No Longer Able to Be Dependent: Understanding Migration Among Accra's Street Children

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Our paper considers the migration of children to live and work on the streets of Accra, Ghana. As part of the 'paradigm shift' in thinking about street children identified by Ennew and Swart-Kruger (2003), children's presence on the streets and urban centres is no longer seen solely in terms of abandonment, orphaning or pathology (e.g. Hecht 1998). Rather, recent debate has stressed children's active decisions to leave home and kin expressed in terms of their response to the push factors of poverty, unemployment and family violence, alongside their appreciation of the pull factors of the perceived advantages of city living. The analysis here develops this child-centred account of children's (often independent) migration, but our emphasis is somewhat different. Drawing upon an emergent literature that focuses upon destitution (Devereux 2003), our contention is that children's decisions to migrate to Accra must be seen the culmination of a process involving their progressive and active exclusion from homes and communities. These children, we argue, are destitute because they are *no longer able to be dependent* (Harriss-White 2010). Seen in terms of a series of events leading to their eventual disenfranchisement and disentitlement, the children's exclusion is characterized by the progressive failure to provide emotional and material support, and/or the consequences of family disputes, violence and neglect. However, we also argue that children are not simply the passive recipients of these processes of exclusion. On the contrary, migration, we argue, is one instance of the limited agency of destitute children as they look to life and work on the street as the basis for the construction of new social relations.