CHILDREN’S VOICES IN MIGRATION
SPIRITUALITY AS A RESILIENCE FACTOR AMONG MIGRANT CHILDREN

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master in Theology and Religious Studies

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SUMMARY

Victoria Eugenia, Blanco Salcedo, Children’s Voices in Migration: Spirituality as a Resilience Factor
Among Migrant Children

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In 1989 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child declared that every child had a right to a
standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Yet,
children continue to be affected by violence, poverty, lack of education and political instability, just to
name a few. Such challenges often prompt people to migrate in a search for a better life and these decisions
always affect children. In the years 2015-2016, over thirty percent of the applicants for refugee status in the
European Union were under the age of 18. During transit, as well as while in their country of destination,
many of these children will experience traumatic events. That being said, despite that fact that many
migrant children have faced challenges, most of them demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of
traumatic events.

This paper is concerned with evaluating the role that spirituality can have on migrant children’s
development, as a resilience factor. Chapter I will explore socio-ecological models of both resilience and
spirituality. This will be done by looking at definitional concerns of both terms as well as how both models
may foster psychosocial well-being among migrant children. Chapter II discusses how spirituality may
foster resilience, with a focus on migrant children, based on previous research performed in various
academic fields. The final chapter provides detailed recommendations for faith-based organizations to help
promote spirituality among migrant children by recommending Child Friendly Spaces (CFSs) as a model to
be implemented by organizations which aim at providing protective practices in order to help children’s
development and well-being. The chapter describes the purpose and function of CFSs and how they can be
valuable for children who participate in them. This paper will be based on a research-informed analysis by
scholars that examine relevant concepts.
Thank you to my promoter, Annemie Dillen, for guiding and inspiring me.
Thank you to my pink pussy hat ladies, for waking up with me.
Gracias a mi mamá, por enseñarme a lo que es ser una mujer fuerte e independiente.
Thank you to my husband, who saved me.
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“Spirituality is like a bird; if you hold it too tightly, it chokes; if you hold it too loosely, it flies away. Fundamental to spirituality is the absence of force. – Rabbi Hugo Gryn”

INTRODUCTION

The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the drug wars in Mexico each resulted in over 10,000 casualties in 2016 alone. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 65.3 million people around the world had been forced from their homes by 2016, of whom more than half were under the age of 20. Of these 65.3 million, 21.3 million were refugees, over half of whom were under the age of 18.¹ War and violence consistently put children at risk of human rights violations such as torture, child soldier recruitment, abductions, sexual violence, as well as contribute to loss of community infrastructure.² Furthermore, the recent migrant crisis – as labeled by the media – has highlighted the inability of governments to properly react to the crisis. This has left grassroots actors, including faith-based organizations, as some of the main sources of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable.

There are various ways in which both voluntary and forced migration can impact children. Children are either left behind by parents who choose to leave, migrate with their parents or other family members, or they migrate independently of parents or adult guardians.³ According to UNHCR, children who migrate with their parents face difficulties such as marginalization and discrimination in their host country, a lack of access to social services, and parents’ economic insecurity.⁴ This does not apply to all voluntary or forced migrant children. In fact, most of them flourish and give back to their new communities. At the same time, migration can be a traumatic experience and programs need to be devised by local and global communities in order to help and protect those most vulnerable. The question therefore becomes, how can one respond to the needs of these children in terms of both physical safety and psychological well-being?

While research has validated the notion that disasters – whether natural or human induced – have the ability to trigger a variety of psychological and psychiatric consequences within an individual, there continues to be less recognition of the effects that disasters can have on families or communities.⁵ Psychiatrists Daya Somasundaram and Sivayokan Sambasivamoorthy argue that this is primarily because the field of trauma studies is rather

³ According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, everyone under the age of 18 falls under its rights. Bonnie J. Miller- McLemore defines children as “those literally and immediately dependent on us [adults]”. For more, see Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2007): 68. In this paper I refer to a child as anyone between the ages of 0-18.
⁵ Somasundaram and Sambasivamoorthy, “Rebuilding Community Resilience in a Post-war Context,” 2. According to Somasundaram and Sivayokan “these could range from adaptive and resilient coping responses in the face of catastrophic events to understandable non-pathological distress as well as a number of maladaptive behavioral patterns to diagnosable psychiatric disorders. Conditions like Acute Stress Reaction (ASR, the old disaster syndrome), Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, somatoform disorders, alcohol and drug abuse have been shown to occur after disasters. Chronic long-term trauma can lead to complex PTSD enduring personality changes or Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS).”
young and because it has developed “primarily individualistic in orientation”.\(^6\) An example of this can be seen in the history of the diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The condition is considered to affect the individual; it is a “traumatic event impacting on the individual psyche to produce PTSD”.\(^7\) Arthur Kleinman \textit{et al.} opine that such an approach of pathologizing social suffering not only puts an emphasis on the individual, but also ignores communal ways of dealing with trauma.\(^8\) Dereck Summerfield meanwhile, critiques the assumption that underlines trauma discourse in both academic and political circles. In 1999, he published \textit{A Critique Of Seven Assumptions Behind Psychological Trauma Programs In War-Effect ed Areas} in which he denounced the idea that western agencies could universalize the concept of distress and bring a cure to the ills of the world. Furthermore, he argued that there was no evidence that war-effected populations were “seeking these imported approaches”.\(^9\) According to him, the risk of a globalized “medicalization of stress in violence affected communities is that normal responses are pathologized by the international community”.\(^10\)

In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognized the child’s right to a standard of living adequate for his or her “physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”.\(^11\) Yet, it is only recently that research has begun to explore the role that fostering spirituality can have in edifying diverse dimensions of human development. Scholars have started to look at spirituality and its influence on emotional, cognitive, social and political development on people in forced migration. What is more, though the study of children and religion has a long history – mainly focused on education – sociological or theological studies of children’s spirituality have existed for only about twenty years.\(^12\) This is due to the fact that spirituality is often thought of something that happens “outside ordinary time and within formal religious institutions, or within the private confines of one’s individual soul”, limiting it to the inner aspect of the person and as a result excluding children who are often perceived as too chaotic to experience spirituality.\(^13\) However, scholars are now heeding the call to “honor [children’s] spiritual development as a core developmental process that deserves equal standing in the pantheon of universal developmental processes”.\(^14\)

Using recent research, this essay focuses on the role that spirituality can play on displaced children’s development, as a resilience factor. First, the question of whether or not spirituality is important for forced migrant children’s resilience and if so, why, will be examined. This will be done by approaching the concept of ‘children’s spirituality’ and ‘resilience’ in two ways: first, it will attempt to clarify concepts, including definitional concerns. Then, it will evaluate arguments of how spirituality may foster resilience, specifically

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\(^6\) Somasundaram and Sambasivamoorthy, “Rebuilding Community Resilience in a Post-War Context,” 2.
\(^7\) \textit{Ibid.}, 2.
\(^13\) While religions have long held strong spiritual traditions, these have not included children.
among migrant children. Next, given the fact that faith-based organizations have to this point been some of the leading actors in providing humanitarian assistance to displaced people, it will explore the question of ‘how can local faith based organizations help promote spirituality among migrant children?’ This will be done by looking at Child Friendly Spaces (CFSs) implemented by humanitarian agencies during, as well as after, humanitarian crises. The essay will then explore the fact that CFSs could serve as a model for faith based-organizations who aim to provide a spiritual space for displaced children. For the purpose of the present analysis, this study will be based on a research-informed analysis by scholars that examine relevant concepts.
CHAPTER I. A SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF RESILIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

Chapter I will explore a social ecological model of both resilience and spirituality as it is promoted by various scholars. The first part will focus on defining resilience while presenting a model of social-ecological resilience, including support for this approach given by numerous scholars. The second part will attempt to define spirituality – more specifically children’s spirituality as argued by Rebecca Nye, an expert in the field. Furthermore, a social-ecological approach towards children’s spirituality as suggested by Urie Bronfenbrenner will be analyzed.15

1. What is a migrant?

International law differentiates between “migrants” and “refugees”. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who:

“Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”16

According to international law, refugees cannot be sent back to countries where their lives would be in danger. The problem with such a definition is that it excludes other legitimate reasons for leaving one country such as poverty, natural disasters, family reunification, climate change, and so forth. In these cases, countries are free to deport migrants who arrive without proper documentation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the media and politicians often refer to a “migrant crisis” – implying that the people migrating do not have a right to do so. What is more, gender is not included in the United Nations definition of a refugee, and yet asylum seekers are often fleeing gender-based persecution such as rape, widow burning, honor killings, domestic violence, forced marriages, and female genital mutilation.17

According to a report co-published by the International Organization for Migrants and the United Nations, the distinction between voluntary and forced migrants is:

“Voluntary migrants include people who move abroad for employment, study, family reunification, or other personal factors. Forced migrants leave their countries to escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood.”18

For the purpose of this paper, no differentiation will be made between refugees and migrants or between ‘voluntary migrants’ and ‘forced migrants’. Rather, the term ‘migrant’ will be used acknowledging that a differentiation is needed when it comes to policy implementation, however, not for the purpose of this essay.

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15 Urie Bronfenbrenner does not focus on spirituality but rather on a socio-ecological model that calls attention to the diverse social contexts that influence a child’s development. In this paper I shall apply Bronfenbrenner’s model towards children spirituality.


17 Susan Martin, “Justice, Women’s Rights, and Forced Migration,” In Refugee Rights: Ethics, Advocacy and Africa, ed. David Hollenbach, SJ, George Town University Press (Washington, D.C., 2008): 142. Though gender is not included in the definition of a refugee according to international law, UNHCR has issued two guidelines (The Guidelines on International Protection No.1 and No.2) meant for States to use when determining refugee status that take into consideration gender sensitive situations. At the same time, States have their own guidelines and some are gender-specific.

2. Defining resilience

One scenario: two girls wake up in their new homes after having fled instability in their home countries. Their parents are both undocumented, though they both work and pay taxes. Yet, due to the nature of their parents’ work, neither of the girls see them often, as they leave early in the morning and come home late. Araceli is annoyed because she will have to stay in detention after school, since this is the third time that she has not done her homework this week. This is largely due to the fact, that since she has little parental supervision she spends most of her time hanging out with her friends. The other girl, Carolina, wakes up thinking about a history project her teacher assigned. After school, she will go to the nearby Boys and Girls club to do some research on her own, since she wants to do well in school. Why is it, that both of these girls’ reactions are so different, given that they are both faced with comparable challenges? Why is it that some children flourish when faced with risks and challenges, while others continue to suffer? Such questions have lead researchers to explore the concept of resilience.

According to Ann S. Masten, an expert in childhood resilience, the concept “refers to a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development”. Similarly, Tony Newman, a researcher in the field of resilience among children and young adults, refers to the term resilience as “the human ability to adapt in the face of tragedy, trauma, adversity, hardship, and ongoing significant life stressors.” In other words, Carolina proves to be resilient due to the fact that though her life is difficult she is capable of adapting and working towards her goals. In her work, Masten characterized two types of judgments necessary in order for resilience to manifest itself. First, one cannot consider a person resilient if they have never experienced trauma in their personal development. Second, one must infer and establish a criterion in which one qualifies resilient acts as positive. In other words, what does one consider a positive or a healthy reaction towards a certain situation? Why does one consider Carolina resilient and not Araceli? While most scholars would agree that criteria do indeed exist, there is little consensus as to who or what defines resilience and by what standards. In fact, those who are conducting a given study as well as those included in the studies themselves, usually influence such criteria. For example, an abundant number of developmental scholars have defined resilience vis-à-vis major expectations of a given society or culture towards the behavior of children in a specific moment in history, i.e., academic or social achievements. Meanwhile, scholars in psychopathology have defined resilience as the “absence of psychopathology or a low level of symptoms and impairment”.

