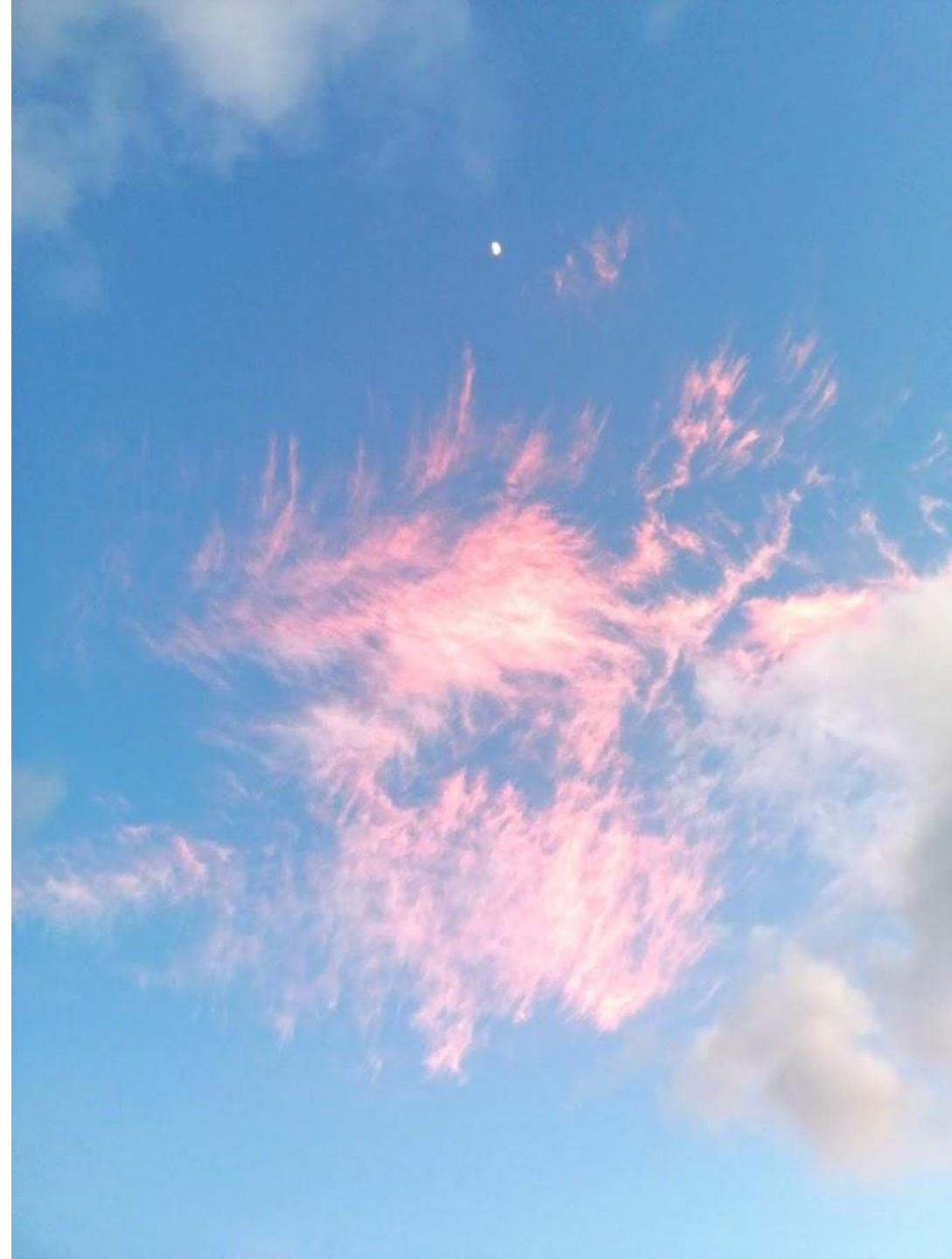


‘She’s a walker’
**Relational mobility of
street-connected youth in
urban Northeast Brazil**

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Second PhD article

- **RQ:** How street-connected youth practise and describe their decision-making regarding socio-spatial mobility in relation to the multiple settings in which they move?
 - Lehtonen, Annika (2025) Relational Mobility of Street-Connected Youth in Urban Northeast Brazil. *Children & Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12982>.
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Street-connected youth in urban Brazil

- These young people ‘**depend on the streets for their survival**’ – whether they live on the streets, work on the streets, have support networks on the street, or a combination of the three’

(The Consortium for Street Children n.d.).

- **Why?**

...Income opportunities, the need for freedom, substance use, involvement in drug trafficking, affective issues in family relations

(Lima et al. 2021; Rizzini and Couto 2018; Santana et al. 2021)





Street-connected relational mobility

- These young people are neither static on the street nor completely isolated from their families and close relationships.
- ‘**Street situations**’ – individual realities and dynamic life situations between different important settings, e.g. **family, the street and support systems** (e.g. Lima et al. 2021; Thomas de Benitez 2011).
- Mobilities should be explored as **relational practices**, rather than mobility decisions being made by solitary subjects (Adey 2017; Larsen, Urry & Axhausen 2006; Manderscheid 2014; Rau & Sattlegger 2018).

Data and methods

- Ethnographic data created in Recife and Salvador, Brazil
- Three different fieldwork periods in 2018–2023
- Two civil society organisations (Juntos and Desejo) and one governmental child welfare institution (Casa)
- Participants: fifteen street-connected young people



Movement within relational survival:

'When she spends the night on the street, I do too'

When I go to the street, I go there to play. On the street, there is always someone I can play with. We are in Resistência, Luz, the park, the statue. Not at the station that much anymore. When I was younger, I was there with my mum. Begging and selling gum. I still sell and I beg. [...] At Resistência [a street community] the adults give us food, we cook there together. Sometimes mum comes to take me and my brother home. Sometimes I'm at home for three days and then go back to the street. Sometimes I spend nights on the street, my mum also does. When she spends the night on the street, I do too. [...] Sometimes my brother runs away from home to the street, then I go after him. Sometimes I go to school, but lately less. Everything is good at home, with my family, but I also like it on the street.

—Bruno, 12 / Recife 6.11.2019

- A sense of **voluntariness** in mobility decisions, while often **conditional** on many constrained relations and structures.
- Mobility practices characterised by forming **important bonds** with their surroundings and creating means of **survival** within limited livelihood choices.





Being thrown out *and* running away: 'Sometimes I go with her, sometimes I don't'

I jumped over the wall, took a bus, the workers ran after me. I went to the street. My friend offered me glue and I became addicted. I met a man on the street, he knew my sister, he did not let anything happen to me. After that, my mum came to get me from the street.

—Larissa, 17 / Recife 23.10.2019

- Whether the youth were thrown out or running away was **nuanced**:
 - Sometimes they were **thrown out** from their homes, communities or public spaces, for instance, by their family members, gangs or the police.
 - Meanwhile, the youth could describe their mobility practices as their decisions of **wanting to leave or escape** e.g. home or an institution.

Concluding discussion

- Navigating street life often does not preclude maintaining relations with the **family** (e.g. Lehtonen 2021; 2023; Paludo and Koller 2008; Rizzini and Couto 2018; Ungruhe 2019; Van Blerk 2012)
- These young people's mobility contests normative ideals of **appropriate childhoods** as spatially static in the natal family setting (Johnson et al. 2021; Ungruhe 2019).
- Their mobility practices go **beyond the dichotomies** of forced or voluntary, agentic or vulnerable.
- Street-connected youth are not solely agents moving as they wish; rather, their **mobility decisions are relationally embedded** in both society and the people around them.





Thank you!

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