia, and Guatemala, security forces sometimes take it upon themselves to "clean" the streets of these unsightly children after hours.[9]

The children at the toilet are not, therefore, safe from oppression and brutality. Many children told me, however, that they regarded it as a safe place, mainly because of their feelings of safety in numbers. The toilet is a meeting place for the *tekyan*, "a site of cultural resistance" and a "liberated zone," where street boys can feel a sense of safety, and relax. (Myslik 1996: 168). The safety they feel is an "emotional and psychological safety that comes from being in an area which has some sense of belonging or social control, even in the occasional absence of physical control" (Myslik 1996: 168).

*Stasiun*

The station and the railroad tracks running through the city featured in all of the children's maps. This was because high mobility is a particularly noticeable behavioral aspect of the *tekyan* subculture. They move across the country with considerable ease via Java's extensive rail system, riding on railroad cars which depart regularly from the station. The boys' high mobility and use of the railroads can be viewed as a form of geographical resistance, as they are a way of avoiding state authorities' control, enabling street boys to "jump scales" to other cities, away from oppression in one city to possible freedom in another (Smith 1994: 90).[10] The boys take up and leave a city if they are in trouble with the authorities, if the earning opportunities are bad, if there is a "clean-up operation" on the streets, if they have fallen out with someone, or if they just want to find adventure or follow friends. As a result, the railroad station is often a meeting point for street boys. It is a place for earning money, searching for leftover food, meeting other street kids, for spreading the *tekyan* subculture, and where newcomers are socialized to street life.

## Conclusion

Street children in Indonesia face daily oppression through marginalization and violence from both state and society, which seeks to control unwanted groups through spatial ordering and public discourses. The exclusion of street boys from public spaces is often in the form of verbal abuse, evictions, arrests, beatings and torture while in police custody, and other excessive infringements of the children's basic human rights. It is such treatment which has contributed to their alienation, and led to the strengthening of a street boy subculture, the *tekyan*, as a group response of resistance, solidarity, and as a means of survival.

The *tekyan* of Yogyakarta contest their own exclusion by appropriating specific places in the city, and by constructing a network of entwined spaces for their everyday survival. This chapter has shown how these produced spaces reflect the street boys' social marginality, and describes these spaces as "urban niches" in which they can earn money, obtain food, feel safe, and find enjoyment, despite the hostility of outside forces. The boys in Yogyakarta marked these places on their maps: traffic lights, bus stops, the sides of roads and railroad tracks, outside a public toilet or an entertainment area, a city park, and other public spaces where access was not heavily controlled. The maps show that the children are not tied to any one place, and that they have numerous "symbolic cocoons," which they use in order to survive (Arantes 1996: 86). It is the "fluidity" of these spaces, and the flexibility of the children to shift from one place to another at a moment's notice, which ensures their survival (Massey 1994; Pile 1997). If, for example, one place becomes difficult to operate in, due to the threat of a *garukan*, then a child will quickly escape to another urban niche (a bus stop, traffic light, or even another city), in order to earn money.

In addition to "winning space" for their survival and existence, some of these appropriated spaces, such as the toilet and the railroad station, are also sites of interaction for street boys, and have become territories in which identities are constructed and where the *tekyan* subculture is formed. These places are what Scott (1990: 119) terms "off stage social sites in which resistance is developed and

codified." Spaces such as the toilet create a strong sense of belonging and positive self-identity which allow the boys to look beyond the dangers of being homeless in the city, and to feel secure. In effect, certain spaces have become a "home *in* the public space," and help a boy to survive, and to feel as though he belongs and exists in a world which would rather he did not (Arantes 1996: 86).

In summary, street boys are not passive victims, but adopt various strategies of resistance to the marginalization imposed on them. They do this by occupying multiple and shifting sites around the city, and by employing an expansive range of survival strategies across diverse spatial relations. These actions can be understood as "geographies of resistance," and everyday forms of endurance (Pile and Keith 1997). Street boys' relationships with different places and their use of geographical spaces are, therefore, complex and multilayered, and their activities and behavior patterns change over time in response to their changing environment. Such adaptations are part of their survival.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## NOTES

1. One reason street girls are less visible is that they do not engage in the same income-earning activities as the boys (shining shoes, busking, selling goods, parking cars, scavenging, and begging). Usually, street girls survive by being looked after by their "boyfriends": their principle form of income and protection. Elsewhere I have written about the lives of street girls and how they live and operate in different parts of the city from street boys (Beazley 1998a; 1999).
2. UNICEF has defined street children into two broad categories: children *of* the street and children *on* the street, or the "homeless" and the "not homeless" (Balanan 1989: 60). Homeless children are those who live, work, and spend the majority of their time on the streets, and who have very little, if any, contact with their families.
3. Fieldwork was conducted over a period of 13 months, in 1995–7, as partial requirement for a Ph.D. in Human Geography at the Australian National University. I am grateful to the Commonwealth and State Fellowship Plan (CSFP), and the Australian National University for their funding. I am also indebted to the street children of Yogyakarta, and to all the workers and children of the street boy and *Rumah Girli* NGO (Non Governmental Organization) for their friendship and support while I was in Yogyakarta.

4. In May 1998 President Soeharto was forced to step down, after 32 years in power. He was revered as the "father of development" until the recent Asian monetary crisis which had severe socio-political repercussions in Indonesia and contributed to Soeharto's downfall.

5. War on preman declared. *Jakarta Post*, March 10, 14, 16 and 21, 1995.

6. For accounts and case studies of death in custody see Amnesty International 1996a. It should go without saying that extra judicial executions through the "shoot to kill" policy are a clear violation of the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty, and the rights to personal liberty and a fair trial.

7. A street child, Rony Fardian, was shot down by security officers at the railroad station in Jakarta in 1994.

8. *Tekyan*, or *tikyan*, is derived from the Javanese *sithik ning lumayan*, meaning "just a little but enough."

9. In recent years there have been numerous documented accounts of death squads, police forces, business people, and vigilante groups murdering street children in South American cities. See for example Dimenstein (1991), *Amnesty International* (1994c:14–15; 1993: 6–7), and Swift (1996). In the past 20 years Indonesia, like Brazil, has experienced the lethal cocktail of capitalism, cronyism, and neoliberalism, which until recently, produced an "economic miracle" along with a huge disparity in the distribution of income.

10. Smith's (1994) account of the homeless in New York, examines the use of a "Homeless Vehicle" allowing homeless people to have greater spatial mobility, and thus enabling them to "jump scales." See also Cresswell (1993) who examines mobility as a form of resistance to ideals of family and home in the context of Kerouac's novel *On the Road* and established "norms" in 1950s America.

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