Fonagy et al. define resilience as “normal development in difficult conditions,” yet, who is to say what is ‘normal’? Moments of resilience are always contextual and as a result in order to evaluate whether someone is doing ‘well’ or should be considered ‘normal’ calls for an assessment or judgment on a particular situation. For example, homeless children tend to be at higher risk of behavioral, educational or health issues and therefore if a child does well in school one tends to assume that this suggest that s/he shows signs of resilience. However, what

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19 These fictive scenarios were influenced by my own life as an immigrant in the United States and life stories that I saw growing up between 1999 and 2009.
23 According to Masten these expectations are termed salient developmental tasks, competence criteria, or cultural age expectations in developmental and life span-theory.
if that same child were to steal food from her or his classmates because s/he was hungry? Does one still consider that resilience? According to Masten et al. the way we judge “adaptive outcomes” are, to some extent, determined by the level of danger and the time given to the individual or group to adapt. As Masten et al. state:

“In circumstances of massive trauma such as war or natural disasters, survival itself may be the primary criterion for resilience in the short term. Over the long term, as more normative conditions are restored, one would begin to look for positive psychosocial functioning in developmental tasks appropriate to a person of that age in that cultural milieu and time. Thus, over time, expectations would normalize to those expected for most children of that place and time.”

2.1 From the individual to the community
Since the beginning of the 20th century – as a result of the two World Wars – researchers have focused on the negative psychological consequences of violence on children. However, as Weiste A. Tol et al. concludes:

“Although such epidemiological work presents a crucial step in documenting the impact of armed conflicts and war, service providers are confronted by questions that go beyond establishing that exposure to political violence increases chances for developing psychological symptoms. Such questions include: “What are the main influences on child and adolescent mental health in political violence-affected areas?” “Why do some children and adolescents develop psychological symptoms and others do not?” “What services are most effective to prevent mental health problems in children and adolescents growing up in political violence?” and “What type of protective resources may children and adolescents build on to retain mental health when confronted with political violence?”

The term resilience started to appear in academic journals around the 1980s and was used as “a metaphor for the ability of individuals to recover from exposure to chronic and acute stress”. During its infancy, research focused on “children who developed well in the context of risk or adversity [and thus] held the potential to inform theories of etiology in psychopathology,” and as a result, could have an effect in “guiding intervention and policy”. As a starting point, researchers assumed that resilience in the face of trauma was something exceptional. Yet, as Masten states, “what began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary”. This is due to the fact that research has shown that resilience is possible through “relatively ordinary” channels, such as “intelligence, self-esteem, and the availability of committed caregivers or other attachment figures”.

An early example of the study of resilience is that of James Anthony’s notion of psychoimmunization. Anthony posited that occurrences of trauma were less likely to be pathological when linked with high social support. Consequently, the individual was

30 Ibid., 233.
safeguarded from any future experiences of trauma. According to Anthony “what are needed are objective measures regarding such structures and the degree of the individual’s participation in them”. In the words of Michael Ungar:

“Almost always, early studies of resilience focused on the individual as the locus of change. The environment (a family, school, institution, or community) was assessed for its influence on individual developmental processes but it was still the qualities of the individual, not the environment, which intrigued researchers."

Dangerously, by assuming the individual to be the “locus of change”, it was assumed that those who were disadvantaged where “expected to exercise personal agency in regard to accessing opportunities in their environments in order to increase their psychological functioning”. Ergo, the focus was not on macro-social systems that produced conditions of social suffering. Yet, suffering is always intrinsically tied to social circumstances, verified through specific historical and social conditions and configurations. In this sense, it is fundamental to observe how political, economic and institutional powers interlace in personal experiences and how people react to events in their daily lives. Even though resilience was seen as dependent on resources from the wider environment, it was considered intrapersonal and as a result the study of resilience always focused on the individual as the place where change occurred. In a call to move beyond emphasizing the negative psychological consequences of violence as well as the focus on the individual, some scholars argued that the study of resilience had not gone far enough and thus proposed an ecological approach, which I shall now examine.

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32 For further information about James Anthony’s research see: Elwyn James Anthony, The Invulnerable Child (New York, NY: Guilford, 1987.)
36 Kleinman, “Social Suffering.”
2.2 An ecological model of resistance

Researchers working with children have emphasized the significance of resilience among individuals and communities affected by conflict. While some researchers continue to argue that resilience is an inborn characteristic, Masten argues that it is a “product of experiences and interaction with people and the environment, even before an individual’s birth.” In an attempt to move beyond the individual as the “locus of change” scholars have called for a shift towards an “ecological-transactional approach” as well as the necessity for future research to examine the “resilience processes.” These calls have been influenced by both Urie Bronfenbrenner’s work, which I shall examine later, as well as the revelation that while a large number of children experience trauma-inducing situations, studies have shown that a majority of them exhibit qualities linked to resilience.

Wietse Tol et al. in their work with children in war-affected communities, define ecological resilience as “those assets and processes on all socio-ecological levels that have been

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38 Ibid., 13.
shown to be associated with good developmental outcomes after exposure to situations of armed conflict”. Tol et al. suggest that being included in a wider definition of resilience assists the development of mental health and psychosocial programs. Tol et al. state, “by identifying how protective processes at wider social level influence biological and psychological functioning, the development of especially universal and selective health prevention efforts may be informed”. In other words, “an interactional, environmental and culturally pluralistic perspective provides a second way to understand resilience”. Such an approach gives adequate weight to both the individual and an individual’s environment. As a result, a paradigm shift occurs in the study of resilience: the individual and her or his capacity is not longer the “locus of change” but research is focused on the motives or causes of positive coping after experiences of trauma.

In the words of Ungar,

“[An] ecological understanding of resilience suggests complexity in reciprocal person–environment interactions. The goodness of fit between elements of the mesosystem […] predicts positive growth in suboptimal conditions. As individuals or environments change, the factors most likely to correlate with positive developmental outcomes also change.”

According to an ecological understanding of resilience, the individual is no longer seen as a passive vessel, which is the case with respect to much of the western understanding of healing and trauma rehabilitation. As a result, the concept of resilience can be helpful in shifting the focus from migrant children as passive individuals towards a more active and communal understanding. Yet, while studies have shown that resilience is a key element when thinking about people and their response to trauma, some western psychiatrists oppose the concept of resilience and rather apply it to war effected populations by interpreting it as evidence of “psychological dysfunctionalism”. That is to say, they do not believe that resilience is a psychologically sound method in responding to traumatic events. Therefore, it is important to continue to investigate and provide ethnographic examples of how resilience manifests among individuals and their communities.

3. Defining spirituality

Defining spirituality is often very difficult. This is because when verbally defining a term such as spirituality, which encompasses many aspects of the person, one tends to only capture one aspect of the whole picture or it becomes so broad that it loses its contextual identity. As a result, definitions of spirituality will differ within fields of knowledge, depending

44 Ibid., 13.
46 Ibid., 14.
47 Hanna Kienzler, “Debating War-trauma and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in an Interdisciplinary Arena.” Social Science & Medicine 67, no. 2 (2008): 224. According to Kienzler, it is often times the case that post war-torn communities do not interpret their situation as psychological (PTSD, anxiety, depression, etc.) and are therefore reluctant to speak to western psychologist about their experience. However, western intervention sometimes seems to “homogenise the psychiatric discourse on war-trauma and PTSD” and pay no attention to different methods of healing that are outside a pathological solution. Such an approach to the effects of war begins with the idea that it is “normal” to be traumatized by war and makes the “presumption of individual vulnerability is, the basis for psychiatric diagnosis as well as treatment”.
on which aspects a certain scholar is trying to highlight. For instance, theologian Rowan Williams defines spirituality as “each believer making his or her own engagement with the questioning at the heart of faith […] constantly allowed to challenge the fixed assumption of religiosity”.48 For educator Brenda Watson, spirituality is the “signals of transcendence that are normal aspects of life but all at odds with a materialistic understanding of the world, they point to something other – something more […] [it] can lead people to an awareness of religion”.49 For psychologist William James it is “a belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto”.50

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) defines spirituality as follows:

> “Spirituality is recognized as a factor that contributes to health in many persons. The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and societies. It is expressed in an individual’s search for ultimate meaning through participation in religion and/or belief in God, family, naturalism, rationalism, humanism, and the arts. All of these factors can influence how patients and health care professionals perceive health and illness and how they interact with one another.”51

Using this definition, spirituality can be seen as multidimensional, since it not only encompasses the individual’s search for meaning but also about her/his relationship with others, the environment and the divine. As a result, much like resilience, it is shaped by relationships with family, friends, schools, faith traditions, and communities. Along these lines, Bethany Ojalehto and Qi Wang state that cultural meaning systems support child development when expressing adversity by lessening the repercussions of harmful stress.52 As a result, collective spirituality can promote cultural adaption, shared identity, and cohesive meaning systems and in turn can have an essential role in keeping active cultural practices that support children’s development.53

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49 Nye, *Children’s Spirituality*, 3.
50 Ibid., 3.
Bethany Ojalehto obtained her PhD in cognitive psychology at Northwestern University, United States. Her research focuses on culture, cognition, and conceptual development as well as indigenous epistemologies. Qi Wang holds a PhD in Psychology from Harvard University. Her research focuses on the intersection of cognitive and social development with a focus on how cultural norms impact the individual and vice-versa.
3.1 Children’s spirituality

![Dimensions of children's spirituality as presented by Rebecca Nye's definition](image)

Academic interest in children’s spirituality has shown that spirituality is a prevailing feature in most children’s lives.\(^{55}\) This is despite the fact that it is often thought of as something that is “other worldly”, excluding children who are thought to be too chaotic and unpredictable or do not yet have the required intellectual capacity to be considered spiritual beings. However, when it comes to spirituality, quite the opposite is the case – children might even be more inclined towards spiritual tendencies than adults.\(^{56}\) Children tend to have a more holistic approach to understanding things; unlike adults, they are not likely to analyze everything and therefore, their understanding of the world has a more mystical element. Furthermore, they are comfortable with the ineffable, as children easily recognize that words are not always capable of describing thoughts and feelings.\(^{57}\)

Based on her research of the varied expressions of spirituality seen in children’s lives, Rebecca Nye has highlighted children’s capacity for “relational consciousness”.\(^{58}\) Subsequently, she defines children’s spirituality as:

> “Children’s spirituality is an initially natural capacity for awareness of the sacred quality to life experiences. This awareness can be conscious or unconscious, and sometimes fluctuates between both, but in both cases can affect actions, feelings and thoughts. In childhood, spirituality is specifically about being attracted towards ‘being in relation’, responding to a call to relate to more than ‘just me’ – i.e to others, to God, to creation or to a deeper inner

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\(^{54}\) Nye, *Children’s Spirituality*, 6.


\(^{56}\) Nye, *Children’s Spirituality*, 6.


Nye encourages one to look at children’s spirituality like a child. In other words, it is not always
conventional; it requires effort from adults in order to listen and acknowledge that what is being
said is valid, in order to develop a shared language. This shared language cannot be
compartmentalized (it is often beyond religious material) and it does not develop in a linear
way. Furthermore, while their spiritual way of seeing the world is important to children, they
observe that it might not matter to anyone else since it is not considered part of mainstream
values; lastly, it is vulnerable – it can perish if overlooked or of it is misconceived.  

