The integration of asylum seeking and refugee children: resilience in the face of adversity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Forced migration, particularly as it applies to children, tends to be viewed as a fraught and difficult experience. As a result, the vulnerability of young forced migrants has tended to dominate the literature, especially within quantitative studies. Concerns abound in relation to the ability of refugees to rebuild their lives and to integrate into new countries, particularly if they come from places that are considered very different from their reception countries. These differences might include the languages spoken, political systems in place, or the ethnic, religious, or cultural backgrounds of the majority population. However, increasing emphasis is now being placed on the resilience of child refugees, with attention drawn to their sense of agency, their capacities, and their efforts to cope with the challenges they face. This is especially highlighted in qualitative studies where the perspectives and voices of migrant children are privileged (e.g. Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Smyth et al., 2015; Lind, 2017).

This chapter discusses the experiences of both refugee children who are unaccompanied by parents, guardians, or customary caregivers, and refugee children who are in the care of their parents and are thus accompanied. Internationally, in recent years, the focus of research has tended to be on unaccompanied refugee children, perhaps partly due to the vulnerability associated with this group. As Kanics (2016) notes, 'children migrating with their families still remain unseen and their stories untold' (p. 22). Accompanied refugee children are often considered to be less vulnerable, although more recent literature has begun to question this perception and draw attention to the dearth of research in relation to this group (O'Connell Davidson and Farrow, 2007), particularly research that privileges these children's own experiences (Ottosson et al., 2016). This research lacuna will be reflected here. While there will be a greater focus on unaccompanied refugee children, the experiences of accompanied children will also be considered.

This chapter argues that, while refugee children are vulnerable in many respects, they are also remarkably resilient in the face of the many challenges they experience. The chapter aims to show that this resilience has the potential to serve as an important facilitator, by helping children to adapt

to their new environment while also maintaining connections with their culture of origin. However, to understand the challenges that refugee children face as they embark on life in a new country, it is essential to contextualize them in relation to their past experiences. This chapter firstly addresses children's pre-migration circumstances as well as their experiences of travel and transit. It argues that these experiences, as well as the circumstances in the country where they claim asylum or are resettled, will impact their adjustment to their new country and their psycho-social well-being.

2 THE EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

2.1 Pre-migration Experiences

Often, refugee children's experiences are categorized into pre-migration and postmigration domains, although the challenges of migration and transit are also recognized (e.g. Bhabha, 2014; European Union Committee, 2016; Mougne, 2010; Nardone and Correa-Velez, 2015). Regarding the pre-migration context, many refugee children come from situations of conflict, poverty, and lack of opportunity, often facing persecution of various forms and witnessing horrific events. The literature tends to refer to children fleeing war and violence, harmful cultural practices, and human rights violations more generally (Hopkins and Hill, 2008; Vervliet et al., 2015). Pre-migration lives are thus characterized by significant stress and, in many cases, trauma. In a study which included interviews with 30 unaccompanied children living in Scotland, Hopkins and Hill (2008) found that many did not want to talk about their pre-migration experiences. One participant stated: 'It is very painful for me to talk about life. It gives me bad thought' ('Junior', cited in Hopkins and Hill, 2008, p. 260). Because of this reluctance to talk, Hopkins and Hill (2008) characterize their insights into the young people's pre-flight experiences as 'partial'. However, the data they managed to gather suggested that young people experienced violence, loss, separation, and trauma. One young person stated: 'I lost my family. I lost my brother. I lost my father. I lost everything' ('Prince', cited in Hopkins and Hill, 2008, p. 261). While the findings of this study are not generalizable, they are consistent with other research (e.g. Abuminah and Blower, 2010; Correa-Velez and Nardone, 2014), as well as with our general understandings about the pre-migration lives of many refugee children.