3.1.1 Development of children spirituality

What does this spirituality look like? How does one measure it? In his 1981 book
Stages of Faith, James W. Fowler – a theologian and developmental psychologist – developed a
theory of six stages of faith maturation. Since its publication, it has become quite influential in
discussions of children, faith and religious education. Fowler’s model of faith development
describes six stages of faith that people may experience as a way of creating meaning and
relating to the world around them as it becomes more complex and extensive as they age. He
describes “faith as a universal human activity of meaning making; grounded in certain
structures that shape how humans construe their world and interact with the self and others.”
He measures changes within each stage in a child’s “moral reasoning, ego perspective, religious
symbolization, worldview, locus of authority and radius of social relationships”.  

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, in referring to prominent models of psychodynamic,
cognitive and moral development, asserts “Fowler initiates an imaginative conversation
between Erik Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg […] enriching their claims by adding faith, drawing
significantly upon H. Richard Niebuhr”. According to her, in academic circles, “Fowler has a
national and international reputation as the unequivocal expert on faith development”. That
being said, many scholars have argued that Fowler’s stage theory invokes a flawed
understanding of children. In particular, Miller-McLemore lists a few of these assumptions
about childhood and adult faith that impede understanding of children’s religious formation.

Miller-McLemore’s primary concern with Fowler’s theory is that while the majority of
the stages involve a child’s development, he uses an adult’s perspective in outlining these steps.
According to Miller-McLemore, Fowler’s concern is to provide adults with a description of

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59 Nye, Children’s Spirituality 6.
60 Ibid., 6.
61 James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning
62 Stephen Parker, “Faith Development: Theory as a Context for Supervision of Spiritual and Religious
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63 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 119-121.
64 Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “Children’s Voices, Spirituality and Mature Faith,” In Children’s Voices:
Children’s Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education, eds., Annemie Dillen and Didier
65 Miller-McLemore is E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Religion, Psychology, and
Culture at the Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion of Vanderbilt University.
stages, which they pass through in life and consequently gain greater maturity.\textsuperscript{67} However in her view, in creating a step-by-step progression through faith formation, Fowler “overvalues the final frame”.\textsuperscript{68} She opines that Fowler’s \textit{Stages of Faith} belongs in a time where the focus on the adult life cycle in the social sciences held strong interest among scholars. In turn, this type of analysis has prevented other approaches towards children spirituality, since there seems to be no other way to discuss children and their faith.\textsuperscript{69} In Miller-McLemore’s view, such an approach of interpreting faith as something universal instead of a concept that is dependent on context has made it challenging to consider other fundamental parts of childhood. She states, “for nearly three decades, fascination with Fowler’s categories stifled other ways of thinking about childhood and faith”.\textsuperscript{70}

### 3.1.2 Paradoxical

Faith does not develop like other parts of the body. Maturing in age or growing up, does not mean maturing in faith. The danger with any theory on development is that there is an underlying assumption that children are immature since they have not reached higher stages. In terms of children’s spiritual and religious development and growth, they are viewed as on the path to spiritual becoming, rather than spiritual beings. According to scholar Alison James, age is a dangerous agent for the measuring of maturity, especially when discussing the religious or spiritual maturation of children. She adds “the wizened, silver headed person down the pew might suffer from a hardening of religious attitudes whereas children often startle us with their insights.”\textsuperscript{71} Philosopher Gareth Matthew takes the idea even further, observing that age sometimes brings with it “staleness and un-inventiveness”.\textsuperscript{72} Likewise, Miller-McLemore states that age might also “bring the desire to conform to convention and a penchant for increasingly inflexible beliefs and opinions.”\textsuperscript{73}

On the other hand, children are often open and curious. Pastoral theologian Herbert Anderson further adds to the paradoxical nature of children’s spiritual development.\textsuperscript{74} When it comes to faith, he argues that there is nothing greater than the faith of a child. In fact, children's spirituality is usually vulnerable, open, dependent, creative and full of hope.\textsuperscript{75} In his view, while a stage development theory might help understand some aspects of faith development, it does not by any means paint the full picture, failing at times to capture certain abilities that children possess. An expert in developmental psychology, Chris J. Boyatzis, argues that children are also influenced by cultural norms, while at the same time are capable of their own independent thoughts. In Boyatzis’ words, “to speak in terms of two venerable ideas, the child is raised by a village, but the child comes with conceptual propensities and is not a tabula rasa”.\textsuperscript{76} With this in

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\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 640.

\textsuperscript{68} Miller-McLemore “Children’s Voices,” 30.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 34.


\textsuperscript{72} Alison James in Miller-McLemore “Children’s Voices,” 37.

\textsuperscript{73} Miller-McLemore, “Children's Voices,” 40.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 41.


mind, I shall now explore a more social-ecological approach to children’s spirituality influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner.

3.2 A social-ecological approach to children’s spirituality

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a Russian-born American developmental psychologist, argued for a social-ecological model that highlights the abundance of influences on children’s development by examining diverse social contexts of growth. Bronfenbrenner labeled four different levels of the environment that had direct and proximal impact on children’s development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. A microsystem is a “pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person,” such as children’s family, caregivers and/or daycare. For Bronfenbrenner, an important term in the definition is experience. He states:

“The term is used to indicate that the scientifically relevant features of any environment include not only its objective properties but also the way in which these properties are perceived by the persons in that environment […] very few of the external influences significantly affecting human behavior and development can be described solely in terms of objective physical conditions and events; the aspects of the environment that are most powerful in shaping the course of psychological growth are overwhelmingly those that have meaning to the person in a given situation.”

The next level, the mesosystem, functions as a way to describe how different parts of a child's microsystem work together for the sake of the child. A mesosystem is established when the child enters a new and different setting. The exosystem level meanwhile, involves multiple settings that do not necessarily include the child as an active agent; nor does the child interact with such places/people often, yet they continue to have a large effect on the child. Parents’ or caregivers’ workplaces, extended family members, government reform, environmental regulation, social unrest, and financial upheaval are a few examples of exosystems that can affect children. The macrosystem is the culture of the child, involving concepts such as race, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status, to name a few.

Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological model allows scholars to discern how various microsystems effect and interact (mesosystems) in young people’s lives. Furthermore, it permits scholars to also move beyond immediate contexts and evaluate how macrosystems also have immediate as well as proximal impacts on children. This method raises many questions. For example, beyond the family, how do rituals, transcendent entities, and involvement in religious communities impact children? How are people’s religiosity or spirituality formed by social, political and economic ecologies in which they live? Jacqueline S. Matias et al. explore contemporary approaches to the study of the relationship between ethnicity, culture and spirituality and conclude on an inextricable connection between them. As a result, they argue, empirical research should further examine the way in which political, economic and social forces shape spiritual development. In situations of conflict or post-conflict as well as among

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78 Ibid., 22.
79 Ibid., 22.
80 Ibid., 25.
81 Ibid., 24.
82 Ibid., 9.
forced migrant communities, empirical research should examine the interconnection between concepts such as national identity, ethnic pride, racial privileges, war, neocolonialism and children’s and young adults’ experiences of faith.  

As scholars become more aware of the interconnectivity between various micro and macro-systems, the question of how does one social context interact with development in other contexts has been the focus of several recent studies. For example, a study conducted among American youth who live in low-income areas has shown how positive academic progress is influenced by religious involvement – more so than in youth from low-poverty areas. Another study done by Kelly Dean Schwartz examines the relationship between the transmission (parent-church attendance) and transactional (discussion about faith) faith models of socialization. In addition, it explores a third model (transformation model) as a “meaningful construct contributing to our understanding of social factors and their influence on religious faith”. Schwartz measured the spirituality on youth averaging the age of sixteen years old in an international denominational Christian youth conference in Canada. Data was collected based on standardized surveys of religious belief as well as faith support from parents and acquaintances. The data showed that the youth’s own spirituality could be foreshadowed based on their parents’ and friends’ spirituality. Furthermore, the spirituality of their friends negotiated the influence of the parents. Boyatzis opines, “Schwartz’ study illustrates that our understanding of children spirituality is enriched by measuring the interplay and different contexts of parents and peers”. Such studies, among others, show the importance of examining children’s spirituality and its connection to various social forces. Yet ironically, worship institutions have continuously been ignored as places for spiritual development. While some in-depth analysis has been done on children’s experiences in congregations, much more research is needed. At the same time, as highlighted above, what is considered positive or good coping skills can sometimes depend on those doing the research, as well who is included in the research. As Ungar argues, “more often, those studying resilience impose a standard set of outcome measures that are reasoned to be relevant to a population but may overlook indigenous coping strategies that are adaptive in contexts where there are few choices for other forms of adaptation”. Consequently, it is crucial that research continue to struggle with definitional challenges as well as ways in which scholars approach research. This is particularly important when it comes to the contribution of spirituality as a resilience factor among migrant children. It is well recognized that spirituality plays an important role in building resilience, however, concrete evidence on ‘why’ and ‘how’ this takes place is still missing. With this in mind, two questions arise: How does spirituality relate to resilience? And how can it help migrant children overcome the challenges they face in their daily lives? The next chapter will attempt to answer some of these questions.

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84 Mattis, et al., “Ethnicity, Culture and Spiritual Development,” 293.
CHAPTER II. HOW CAN SPIRITUALITY FOSTER RESILIENCE?

Studies have shown that events that take place during childhood continue to impact an individual for the rest of her/his life. According to Maria Alejandra Vinueza – a children’s rights advocate and researcher in the field of displaced children’s resilience and spirituality – this is particularly important for children under the age of eight where cognitive, social, emotional and physical development will impact that rest of the child’s life. This chapter shall explore the relationship between spirituality and resilience in various studies. The first part will focus on how different studies have approached the link between spirituality and resilience in general, while the second part will highlight various academic studies on the relationship between spirituality and resilience among migrant children.

1. Studies on the relationship between spirituality and resilience

Spirituality and resilience work together in order to enlighten a “person’s sense of efficacy, worth, esteem and confidence”. The Journal of Refugees Studies recognized that religion and spirituality “constitute a source of emotional and cognitive support, a form of social and political expression and mobilization, and vehicle for community building and group identity”. According to anthropologist and educator Gillian Mann, a challenge faced by migrant children is that some perceive themselves as a lost generation. In studies done among displaced Congolese children living in Tanzania, she found that the children saw themselves as having no future, something she terms “spiritual death, in which life has no meaning”. By addressing such concerns, spirituality becomes an approach that can help migrant children overcome obstacles and face their future.

When dealing with spirituality as a resilience factor, it is important that the theoretical becomes practical. Therefore, the question then becomes, how do spirituality and resilience work together? Multiple studies that have focused on prayer, meditation, reflection and surrender have accounted for signs of resilience among the studied participants. Maurren Miner and Martin Dowson argue that stress or suffering can trigger forms of spirituality that can lead to resilient behavior. In what follows, I shall discuss in detail a few studies that have explored how spirituality can be a foster of resilience.

1.1 Stories and narratives

Stories and narratives are how people define their lives; including events, beliefs, goals, origins, and so forth that not only affect larger societies but also influence the micro-level of families and the individual. In the words of author Terry Pratchett, “people think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it’s the other way around”. In line with this, Daniel Scott suggests the narrative approach as a way of accessing the study of spirituality. From the assumption that

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95 Mann, “Beyond War,” 448-59.
96 Ibid., 453.
97 Maureen Miner and Martin Dowson, “Spirituality as a Key Resource for Human Flourishing,” In Beyond Well-Being: Spirituality and Human Flourishing, eds. Maureen Minner, Martin Dowson and Stuart Devenish (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Pub, 2012): 19. Maureen Miner is Chair of the University of Western Sydney Psychology and Spirituality Society, as well as a Senior lecturer in psychology at UWS. She both teaches and researches in the field of the Psychology of Religion/Spirituality. Martin Dowson is currently Excelsia College’s Director of Academic Development. His most recent research encompasses educational psychology, psychological measurement, and the psychology of religion.
Spirituality is a universal human experience, Scott evokes upon personal narratives as a means “of expressing human [and] spiritual experience(s)”\footnote{Daniel Scott, “Storytelling, Voice and Qualitative Research,” In Spiritual Education: Cultural, Religious and Social Differences: New Perspectives for the 21st Century, eds. Jane Erricker, Cathy Ota and Clive Erricker (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001): 118-120.}. For Scott, the narrative approach allows for a space to be created where children are given the opportunity to speak about their lived experiences “which is not dependent on external evidence or objective detail”.\footnote{Scott, “Storytelling, Voice and Qualitative Research,” 120.} What is more, narratives allow for hermeneutical junctions to form, since both the speaker and the listener are always forming new ways of understanding them. Thus it allows communities to come together beyond the individual as they share and reinterpret different spiritual ways of being and meaning-making.

Religious narratives also highlight the interaction between the relationship that people believe to have with God and their part in God’s story – a relationship that can play a crucial role in a person’s resilience. Using qualitative research, Mark Brough \textit{et al.} collected narrative data on migrant children from Burma who were settled in Australia as refugees. The authors highlighted how multiple participants used Buddhist traditions as a way of building hope and dealing with their past experiences. One participant stated:

“It is a very necessary thing to know, according to our philosophy [...] we take training for our mind, it is very important thing. We can get the physical suffering, but we cannot get the mental suffering if you train your mind. That is a very important thing.”\footnote{Mark Brough, \textit{et al.}, “Unpacking the Micro-Macro Nexus: Narratives of Suffering and Hope among Refugees from Burma Recently Settled in Australia.” Journal of Refugee Studies (2012): 15.}

Similarly, in a case study on the adjustment of Sudanese migrant boys over a period of 10 years, Laura Bates \textit{et al.} point to the fact that religion and religious narratives had been an important type of support for some of the boys. John, one of the participants who had traveled to the United States as an unaccompanied minor and was now beginning university stated:

“My life story has taught me not to mess myself up in America none of this time, my Lord, Jesus Christ brought me [i.e., didn’t bring me] out of all these atrocities just to blow the opportunity of [by] not going to college and waste my time with drinking and partying.”\footnote{Laura Bates, Deborah J. Johnson and Meenal Rana, “Pathways of Success Experiences Among the “Lost Boys” of Sudan: A Case Study Approach.” In Handbook of Resilience in Children of War, eds. Chandi Fernando and Michel Ferrari (New York: Springer, 2013): 184.}

Such research has brought to the fore how religious narratives can be fundamental in strengthening hope and resilience, which is essential if one wishes to examine how narratives continue to influence spirituality and resilience among children.

Anna Trousdale also performed a qualitative study where she picked six girls and boys between the ages of 7-8 from different religious backgrounds and subsequently read to them individually while asking questions and examining their responses.\footnote{A practice application in the importance of narratives and their impact on children can be seen in the Godly Play approach. Jerome W. Berryman, the founder of Godly Play, states: “spiritual awareness best takes the form of narrative”. For more information see: Jeremy W. Berryman. Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco Press 1991).} Afterwards, when the reading was done, the children were asked to re-tell the story in order to evaluate their own interpretation. The studied showed how children do not interpret stories that same way as adults, meaning that it is important to “take into account children’s developmental levels in choosing...
books for them”. Trousdale argued based on her findings that the children’s reinterpretation of the story depended on the stories themselves as well as the child’s own religious background. Furthermore, she opines that while reading spiritual stories, children should be allowed to arrive at their own understanding as they fill in the gaps on their own. Such an approach encourages children’s own ability to examine the world.

Yet it is not enough to simply allow children to reinterpret spiritual stories, as adults should also listen to children’s own stories. Based on her life as an elementary school teacher in a Chicago housing project, Melissa Butler suggests that is it critical that one listens to children’s stories “openly and without judgment so that they can be externalized, processed and worked on, acknowledging their multiple uses and meanings”. She goes further by suggesting that the way that children understand their own lives helps shape their sense of identity. Therefore, the manner in which they “negotiate their own agencies in places where limits to agency are profound” depends on the child’s own way of understanding her or his own lived experience. Allowing children to engage in their own narrative enables them to become fully involved in their own lives, “understanding their place of living and becoming actors in it”. In other words, by giving children a sense of agency, one allows them to believe that what they do ultimately matters.

1.2 A search for meaning

As discussed in Chapter I, part of the definition of spirituality includes the individual’s search for meaning. In a qualitative study, Mary Raftopoulos and Glen Bates conducted interviews among 15 Australian youth in order to evaluate the relationship between spirituality and resilience. During the interviews, participants were asked about the role that spirituality had in their lives and how, if at all, it assisted them in getting through difficult times. During the study, three main dimensions developed that were found to foster resilience: i) a relationship with God, ii) meaning-making iii) a relationship with the inner-self. The authors concluded that the combination of resilience as “achievement of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” and spirituality as an “active quest for something outside the self that will lead to greater knowledge and greater capacity to love”, resulted in an “evolving sense of life purpose”.

Furthermore, a study done on resilience and religion in youth in Southern Africa found that spiritual connectedness can have a positive impact on children facing difficult situations and is thus a source for resilience. The authors of the study analyzed written stories and held interviews with orphaned children in order to see how religion had influenced their coping strategies. They found that prayer, intercession, fellowship, values, faith, hope and meaning-

104 The children in the study were either from the Catholic, Protestant or Jewish tradition.
108 See Chapter I “Defining Spirituality.”
109 Mary Raftopoulos and Glen, Bates. “‘It’s that knowing that you are not alone’” the role of spirituality in adolescent resilience” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 16, no. 2 (2011): 151-152.
110 The authors of the study use the term “religion”, while in this essay I refer to religion as one aspect of spirituality. As seen in Chapter I, spirituality is considered as the individual’s search for meaning. Religion is one aspect that this can be done. See Figure 3.
making as fosters of resilience among the participants.\footnote{Arve Gunnestad and S’lungile Thwala, “Resilience And Religion in Children and Youth in Southern Africa.” \textit{International Journal of Children’s Spirituality} 16, no. 2 (2011): 176-183.} For instance, one participant spoke of how her church community offered moral support when her mother was sick:

“For [three] months I was taking care of my mother because my father passed away 4 years ago. During that time members of the church supported us with food and money to pay school fees and house keeps. Members of the AEC church gave us soaps and gloves to use when helping our mother, but nobody told us about her sickness. But I knew from the very onset that it was HIV because I have seen how our daddy died and people were talking about it.”\footnote{Gunnestad and Thwala, “Resilience and Religion,” 178.}

It should be noted that the study found negative spiritual coping methods among some of the children. Though a minority, some of the participants questioned God’s love for them, blamed a particular tragedy on witchcraft, or felt guilty or passive with respect to particular events. The authors found that in such cases, the child’s response to traumatic situations through spiritual traditions caused more strain and fear in the child.\footnote{Ibid., 175.} For example, some of the children considered difficult situations as God’s punishment or the devil’s doing. One of the children thought that his father had fallen ill due to witchcraft, which “caused additional strain for the boy” since he was not only upset about his father’s situation but also fearful that it might also happen to him. Also, one girl’s father died of possible dyspepsia and afterwards she was not able to go to the bathroom herself, out of fear that she would suffer the same fate.\footnote{Ibid., 175.} As can be seen, it is also important to address situations in which children use negative coping strategies that undermine resilience and note that we should also look beyond a spiritual context.\footnote{Vinueza, “Spirituality and the Resilience,” 11.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{spirituality-religion-meaning-making.png}
\caption{Spirituality, religion and meaning-making can often overlap, yet are separate concepts}
\end{figure}
2. Spirituality as a resilience factor among forced migrant children

It is simply not enough to satisfy the basic needs of those who migrate with things as food, water and shelter. Though important, recent developments in migration discourse have attracted funding from the international community for both trauma rehabilitation as well as for education in conflict or post-conflict settings. This is because of the idea that international communities should not just supply basic needs to those in conflict situations, but should also provide physiological and educational help in order to prevent further conflict, as well as aid those affected by conflict. It is against this backdrop that one should incorporate spirituality as a resilience factor. Maria Alejandra Andrade Vinueza demonstrates how spirituality is of the utmost importance for people “on the move”, since it is “inherent to every human being, it

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cannot be taken away […] [though] it can be negatively affected by external factors, it remains even when everything else is removed”. She continues by claiming that spirituality permeates an individual’s value system, which is the basis of their behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, spirituality responds to migrant children’s critical life questions, such as: Is my life worth living? What makes life unfair, and why? How does suffering exist if God is omnipresent? Does God exist? What is my role/purpose in the world? Are others more valuable than me? How can people hurt each other? Why does God allow it? What reasons do I have to fight for survival? Does God listen to my suffering? Will my suffering get better? Will it end? 

As discussed in chapter I, a socio-ecological model of both resilience and spirituality calls for a multidimensional approach to both concepts. The subsequent section therefore discusses migrant children’s spiritual development based on an “ecological system” of the individual child, spatial surroundings and relationships with others.

2.1 The individual

Faith and spirituality have been shown to provide children with a means of making sense of their experiences. According to Dawn Chatty et al., “spiritual collective memories” in the context of migrant communities allows for the construction of self-identity and self-understanding. Similarly, Rwanda Farah, a researcher studying the impact of prolonged forced migration among Sahrawi and Afghan migrant children, argues that children pick up on spiritual collective memories to explain traumatic events or to form their identities as migrants. For instance, Palestinian forced migrant children, through narratives and art, explain the death of family members or those close to them as “martyrdom”, and as a result they “infuse their individual experiences with a shared cultural meaning”. Furthermore, spiritual memories also give children a sense of hope and control as they provide meaning to their life situation. This grants them the ability to create a sense of continuity by constructing personal and spiritual narratives of their own selves.

2.1.1 Hope

Hope can serve as a source of strength and comfort during challenging situations. In her research, Mann calls attention to the scarcity of hope among Congolese migrants. Mann’s study of displaced Congolese children living in Tanzania involved more than 100 children between the ages of seven and 18. Children were interviewed over the course of 27 months concerning their experiences of war as well as life afterwards as migrants in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In an interview with an 18-year-old boy named Didier, Mann describes Didier’s anguish as he focused not on the past but rather on the “miserable character of his present life and the challenges it posed to his dreams and expectations for the future.”

She continues, “Most described an overwhelming sense of abjection […] to describe the sense of not only losing one’s place in the world, but the associated feelings of betrayal, humiliation and having been cast aside. These feelings were exacerbated by a sense of being suspended in a boring and meaningless present in which future was so uncertain and beyond control that is was at times unimaginable.”