Yet, in addition to these difficult and traumatic experiences, the pre-migration period also comprises elements of 'ordinariness' (Kohli, 2006). Even when severe conflict is taking place, there is evidence that people, perhaps especially children, attempt to reclaim some ordinary aspects of their lives, including attending school and playing with friends. While there is much evidence of family members being separated from one another, there are also of course families that continue to live together, creating a home and some type of normality amidst the chaos of war and conflict: they eat, work, play, talk, and pray together. For example, in my research with unaccompanied children in Ireland

(Ní Raghallaigh, 2007), one young person spoke about what he and his mother used to do together in their country of origin: 'What kind of things we would [do] . . . She would read me stories, she would, we would play games, cards . . . eh, we would cook, you know, we would . . .' (Young person, cited in Ní Raghallaigh, 2007, p. 140).

Thus, this young person had memories of ordinary everyday interactions with his mother. While the focus of this chapter is on adaptation within the post-migration context, the past – including positive experiences such as the one above – cannot be forgotten. Indeed, the distinction between pre- and post-migration phases is not clear cut. Many researchers have shifted their attention from looking predominately at pre-migration challenges to exploring how these past experiences interact with ongoing exile-related stressors 'to produce and maintain the high levels of distress so commonly reported in the literature' (Miller et al., 2002, p. 342). Challenges relating to each phase will inevitably shape each other, as will any positive experiences.

2.2 Experiences during the Migratory Journey/Transit

Having managed to leave their home country, refugee children continue to face challenges and stressors during their migration or during transit (when they live temporarily in another location). These circumstances have become better known, at least in Europe, during recent years, as the media has paid increased attention to children's hazardous journeys and the difficult conditions in which they live on the frontiers of Europe. The drowning of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy whose family was attempting to reach Greece, was particularly noteworthy in terms of the global attention that it drew to the refugee 'crisis' and to the life-or-death dangers the 'crisis' poses to children. Even when refugee children do not themselves die during the journey, they often witness the deaths of others, including family members. Children are also at risk of various forms of abuse, including financial and sexual exploitation, and often also experience a fear of people in authority, especially given the increased policing of borders in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere (Bhabha, 2014). In her study of Afghan unaccompanied minors, Mougne (2010) reported on their experiences of detention, beatings, and forced separation from siblings, among other adversities. Elsewhere, Nardone and Correa-Velez (2015) refer to unaccompanied minors being exposed to 'extreme levels of vulnerability' (p. 295) in their journeys to Australia. One young person in their study described the boat journey as follows:

> The boat journey was quite frightening; we were in the sea for 16 days in a rather small boat. The boat engine failed a few times. I could sense death with every wave that hit our boat and I knew this is a life or death journey but I also knew that going back was not an option since

it would equate to death. (Afghan-born young person, cited in Nardone and Correa-Velez, 2015, p. 306)

Other literature makes reference to the stress of living in unsafe conditions or of not having anywhere to live while in transit (e.g. European Union Committee, 2016; Mougne, 2010; Vervliet et al., 2015). It must be remembered that the vast majority of child refugees live in overcrowded refugee camps or urban settlements near their home countries. Bhabha (2014) argues that many of these children are 'trapped in a limbo of temporary permanence, dependence, and despair, where only periodic aid handouts from international organisations or intracamp fights interrupt the endless flow of boredom and depression induced by the lack of prospects' (p. 209).

2.3 Post-migration Experiences

Given the difficult experiences encountered prior to migration and during the migratory journey, for many refugee children, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, arrival at a point of safety will often bring an initial sense of relief, joy, and perhaps excitement. However, the post-migration period is also characterized by a multitude of challenges and stressors. Rather than dwelling on previous experiences in their countries of origin and during their journeys, many refugee children are preoccupied particularly by the day-today challenges that face them in their new environment (Miller, 1999). Often, there is a gap between the expectations of exile and the realities that are encountered. For example, participants in one study referred to the fact that they had fled one war in Somalia only to encounter another war in their country of resettlement (the United States) (Betancourt et al., 2015).