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119 Ibid., 9.
121 Mann, “Beyond War,” 450.
122 Ibid., 451.
A central theme in Mann’s study was a sense of desperation as most considered themselves lost and without hope. Furthermore, not only did they feel as if they had been abandoned by the world, but they wrestled with internalizing the ideas that they were “useless and lazy beggars”, as they believed that is what Tanzanians thought of them.\(^{123}\) Mann concludes that it is not enough to focus simply on tragic events that children experience during conflict, but also the challenges of everyday life that she defines as “feelings of loss, deprivation and hardship”. For Mann, existential unease was at the core of these children’s situations.\(^{124}\)

Similarly, in a study done among Palestinian forced migrant children in Lebanon, Patrick O’Leary et al. argue for the importance of generating hope among migrant populations. They state, “hope building in particular is reported as a key component of healing for those who have experienced trauma, […] and is therefore an important part of a protective environment for children”.\(^{125}\) In their study, the authors found that certain aspects of life in the camps such as religion and faith brought positive results in terms of building children’s resilience. Faith and religion were used to bring about “hopeful thinking” which could be correlated with children’s positive wellbeing, particularly when it came to social and health problems.\(^{126}\)

2.2.2 Meaning-making

Often, research separates religion and spirituality, though recognizing that they are both part of a broader category. Within that broader category one finds an overlap between religion, spirituality and meaning-making. The need for meaning is a human reality, especially during periods of stress or difficulties. Ojalehto and Wang opine that spiritual meaning-making may be an important coping strategy among migrant children due to the fact that they may feel powerless in controlling events around them.\(^{127}\) In a study done on migrant children of war in Sri Lanka, Chandi Fernando and Michel Ferrari documented how resilient orphans did not emphasize the philosophical elements of Buddhism, but rather gave priority to the “action oriented rituals of Buddhism”, such as:

“Meditation, practicing loving-kindness, reciting gathas […], observing sil […], reading Jatha Kathava[…] listening to bana, worshipping the statues of Buddha, cultivation understanding about life’s circumstances, and trying to become a better person and reach a higher state of being in future lifetimes”.\(^{128}\)

According to the authors, such rituals allowed children to come to terms with both positive and negative experiences, through self-reflection.\(^{129}\) These findings are consistent with Metin Başoğlu’s et al. study on 1358 Yugoslav children survivors of war, which deemed religion as a coping strategy resulting in psychological wellbeing.\(^{130}\) Therefore, it may be concluded that spiritual meaning-making can aid in supporting migrant children’s development, since it

\(^{123}\) Mann, “Beyond War,” 451.
\(^{124}\) Ibid., 452.
\(^{125}\) Patrick O’Leary Aisha Hutchinson and Jason Squire, “Community-Based Child Protection with Palestinian Refugees In South Lebanon: Engendering Hope And Safety.” International Social Work 58, no. 5: 717.
\(^{129}\) Fernando Chandi and Michel Ferrari, “Spirituality and Resilience,” 70.
provides children with “cognitive schemas that enable children to make meaning out of chaos”\(^\text{131}\).

While spirituality in its various forms can serve as a source of resilience by providing hope and enabling meaning-making, it is also imperative to avoid relativism, guilt and/or passivism. In other words, while spirituality can serve in allowing children to make sense of the chaos around them, the aim should not be to reduce traumatic events to spiritual narratives and/or forget larger suffering that happens at both the micro and macro level. Although Vinueza points to Biblical narratives as sources of resilience among Christians who are facing challenges, she warns that over emphasizing the “spiritual context” can inhibit individuals and communities from dealing with the root of important “environmental, political or social” causes of suffering.\(^\text{132}\) For instance, a case study conducted among Vietnamese forced migrants in Canada found that collectively, the group reinterpreted sexual violence experienced by women when they escaped Vietnam.\(^\text{133}\) According to the study, the participants used Buddhist law to come to terms with the trauma. For them, the sexual abused endured by the women was punishment for their ancestors’ previous actions. Ergo, the participants did not think that the aggressors should be punished, since the victims were paying for their ancestor’s h\(\check{\text{on}}\).\(^\text{134}\)

![Figure 5. Relationship between resilience, spirituality, hope and meaning-making.](image)

2.2 Spatial surroundings

In the 1970s, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess termed the phrase “ecological self”, arguing that all species are unified and therefore connected in the global ecosystem.\(^\text{135}\) For instance, children identify and form their identities with respect to their home and its surroundings. If a child experiences their home being destroyed, they will feel that parts of themselves are also being destroyed and be impacted accordingly.\(^\text{136}\) In their book No Place to

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\(^{131}\) Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 136.


\(^{134}\) Atlani and Rousseau, “The Politics of Culture in Humanitarian Aid,” 443.


be a Child, social scientists James Gabarino, Kathleen Kostelny and Nancy Dubrow describe the effects of war on children by documenting their interviews and observations on children that had experienced war. According to the authors, the concept of a home is crucial while children form their identities and shape their image of the world.\textsuperscript{137} Article 27 of the CRC acknowledged that “the right of every child [is] to [have] a standard of living adequate to the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”.\textsuperscript{138} It is children’s right to have a space where they can play, work, learn to care, love and be curious. This is especially important for migrant children, since their “experience is especially concerned with ecological spaces of development, being chiefly defined by geographic displacement”.\textsuperscript{139} 

The Journal of Refugee Studies, while acknowledging that religion has at times been a source of conflict, states that it serves as a crucial anchor for migrants since it provides a “mobile” home that allows them to create a sense of collective identity.\textsuperscript{140} Spatial surroundings also allow migrant communities to recreate daily experiences from their homelands by “spiritualizing their context”.\textsuperscript{141} Celia McMichael carried out ethnographic research among migrant women who had experienced displacement and as a result had been resettled in Australia. According to her research, Islam was able to give these women a spiritual “mobile” home that “provides stability in the often unstable world of forced migrants and refugees”.\textsuperscript{142} In the words of McMichael,

> “Women draw upon the practices and ideologies of Islam, and in turn Islam shapes spaces, interactions, modes of thinking, and daily activities. In this way, Islam offers a sustaining thread in refugee women's lives and helps them to overcome the threat of discontinuity that arises with displacement.”\textsuperscript{143}

Similarly, Derek Summerfield highlights how Mayan migrants came to terms with being displaced by coming up with new traditions that dealt with their new situation, documenting how they would pray to mountain spirits in order for them to guide them in their journey.\textsuperscript{144} 

Migrant children have also been shown to deal with the loss of their homes through spiritual metaphors of land. Salvador Simo-Algo et al., established a preventive occupational therapy program for children of war in Kosovo, with spirituality as a central focus.\textsuperscript{145} When children were given the opportunity to express themselves through art, they drew images of burning houses, cadavers and barren lands.\textsuperscript{146} At the same time, while some children identify with the loss of their homeland, other children might also find comfort by focusing on the physical space that is their country of destination.\textsuperscript{147} There, spiritual spaces have shown to

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{139} Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 131.
\bibitem{141} Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 131-132.
\bibitem{143} McMichael, “‘Everywhere is Allah’s Place,’” 172.
\bibitem{146} Salvador Simo-Algado, \textit{et al.}, “Occupational Therapy Intervention,” 212.
\bibitem{147} Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 132.
\end{thebibliography}
provide a safe space that allows for a “collective expression of grief and emotional outlet in refugee crisis”. 148 Cambodian migrants identified religious pagodas as a safe space that allowed for improving their situations. Similarly, Christian churches have been seen as a place for “emotional expression” among migrant South Sudanese children. In a series of interviews, Gozdziak highlights how migrant Albanian Kosovar children found that prayer rooms gave them a space of comfort as well a space that could allow for mental and spiritual recovery from their experiences 149.

As can be seen, spiritual spaces have been proven to equip migrant children with an area for them to interact with others and the environment and thus providing them a safe space for cognitive, physical and spiritual development. The research highlighted above has displayed how migrant children identify with both their homelands and their ‘new’ homes as physical spaces that allow for “spiritual expression, as meaningful context for daily life and as symbolic objects of spiritual discourse”. 150 Therefore, it is important to listen to children’s voices when planning communal spaces and settlement planning in order to give children the opportunity the develop and take a role of responsibility in their surroundings. 151

2.3 Relationships

An ecological model of resilience and spirituality allows one to evaluate how different levels of the child’s life influence her or his spiritual development. As Fig. 4 shows, it is not enough to evaluate how spirituality promotes resilience at the individual level. Consequently, it is necessary to assess how spirituality fosters resilience through relationships with the transcendent, family and the community at large, given that these are the spheres in which children’s lives are embedded. Fig. 6 bellow, presents ways in which spirituality can foster resilience through an ecological model according to Emily Growford et al. 152 The following section explores how scholarship has observed the link between spirituality and various relationships and how such relationships contribute to healing, generating hope and resiliency. This is based on Crawford et al’s interpretation of the chart below, which can be divided into three broad categories i) relationship with the transcendent, ii) relationship with family and iii) relationship with the broader community.

150 Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 133.
2.3.1 Relationship with the transcendent

Returning to the definition of spirituality seen in chapter I, an important element of spirituality is a belief in the transcendent.\textsuperscript{153} It is not surprising to see that for migrant children who do not always experience a stable home or acceptance from their communities, transcendental figure(s) can often bring comfort. In many religious traditions, such figures are regularly depicted exhibiting unconditional love and caring. Migrant families often live in dangerous situations and usually do not decide to migrate based on one factor, but rather an array of reasons such as: security, financial stability, education and/or family reunification, to name a few. Currently, youth migration is an increasing global reality, with a growing number of children migrating on their own in order to escape factors such as poverty, discrimination, inequality and/or natural disasters.\textsuperscript{154} As a poignant example, according to the U.S Customs and Border Protection, 408,870 unaccompanied minors mostly from Mexico and Central America were apprehended in 2016.\textsuperscript{155} Such experiences can often lead to psychological trauma and the

\textsuperscript{153} See Chapter I: “Defining Spirituality”.
feeling of loneliness and abandonment. What is more, outside of the Western context, it is unusual for people to consider spirituality as separate from a divine/transcendental figure(s). For this reason, the subsequent section focuses on how a relationship with the transcendent can foster resilience among migrant children.

Crawford et al. are of the opinion that having faith in the divine gives children a sense of command, since it is a relationship that they feel they are able to control. Given the fact that spiritual traditions provide precise and clear-cut ‘guidelines’ as to how to please the divine, children are less likely to feel as if they will be let down by the divine, as long as they follow the rules provided to them. The authors argue that allowing children to have relationships in which they have a sense of control leads to lower levels of depression and anxiety, on account of their belief that by appeasing the divine, they will be able to improve their situation. Furthermore, in a study conducted looking at ten African American single mothers, psychologist Anne E. Brosky, found that praying to God was a way by which the mothers and their children coped with hardships. Other mothers found that a belief in God helped their children survive in their communities, while one mother argued that a belief in God was a way to teach her children about their role in a “scheme bigger than just the neighborhood”. Crawford quotes one mother as saying to her child.

“You’re not out here to please anybody but yourself and . . . I try to impress this upon them. It’s only one person that you have to answer to and that’s the Lord when you die and go away from here, you know.”

However, Crawford et al. warns that studies that show spirituality as a form of positive coping do not support the idea that a sense of spirituality in the child per se contributes to positive coping mechanisms. Rather, the authors argue that it is those migrants that approach spirituality in a “positive sense” that “benefit from their religious beliefs”. A belief in the transcendent has been shown to provide children with strength during difficult situations. According to Richardson E. Glenn, “the energy or force that drives a person from survival to self-actualization may be called quanta, chi, spirit, God, or resilience”. This “energy” is influenced by people’s belief in the transcendent. Glenn continues: “having such a faith in those forces fortifies the immune system of the body in addition to increasing self-efficacy and other resilient qualities”. Yet, as Dillen points out, Glenn’s concept of resilience equates it with the divine, which can be problematic. Dillen claims that such an approach forgets the transcendent aspect of God(s) and as such “when the energy for life itself is called divine, there is only room for an immanent concept of God”.

2.3.2 Relationship with family

Migrant children face many challenges before, during and after they have made the decision to migrate; and as is often the case, these experiences disturb family dynamics. In some instances, children and their families might be exposed to or forced to participate in violence in

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their countries of origin or in transit. Once in their country of destination, family roles can alter, since migrant children straddle both old and new cultures. Given the fact that they are younger and have easier access to education, migrant children tend to learn the host country’s language and cultural norms at a faster pace than their parents or loved ones. At times, this can be stressful on children’s parents since they feel as if their culture of origin is being lost on the next generation. Furthermore, in refugee camps in the United States, Cuban migrant children reported that one of their main stressors was being separated from their family members. Once settled in their new homes, unemployment among children’s caregivers and family conflicts were identified as triggers in children’s symptomatology. It is evident that when families suffer, children suffer as well.

According to Ungar, “a social ecological model of resilience [...] is dependent on a family’s ability to both access available resources that sustain individual and collective well-being, as well as participate effectively in the social discourse that defines which resources are culturally and contextually meaningful”. As has been argued, spirituality can help shape the manner in which individuals and communities approach situations of violence. As Froma Walsh, a leading international authority on family resilience theory, research, training, and practice, states: “Resilience is fostered by shared beliefs that increases options for effective functioning, problem-solving, healing, and growth”. Through her research, Walsh has demonstrated how different forms of spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation or other practices outside organized religion such as music and the arts can be “wellsprings for resilience” for families. Thus, they can motivate parents or other caregivers to care and worry about the wellbeing of children within the family.

2.3.1 Relationship with the community

Having shown how spirituality fosters resilience by way of a relationship with the transcendent and at the family level, it is also important to evaluate how a relationship with the larger community might foster resilience through spirituality. As they say, “it takes a village to raise a child”. In the words of Ojalehto and Wang:

“Collective spiritual schemas used by communities to explain suffering and trauma are often picked up intuitively by children, and cultural meaning systems directly support child development in contexts of adversity by moderating the impact of harmful stress.”

Several studies have shown how communal spiritual remembering of social violence is critical when it comes to the functioning of communities. Michael Wessells, a psychologist and expert in the field of forced migration and health, and Carlinda Monteiro, deputy director of the Christian Children’s Fund-Angola, explain how in discourses with displaced children in Angola, most referred to trauma idioms in the sense of families not being able to meet basic

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168 Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 133.
169 Ibid., 133.
needs. What is more, they observed that children did not interpret trauma at an individual level, but rather as social suffering. Their research showed how it was through spiritual rituals and ceremonies that locals dealt with trauma and loss.\textsuperscript{170} Spiritual rituals and meaning-making systems strengthen “a community’s sense of coherence, that is a subjective sense of [the] world as comprehensive, manageable and meaningful.”\textsuperscript{171}

In the context of Angola, spirituality is at the core of people’s existence. What is more, this spirituality extends not only to those who are living but also to their ancestors. Ancestors are revered and dignified through local customs and the continuing of tradition. According to Wessells and Monteiro:

> “In this belief system, spirituality is at the center of life, and local people interpret events in terms of spiritual processes rather than the mechanistic accounts familiar to most Westerners. Furthermore, they understand their well-being or suffering not as individual factors, but as expressions of harmony or tension between the living community and the ancestral world.”\textsuperscript{172}

Yet, due to being forced to leave their homes, migrant children and their families might find themselves isolated, which can at times lead to stressful life circumstances. A study done among migrant children in Denmark found that discrimination and isolation from community settings in the host country were more likely to cause psychological problems than traumatic events experienced during the pre-migration and migration stages.\textsuperscript{173}

Spiritual memories and stories allow for a sense of stability in times of chaos. Displaced Somalis told their children “idyllic stories of past family and community life” through times of war and chaos. According to Ruth Kever \textit{et al.}, “these stories of customs and practices that shaped their social life during the war provided them with a threat of continuity in their post-conflict lives.”\textsuperscript{174} Though spiritual rituals and ceremonies have been seen to foster resilience among migrant children, they are by no means static.\textsuperscript{175} Various scholars have shown that collective memory is “socially negotiated”, i.e: spiritual traditions are shaped, altered and determined by the “community’s narrative and discourse conventions” and that the “transmission of memories related to collective violence may also mirror the resilience communities exercise”.\textsuperscript{176} Furthermore a correlation between spiritual rituals and traditional healing methods and children’s developmental wellbeing has been found in different cultural contexts. Scholarship among Acholi communities in Uganda has shown how rituals that are connected with biomedical treatments allow for a “sense of calm” and control among former child soldiers.\textsuperscript{177}


\textsuperscript{171} Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 133.

\textsuperscript{172} Wessells and Monteiro, “Internally Displaced Angolans,” 71-72.


\textsuperscript{175} Wessells and Monteiro, “Internally Displaced Angolans,” 44.

\textsuperscript{176} Ruth Kevers, \textit{et al.}, “Remembering Collective Violence,” 631.

\textsuperscript{177} Ojalehto and Wang, “Children’s Spiritual Development,” 134.
CHAPTER III. THE ROLE OF FAITH COMMUNITIES

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing academic awareness of the value of children’s spirituality. Yet, it is also important to reflect on how emerging research can also influence practices such as education, religious formation, youth care institutions, personal development, as well as other settings. As has been demonstrated in chapter II, spirituality can provide a means of fostering resilience among different migrant communities by promoting individual and communal growth as well as supporting psychological wellbeing. With this in mind, faith-based organizations have a unique opportunity to foster resilience by nurturing spirituality among migrant children. This chapter will explore how Child Friendly Spaces (CFSs) have been implemented by humanitarian agencies during, as well as after, humanitarian crises. Based on current research, it will analyze how CFSs can serve as a model for faith based-organizations who aim to provide a spiritual space for migrant children.

1. Child Friendly Spaces

CFSs were first established by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 1999 during the Kosovo War as a way to give an “appropriate, community-based mechanism that would be useful on a broad scale.” Due to their success, CFSs were used as a response following emergencies in countries such as: Angola, Chad, Colombia, East Timor, El Salvador, India, Iran, Lebanon, Liberia, Russia, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Somalia, and Syria. Subsequently, research has shown that CFSs have numerous benefits, such as “flexibility, rapid start-up, scalability, low costs, adaptability to different contexts, and utility in mobilizing communities.” The main purpose of CFSs, broadly speaking, it to provide a stimulating space organized and shaped by local communities for children that supports their resilience. According the UNICEF’s guidelines on CFSs in emergencies,

“[CFS] specific objectives are to: (1) mobilize communities around the protection and well-being of all children, including highly vulnerable children; (2) provide opportunities for children to play, acquire contextually relevant skills, and receive social support; and (3) offer inter-sectorial support for all children in the realization of their rights.”

Due to their flexibility, CFSs have become one of the most popular response methods with respect to humanitarian intervention to help aid vulnerable children. Part of this flexibility is due to the fact that CFSs can be implemented at any location that is accessible to

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180 Ibid., 16.
the community. For instance, in Syria’s urban areas, CFSs have been assembled in apartment buildings. In South Sudan’s rural areas, CFSs have meanwhile been organized outside, under trees. Furthermore, there is flexibility when it comes to establishing programs, since it should be based primarily on the needs of the local population. As a response to Typhoon Haiyan, the Philippine Children’s Ministries Network (PCMN) established a CFS as a means of addressing what they considered were “gaps in the provision for children”. They established a CFS to provide children with a psychosocial camp that, according to PCMN, created “a youth friendly space, and develop[ed] a comprehensive programme for children in need of special protection which included assessment, support and referral, as well as alternative foster care”.  

CFSs allow for the participation of the communities involved, encouraging dialogue between aid organizations and local communities. Hence, when CFSs are implemented, parents, children and the wider community shape and structure them, and in turn this “empower(s) communities around children by building on community structures and engaging child, family, and community participation”. In collaboration with UNICEF, the Christian Children’s Fund (CCF) – a Christian charity organization – has established over 100 CFSs in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In Northern Uganda, they set up a CFSs for children three to six years old, where local communities were able to determine both the learning and recreational activities, as well as decide on the volunteers who would be working with the children. In this way, CFSs are always different depending on their context, given that the shape they take depends largely on the communities, both local and international, that are building them. In fact, for CFSs to work properly, they should always evolve through the partnership of the community, local partners and the local/national government. Children, parents, families, local leaders, workers and volunteers bring their own religious identities, spiritual convictions, traditions and sociocultural location to their participation in CFSs. It is therefore important to consider how all of these factors interact and how they can cultivate resilience. In most cases, CFSs are meant to serve a short-term purpose (6-15 months) before the transition is made to more sustainable programs such as ‘official’ schools. Yet, even after the transition has been made, CFSs can continue to deliver other benefits that official schools

183 Davis and Iltus, A Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces, 75.
185 According to their mission statement, PCMN is “a Christ-centered national network of Christian children’s ministries, local churches, mission groups and individuals which is committed to enhancing the Christian response. It seeks to facilitate a unified approach to children’s mission by linking the different key people in ministry. It also strives to strengthen current initiatives and encourage the development of other children’s ministries and to create a strong Christian voice on behalf of the children.” For more information see: http://www.peconline.org/commissions/pcmn.htm
187 Davis and Iltus, A Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces, 16-17.
188 Christian Children’s Fund’s goal is to “improve the quality of life for children, families and communities in developing countries in five key areas: health and nutrition; education; water, sanitation and hygiene; strengthening community organizations; and sustainable livelihood development.”
190 CFSs were originally established for children ages 7-13. Yet, they have been proven successful when adapted to younger children as well as adolescents.
191 Davis and Iltus, A Practical Guide for Developing Child Friendly Spaces, 17.
cannot provide. They can also be used for those children who cannot attend school.\(^{191}\) In an example that took place in Afghanistan, during the official launch of a new state school community leaders decided to continue the CFSSs “informal education activities” in subjects that children did not have access to at school.\(^{192}\) These subjects can vary depending on the context. For instance, rituals such as prayer, meditation or worship have been proven to give children psychosocial support and could be organized within CFSSs, given that schools might not provide the opportunity for children to participate in such rituals. However, even activities such as going for a walk in nature, listening to music or using art – as was the case for the Kosovar children of war – can prove beneficial in creating spiritual spaces that allow for children to connect with their self, the transcendent, others and the environment.\(^{193}\)

1. A space for children

Children’s physical and mental wellbeing means having access to safe spaces that are free from violence and instability. However, migrant children can be exposed to dangerous situations both in their country of origin and/or during the migratory process. Furthermore, once they have arrived at their country of destination, children might not have legal documentation (i.e. granted asylum, visas, residency status), which puts them at risk of other human rights violations, though possessing documentation does not necessarily mean that children will not fall victim to other types of discriminations.\(^{194}\) As a result, CFSSs can also serve a function in countries of destination, not only in countries that have experienced violence.

Usually, CFSSs are able to provide a safe space to play for young people of all ages, and give them the opportunity to have supportive social interaction and formal as well as informal education.\(^{195}\) By providing a safe space, CFSSs can help decrease anxiety among migrant children that experienced traumatic events in their country of origin, transit, or in their country of destination. In order to provide young people with such spaces, CFSSs workers and volunteers should be trained to provide young people with support in crisis situations. Hence, CFSSs workers are obliged to behave towards children in a merciful and compassionate way. This is crucial, since “being treated with kindness and compassion can help reassure children that the world is not a hostile place and that other people can help them cope with challenges such as the death of a parent or loved ones, the destruction of one’s home or disruption of schooling”.\(^{196}\)

As previously mentioned, CFSSs will only have success if there is meaningful participation from local communities. CFSSs should aim to supply a foundational space for young people’s spiritual development in their community. Research suggests that giving children “a sense of connectedness” to the wider community is one of the most proactive and successful ways to foster resilience among young people.\(^{197}\) Similarly, studies have shown that “relationality among human persons is posited as a key component of spirituality that also

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\(^{191}\) The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, *Guidelines For Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies*.