The exile-related challenges faced by refugee children are multiple and varied. They face the normative challenges of childhood and adolescence, including issues associated with identity development, schooling, and friendships. In addition, they face particular difficulties related to their status as asylum seekers or refugees. For instance, they may experience hostility, bullying, and racism in their new country (Ayotte, 2000; German, 2004; Stanley, 2001). They may also, in the initial phase at least, face communication and language problems (Hopkins and Hill, 2006), as well as difficulties learning about and adjusting to a new and different culture, where they exist as 'strangers in a strange land' (Kohli and Mather, 2003, p. 201). As Lunneblad (2017) argues in relation to the integration of refugee children in Sweden, 'being in a new context, as many refugees are, and not knowing the day-to-day routines nor even what counts as tactful behavior, can mean being unable to participate in a society on equal terms with others' (p. 361).

While many of the exile-related challenges faced by unaccompanied minors are similar to those faced by other refugee children, some are specific to their circumstances as young people separated from their parents, or are at least likely to be experienced more acutely. Unaccompanied children may experience a range of different emotions, including relief at having escaped from an unsafe situation, worry about their parents and other family members who are left behind, and guilt at having been able to leave when others had to stay (Christiansen and Foighel, 1990). In addition, many may feel a sense of responsibility to achieve refugee status and to provide for family members at home (Vervliet et al., 2015). Ottoson et al. (2016) suggest that accompanied children are more protected from difficulties and responsibilites than those seeking asylum alone. As will be discussed below, the presence of parents may be protective in many respects but can also lead to particular difficulties for accompanied refugee children.

2.3.1 Negotiating asylum and care systems

Accompanied refugee children may be somewhat buffered from the stress associated with the asylum process due to the fact that their parents usually go through the process on their behalf, or at least bear the responsibility for negotiating with bureaucracies at this time. Parents, understandably, want to protect their children from the asylum process. In addition – and partly as a consequence – many states tend to view children as 'appendages' (Kanics, 2016, p. 18), rather than as 'separate individuals who have rights and who may have international protection needs, perhaps even a stronger claim than that of their parents' (Kanics, 2016, p. 18). For many accompanied children, this is likely to result in them having no voice vis-à-vis their asylum claim and feeling no sense of control over their futures, although increasing emphasis is being placed on the political agency of children in relation to immigration procedures (Lind, 2017). Also, even when parents make efforts to shield them, accompanied children are likely to be negatively impacted by the asylum process both because of the stress that their parents are under and because of their own worries and concerns about the outcome and about the possibility of deportation. Just as parents seek to protect their children from the stresses of the process, children might themselves attempt to protect their parents by not discussing their concerns and worries with them.

While *unaccompanied* children have, to some degree, a stronger voice than their accompanied peers, facing the challenges of the system without parental support is daunting. The stress and anxiety associated with the asylum process has been widely referenced (Sourander, 1998; Stanley, 2001; Hopkins and Hill, 2006; Crawley, 2010; Wade et al., 2012). Bhabha (2014) argues that asylum seeking children are faced with 'suspicion, condescension, and a patriarchal perspective that denies the significance of children as political agents while highlighting their culpability as irresponsible and

irregular migrants' (p. 207). Elsewhere, Wade (2009, p. 395) contends that the uncertainties caused by the process 'are often overwhelming for young people'. The impact of this uncertainty can be pervasive, affecting all elements of their lives, including relationships with loved ones at home and in the new environment, education, psychological recovery, establishment of identity, and planning for the future. Of particular note is the sense of uncertainty that leads to problems in forming trusting relationships with others (Ní Raghallaigh, 2014). This in turn has an impact on care placements because of the stress experienced not only by young people but also by carers who fear that the children they have grown to love will not be 'successful' with their claims for asylum and will utimately be deported (Ní Raghallaigh, 2013). In effect, while care placements are supposed to provide a sense of security, the ability to settle and feel a sense of stability presents a challenge in the context of uncertainty about asylum applications. As has been noted, uncertainty about the future 'works against any sense of emotional security or permanence' (Larkin, 2015, p. 303). Wade et al. (2012) discuss the difficulties practitioners encounter when trying to find a balance between helping young people feel a sense of security and enabling them to feel realistic about the future. The anxieties created by the asylum process are further compounded by the lengthy nature of the process. Indeed, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, the rights of child refugees to participate fully in society in a variety of ways is curtailed by their status as asylum seekers. In addition, in most Western countries, unaccompanied minors have to negotiate not only the asylum process but also a system of care. They have to adjust to the rigours of an unfamiliar bureaucracy, to being looked after by professionals, and to living in settings which may or may not correspond to their needs (Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh, 2017).