\(^{193}\) Vinueza. “Spirituality and the Resilience.” 10. See definition of spirituality in Chapter I.


\(^{196}\) Ibid., 32.

contributes to well-being”.

CFSs should work towards creating a space where “a variety of meanings can coexist and where there is sufficient sensitivity for individual and collective dynamics of appropriation and distancing of trauma-related memories”. Louise Rowling, an educator and school psychologist, insists on a holistic approach towards spirituality that is based on young people’s experiences and daily life. Such an approach should be “based on researching common themes of spirituality that imply a relationship between connectedness and well-being”.

1.2 Psychosocial support

Some of the main goals of CFSs are to provide psychosocial wellbeing among young people as well as to provide them with a space where they can heal from trying events through supportive schemes “that normalize life for children and enable positive social interaction”.

Some of these schemes include activities that promote “structured activities with peers and adults, informal education, and play and expressive activities that are culturally relevant”. Kathleen Kostelny, a researcher, evaluator, and program advisor in the fields of early childhood development and Michael Wessells, opine that such activities allow young people to overcome traumatic events and consequently develop life skills and abilities that foster resilience and therefore, provide hope. Kostelny and Wessells state, “CFSs help children regain a sense that things will be better and returning to ‘normal’ again”.

Kostelny and Wessells go further and explain that play and expressive activities are crucial in aiding children manage negative events. They state:

“In addition to promoting social interaction, play allows children the opportunity to work through and master difficult experiences. Expressive activities, such as drawing, drama, and storytelling, also help children relieve pent up feelings and make sense of stressful events. In addition, play contributes to children’s healthy development. Through play, children develop important cognitive, perceptual, and motor skills, and they exercise their imagination and creativity.”

Similarly, spirituality through play, has proven successful in helping children develop a language of God, and therefore provides opportunities for children to find spiritual direction in their lives, particularly through enabling them to confront and address the existential limits of their being. One example of this can be seen through Godly Play, and innovative approach towards religious education. Berryman describes Godly Play as play with the language of God and of God’s people. This method is based on the Montessori method that embraces the whole child – hands, heart, mind, sense and intuition. Play that both supports children’s spiritual development as well as how to deal with difficult situations can help foster children’s resilience. Though, Godly Play was originally meant for younger children, it has increasingly grown popular with all ages and could also serve as a tool when dealing with adolescents.

CFSs should be organized in a way that children and adolescents feel that the space belongs to them. As mentioned earlier, CFSs can be set up almost anywhere, as long as there is


201 Kostelny and Wessells, “Child Friendly Spaces,” 121.

202 Ibid., 121.

203 Ibid., 122.

204 Berryman, Godly Play: An imaginative Approach, 42.
space for young people to interact and participate in activities. However, when sessions are taking place, it is essential that CFSs are organized in a welcoming and appealing manner. Kostelny and Wessells suggest that they should highlight children and adolescents by showing their artwork, projects and/or toys.\footnote{Kostelny and Wessells, “Child Friendly Spaces,” 122.} According to the UNHCR guidelines, CFSs should be “physically, culturally and developmentally appropriate, providing adequate space for small groups to conduct different activities simultaneously”.\footnote{The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, \textit{Guidelines For Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies}, 13.} While UNHCR warns about designing CFSs to resemble a place of worship, certain faith-based organizations may have access to useful spaces in various religious buildings. Therefore, while the space may resemble a particular tradition, an attempt should be made to create space for plurality and depending on the context, it should not be assumed that every child is familiar with the traditions of the majority group.\footnote{Berryman, \textit{Godly Play: An imaginative Approach}, 30.}

Likewise, Berryman demonstrates the importance of the classroom. According to him, children are invited to enter into the Godly play space and therefore it is their choice whether to enter and to what extent they are ready to do so. It is important that this room is not ‘over-adulted’ as this takes away from the community of children and their sense that the journey is their own.\footnote{Ibid., 29.} In a parish in North Ormesby, Britain, a highly deprived community, Godly play has proved successful since 2006. The aim in establishing a Godly playroom was to provide children with a safe space to “discover more about themselves, about the community and about God”.\footnote{Godly Play, “Urban and ‘Unchurched’ Children”, http://www.godlyplay.uk/contexts/urbanandunchurched-children/ [accessed May 10, 2017].} In a recent report published by the Guardian shows how for several years Middlesbrough town center and the community of North Ormesby have had the highest proportion of asylum seekers in England.\footnote{Eva Thöne and Laura Delle, “It’s A Shambles’: Data Shows Most Asylum Seekers Put in Poorest Parts Of Britain”. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/09/its-a-shambles-data-shows-most-asylum-seekers-put-in-poorest-parts-of-britain?CMP=share_btn_fb [accessed May 10, 2017].} As a result, they had become a regular part of the parish’s life and according to the senior chaplin, Reverend Dominic Black, the children have responded very richly to the experience of Godly Play. Being part of the church, a community that warmly welcomes them “is an important part of their finding belonging and meaning in this strange cold land”.\footnote{Dominic Black, “Re: Godly Play”. Email, 2017.} Activities such as Godly Play are able to develop life skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, correspondence and innovativeness.\footnote{Kostelny and Wessells, “Child Friendly Spaces,” 122.}

Activities that encourage spiritual development in order to foster resilience can vary widely. In Sri Lanka, displaced children of war from the age of five to 19 were encouraged to construct “sand tray narratives” using 15 figurines and then tell a story based on their sand trays. Most children used narratives from the Buddhist and Christian traditions to mirror their own. Furthermore, they were encouraged to discuss political issues in which they used both Christian and Buddhist rituals to tell their stories of birth, life and death as it happened away from their home.\footnote{Chandi and Ferrari, “Spirituality and Resilience,” 57-65.”} Rebecca Nye argues that allowing children to use their imagination allows...
for “spiritual skills” to develop as they “sift through layers of meaning and make new discoveries”. Nye encourages educators to include “imaginative ‘warm up’ exercises” as well as to take children’s “off-the-wall suggestions” seriously. Lastly, Nye emphasizes the importance of giving children the chance to pick their own activities, whether it be painting, drawing, reading, etc. Activities like these give children’s spirituality preference for its own sake.

Activities that are more outside traditional religious narratives can also give children the opportunity to express themselves through drawing, singing, dancing or group-based activities such as playing sports together. In Angola, CCF in collaboration with Save the Children established a “community-based intervention program”, which aimed to give internally displaced children of war a space to play and “develop physical and social competencies and nourish positive interactions between children and adults”. Other schemes could include spending time in nature, for example going to the sea, walking in the forest, gardening, to name a few examples. The activities have shown to bring about experiences of peace and wellbeing. Thus, it is crucial that CFSs workers and volunteers be trained in different methodologies that allow them to set up activities that are appropriate for young people of different ages as well as different genders.

1.3 Challenges

As mentioned, CFSs aim to provide aid by way of a short or medium-term effort. However, sometimes the help given can be of a more long-term variety, such as with respect to non-educational learning, which official schools cannot provide. However it should be noted that on occasion, there is a risk of going on for too long and either becoming irrelevant or unsuitable to the specific situation. It is important that CFSs do not appropriate the function of other institutions, which could weaken local communities. Furthermore, it is imperative that there is meaningful participation in the “planning, design and operations” of CFSs. According to the guidelines of CFSs implementation by UNICEF, there is a tendency for aid organizations and their local partners to want to establish CFSs as fast as possible and only take children’s needs into consideration as a secondary thought. As a result, children may become passive agents who have no say in deciding their future needs and aspirations as well as coming up with solutions to their challenges.

Coordination is also a significant challenge when it comes to the implementation of CFSs, on account of three main reasons. First of all, CFSs are dependent on funding and as a result, many organizations rush to implement their programs in order to gain advantage over other aid organizations. Because of this, CFSs are set up in a non-collaborative manner in order to provide UN donors with the “quick fix” they demand. Secondly, given their success, CFSs are often seen as “a frontline response to children’s needs”, leading to a great deal of them being set up by aid organizations. Due to the chaotic situations in which most CFSs are implemented, it is difficult to keep track of the activities being carried out by multiple agencies. Often, there are no regulations put in place to make sure that agencies work in a collaborative manner. Finally, because of the nature of CFSs, they function within the domains of “protection,

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214 Nye, Children’s Spirituality, 50.
215 Ibid., 50.
217 Raftopoulos, Glen. “‘It’s that knowing that you are not alone,’” 154.
education and mental health”. In the words of Kostelny and Wessells,

“It has been inherently challenging to reach across the respective protection and education clusters as well as the coordination subgroup that often forms around mental health and psychosocial support. Each coordination group is busy with its own areas of technical need, and time pressures make it difficult for practitioners to attend multiple coordination meetings.”

It is therefore important for organizations to attempt a multi-sectional and interdisciplinary approach in order to “harmonize approaches and provide comprehensive coverage while avoiding gaps”.

2. Spirituality in practice

Spirituality should always be grounded on life events and experiences. Therefore, it is crucial for CFSs workers and volunteers to be perceptive towards signs of spirituality, as well as to be aware of what it could add to programs that are responsible for the care of children. Daniel G. Scott and Douglas Magnuson, experts in the field of child spirituality, add that it is also necessary to take into account the spiritual orientation of the multiple players involved in CFSs, as well as how these “interactions might benefit from deliberate attention to spirituality and its role in professional care”. What follows suggests different approaches in considering the role of spirituality in CFSs, based on Scott and Magnusons’ research on the themes of spirituality in childcare.

2.1 Gift giving

Scott and Magnusons differentiate between two different approaches when it comes to thinking and working in the field of child spirituality and care: the immanent sphere and the transcendent sphere. The authors label these two ‘spheres’ as two critical points in understanding children’s spirituality. According to them, the immanent is found within the “economy of exchange”, while the transcendent is understood through the metaphor of gift giving. Within the sphere of the immanent, practices are based on an “economy of exchange” – in other words, childcare workers invest in the development of children while having a future expectation in mind. These expectations can vary, and should not be assumed to be negative. For instance, adults might ‘invest’ in children in order for them to be able to contribute to society in the future by developing different life skills and abilities. As stated by Scott and Magnusons, “almost every program […] with difficult young people identifies some outcome variable with young people against, which the effectiveness of the initiative is measured”. This implies the notion that the results of said outcome measure the “quality of the program”.

For instance, imagine a young girl, whose parents have died trying to cross the border between Mexico and the United States. She is now living with her mother’s family in the United States and is having a hard time adjusting to her new life, given the trauma that she has
experienced. She is encouraged to attend a program for migrant children at their families’ church, where she realizes that if she does what those who are in a power of authority ask her to do, she will be rewarded even though she does not feel as if these actions are natural or honest. If she refuses or does not respond to those rewards, she might be punished. She may know that those in charge care about her; still she is rewarded for changing and re-taught or punished for failing to do so.

Such programs attempt to shape children that have experienced traumatic events and gear them towards positive social expectations. Nevertheless, Scott and Magnuson are critical of such approaches due to their contractual nature, since if “one or the other parties break their contract, the relationship is over […] Moreover, the relationship is bound by the length and terms of the contract. It is a reciprocal agreement between two parties, and the contract can be terminated at any time by either party”. Rather, they argue that in order to adequately nurture and care for children’s spirituality, it is important to put aside such diagnostic and free-market language and move towards a language of gift giving that does not await or anticipate a gift in return in the form of “fulfillment or satisfaction of adult’s needs”. For Scott and Magnuson, the metaphor of gift giving is “healing, invoking the possibility of transcending a state of permanent woundedness […] it operates outside this economy of production and exchange […] [it] does not ask for a return and does not possess”.

This is particularly important when it comes to migrant children that have been displaced from their homes and in the process may have been exploited due to their vulnerable state of not only being migrants, but children as well. Therefore, it is crucial that affection and tenderness be exhibited towards them no matter what they express in return. In the context of CFSs, workers should be encouraged to not respond to children in a “scripted way”. Furthermore, the metaphor of gift giving encourages CFSs workers to allow for mystery and transformation instead of a carefully managed framework. The starting point is not that adults are the agents of change but rather, it is in letting go of such assumptions and having faith that spirituality in the context of CFSs will foster resilience and thus change.

2.2 Suffering and forgiveness

An important aspect in children’s spiritual development is taking their suffering seriously. Taking suffering seriously not only allows children to learn from their pain but it is the only way to effectively encourage healing and forgiveness. Spiritual development should not have the goal of making suffering disappear but rather to help focus on the good that has come out of suffering, in order to imagine new possibilities. Therefore, when children express this pain in their behavior, a spiritual reading should aim to understand the cause of such behavior, rather than focus on the behavior itself. What it more, workers in CFSs should attempt to create an environment where children are loved – no matter their behavior. Children should feel like they will be looked after regardless of their behavior or how the relate to those in charge. James Anglin, a child and youth care worker, also reminds us that those working in CFSs might also be in pain due to the pressure of their work. The children often found in CFSs have experienced traumatic events that have left them with anger and aggression. Such emotions can sometimes transfer over to staff, who sometimes exhibit them as well in the form

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229 Ibid., 451.
230 Ibid., 451.
231 Ibid., 452.
of frustration and angry responses towards the children. Hence, it is important that their pain also be acknowledged.

Migrant children may have experienced stressful situations either in their country of origin, on their flight or in their country of destination. These experiences may affect their behavior and adults’ reaction to these behaviors may affect their healing process.\(^{233}\) If teachers and staff in CFSs deal with disruptive behavior from children by punishing children from activities or other privileges, they are in fact ignoring the root of the problem. For Scott and Magnuson, “acts of forgiveness become a second from of generosity and care […] staff take the first responsibility to alter the relationship, and forgiveness provides the ground for transformation”.\(^{234}\) Staff then becomes active symbols of forgiveness and as a result, children may be able to learn to forgive those who have harmed them. According to psychologist Philip H. Friedman, a “core solution” to psychological problems is forgiveness, which he defines as the process of letting go of negative emotions and at the same time embracing forgiveness “towards oneself, God and other groups of people”. What is more, one must actively choose and decide to forgive on ones own.\(^{235}\) Consequently, acts of forgiveness give children the possibility to transform their pain into something productive and to grow from that pain.

2.3 Creation and rebirth

Such transformation leads to an individual’s development with respect to the final theme of this paper: creation and rebirth. CFSs’ ultimate goal should be to create the experience of “re-creation of program, of setting, of relationship and of moments”, as Scott and Magnuson argue.\(^{236}\) By creating a safe space for children, CFSs allow for new possibilities to be created during the various activities in order for children to discover their new identities and directions. Activities should encourage healthy methods of problem resolution and encourage hope. If a child experiences different ways of being and relating to others, it may allow her or him to process a change in understanding and thus small actions can turn into building blocks to be imitated and molded by children.

At the same time, it is important to look beyond teaching what one might consider good behavior. Teaching children to act ‘properly’ is one-dimensional since it ignores the search for meaning that is innate in all people. Scott and Magnuson state, “doing the right thing does not address the urge for significance, the human desire to realize value, or the existential yearning for attention to ‘ultimate concerns’ or the absolute”.\(^{237}\) A focus on spirituality allows for a “pursuit of value” to go beyond the self towards “ultimate concerns”. CFSs should therefore be a place where children see and learn more than societal rules, but rather are given the opportunity to live and experience full lives.\(^{238}\) For instance, if possible, CFSs could allow children to have access to animals, where they are encouraged to take care of them. Alternatively, they can provide children with access to music, dance or other arts. Spirituality, above all, should be found in concrete practices that allow children to move past their troubles and fears. In the words of Scott and Magnuson, “rebirth and restoration requires resiliency, and

\(^{233}\) Scott and Magnuson, “Integrating Spiritual Development,” 453.

\(^{234}\) Ibid., 453.


\(^{236}\) Scott and Magnuson, “Integrating Spiritual Development,” 453.

\(^{237}\) Ibid., 454.

\(^{238}\) Ibid., 454.
resiliency requires a different image of acting or being to use as a building block to be copied and amplified in a child’s life”.

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 456.
CONCLUSION

Spirituality has been shown to be a key resource in enabling resilience in children. Though it is difficult to define, there are some constants that can be found when evaluating definitions of spirituality: meaning-making, renewal and communality. As this paper has demonstrated, one of the main roles of spirituality is to provide a system of meaning, which is important at both the individual and communal level. As well as a providing a system of meaning, transformation of the self is intrinsic to spirituality. Migrant children, through spiritual practices, are encouraged to grow, transform and move past their painful experiences. The relational aspect of spirituality is also critical. Most definitions of spirituality include a relationship with God (the divine), creation (nature), family, and community. In the words of Brian J. Zinnbauer and Kenneth I. Pargament, spirituality is “feelings or experiences of connectedness or relationship with sacred beings or forces […] or feelings of interconnectedness with the world and living things”. As has been seen, spirituality has an effect on children’s resilience, given that it is able to provide them with meaning to the challenges they face and hope as a transformative agent, while allowing for relationships to be built based on trust and solidarity.

At the same time, while spirituality can be described as a source of energy that strengthens resilience, one must be careful not to always paint it in a positive light, or functionalize it. Spirituality, like religion, is always more than just a function of people’s wellbeing. For many communities, spirituality is intrinsically connected to religion and therefore it is important to examine how children within various faiths are allowed to express their own spirituality. Furthermore, a critical view of spirituality is needed. For example, while empirical research has shown that a belief in a loving and caring God can facilitate healing, it has also been shown that a belief in a retributive and retaliatory God can amount to an obstacle to healing. Thus, it is important to nurture in children a positive perception of God – whether this is a personal God or a godly power. What is more, as has been demonstrated here, spirituality can also be found outside of the context of religion. More research is needed in both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ worship contexts. According to Nye and Ratcliff, differences and similarities between the spirituality of children within the religious context and those outside of it remain largely uninvestigated.

As has been seen, spirituality can play an important role for migrant children’s resilience. However, as with anything else, it requires a critical approach. Scholars have defined resilience as “a metaphor for the ability of individuals to recover from exposure to chronic and acute stress”. Even though such recovery depends on resources from the wider environment, it is considered intrapersonal and as a result the study of resilience can sometimes focus on the isolated individual as the place where change occurs. Such an understanding of resilience ignores social events that create conditions for growth. In this vein, Richard M. Lener, professor of psychology at Tufts University, calls for a more contextualized understanding of resilience. What is more, resilience can often be regarded as simply the forgetting of trauma. Yet Dillen argues “a caring approach based on resilience does not have the intention of implying that scars

240 Miner and Dowson, “Spirituality as a Key Resource,” 7.
disappear, but it seeks to focus on the good skin around the scars, and to stimulate this good skin.\textsuperscript{245}

Furthermore, Catherine Panter-Brick and Mark Eggerman warn of the ethical dilemma of using ‘hope’ as a builder of resilience. According to the authors, humanitarian interventions often lead to disappointment among migrant populations since such interventions sometimes forget to take into account the fact that there is a “shrinking configuration of social opportunities, widening inequalities, poor distribution of capital, and inequitable state policies”.\textsuperscript{246} The authors conclude that while building hope is important, it is crucial to examine how social mobility presents itself and its role in the limits of building hope. In this light, one must ask the question if a move should be made to go beyond resilience and towards human flourishing? It is simply not enough to evaluate how people cope in traumatic situations, but it is important to create spaces where people are allowed to flourish. More empirical research is needed in the field of human flourishing, where scholars can evaluate what people need in order to flourish and what institutions prevent this from happening.

While children need safe spaces to develop a healthy spirituality, this mostly starts in the home and with the family. More research needs to be done in order to evaluate various coping strategies at the family level. In order for spirituality to work in fostering resilience, it is crucial that researchers, educators and volunteers collaborate with children’s main caregivers. Here, Vinueza suggests “pastoral counseling, parents’ groups and workshops” as practical applications to support children’s experience of resilience as well as to support healthy relationships in the family context, thus “contribute[ing] significantly to a feeling of going back to normality and stability”.\textsuperscript{247} Furthermore, a better understanding of the complexity of the family structure is required. For example, it is not enough to examine how parents or caregivers influence the child, but how the child can be an active agent, influencing her or his caregivers’ spirituality as well as that of their siblings or even extended family should also be looked at. In order to get a better impression of how family dynamics and narratives might influence a child’s spirituality, and vice-versa, both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies are needed.

Finally, faith-based organizations have been some of the leading actors in responding to the needs of migrants.\textsuperscript{248} In order to continue to respond adequately, they need to pursue thoughtful theological reflection that allows for a contextual-hermeneutical approach to both sacred texts and traditions in light of the lived experiences of migrant children, both at the micro and macro level. It is furthermore not enough to examine how spirituality can play a key role in children’s resilience, but researching how their own lived experience of resilience as active agents can influence spirituality is also critical. A theology of migrant children’s spirituality can help us re-evaluate and reinterpret current understandings of concepts such as the home, family, and church. This must be done with the help of both children and adults, given that “to really

\textsuperscript{245} Dillen, “The Resilience of Children and Spirituality,” 64.
understand, we must learn to understand together with them.”\textsuperscript{249} This means listening to migrant children and their experiences in order to heal together with them. Here I would like refer to St. John of the Cross – a 17\textsuperscript{th} century Spanish mystic who recognized human beings’ continuous search for meaning:\textsuperscript{250}

\textit{Sabor de bien que es finito,}
\textit{Lo más que puede llegar,}
\textit{Es cansar el apetito}
\textit{Y estragar el paladar;}
\textit{Y así, por todo dulzura}
\textit{Nunca yo me perderé,}
\textit{Sino por un no sé qué}
\textit{Que se halla por ventura
....}

\textit{Mas emplea su cuidado}
\textit{Quién se quiere aventajar,}
\textit{En lo que está por ganar,}
\textit{Que en lo que tiene ganado;}
\textit{Y así, para más altura}
\textit{Yo siempre me inclinaré}
\textit{Sobre todo a un no sé qué}
\textit{Que se halla por ventura

Find in worldly goods delight
Is at the most a weariness and satiated appetite
And tired paste, more or less.
For all life’s sweets that have their sting
I’ll never lose my way, if not
For some unknown I don’t know what
That some most lucky change may bring

...}

\textit{The [wo]man who wants to make his way}
\textit{Puts all his [her] care not to what’s gained}
\textit{But what is yet to be attained.}
\textit{So I who wish to mount, not stay}
\textit{Below, find it a normal thing}
\textit{To scale the lights, climb to the peak}
\textit{To choose- I don’t know what- and seek
What some most happy change may bring.