2.3.2 Loss, change and adaptation

Many of the stressors experienced by those in exile are associated with loss (Ajduković & Ajduković, 1993; Behnia, 2004; Betancourt et al., 2015; Delaney, 2006; Miller, 1999). Refugees routinely experience loss of family, friends, community, country, culture, language, identity, self-esteem/confidence, status, education, and plans for the future (German, 2004; Betancourt et al., 2015). Relationship losses are of course particularly challenging for refugee children, and may be further complicated if they have witnessed loved ones being killed in traumatic circumstances, as is sometimes the case (Hopkins and Hill, 2006; Correa-Velez and Nardone, 2014; Pacione et al., 2013). Unaccompanied minors usually begin their new lives separated from all family members, and thus their losses are particularly stark. While accompanied children may not have experienced the loss of parents, they may have experienced other losses, including of extended family members or friends. Betancourt et al. (2015) contend that parents often attempt to provide their children with a 'protective shield' – a type of emotional defence that tries to protect the children from social or

environmental risks to their well-being. However, doing so is difficult for refugee parents given the multiple stressors they themselves encounter, something which is again well documented in the literature (Lewig et al., 2010; Ogbu et al., 2014). Hence, accompanied children not only experience stress directly, but are also indirectly subjected to stress as a result of the challenging experiences their parents encounter, even when parents make efforts to insulate them from these stressors. In addition, refugee children, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, may continue to hope for reunion with family and friends, as well as with the culture and familiar surroundings that they have been forced to leave. While this hope may have value, the ambiguity surrounding these uncertain losses can complicate the coping and mourning processes (Green, 2000; Boss, 1999).

In sum, refugee children face numerous challenges prior to leaving their countries of origin, during their journeys, and in their new countries. As a result, they are at risk of adverse outcomes if their own capacities are not harnessed and if supports are not available to them.

3. INTEGRATION AND ACCULTURATION

Although the concept of integration is widely referred to in the literature as a unitary phenomenon, it is in fact best thought of as a dynamic process, the meaning of which changes over time. On the surface, 'integration' may appear simple and straightforward, but upon closer examination, must be recognized as contested and controversial. The concept is frequently understood in terms of the need for migrants to fit into the majority society, often including being able to pass compulsory language and citizenship tests (Murphy, 2013; Olwig, 2011). However, as Olwig (2011) states, 'integration attains different meanings for different immigrant groups at different times and places' (p. 191). In addition, it is interpreted differently depending on the national context. In policy terms, different models of integration exist, with 'multiculturalism' and 'assimilation' being the two that are most widely known (Murphy, 2013).

For the purpose of this chapter, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) definition is useful to consider. It defines refugee integration as a

> *dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population.* (UNHCR Executive Committee, 2005)

Using this definition, integration can be associated with many concepts: 'belonging', 'participation', 'social inclusion', '(re)settlement', 'adaptation', 'incorporation'. The absence of integration, by

contrast, is often considered to be associated with 'segregation', and perhaps with 'social exclusion' and 'isolation'. Paradoxically, however, many migrants may consider themselves to be socially included in a strong migrant community, even if, as a group, they remain isolated from the wider society. This reiterates the importance of the point made above, that the meaning of 'integration' differs depending on a person's own perspective.

Somewhat akin to the distinction between the models of 'multiculturalism' and 'assimilation', Berry's acculturation theory (Berry, 2001; Berry et al., 2006) distinguishes between four strategies of acculturation adopted by migrants, including the integration strategy and the assimilation strategy. Acculturation refers to the 'cultural and psychological changes that result from the contact between cultural groups, including attitudes and behaviours that are generated' (Berry et al., 2006, p. 3). An assimilation strategy involves a refugee seeking involvement with other cultural groups and wanting to give up their heritage culture, whereas an integration strategy involves a refugee maintaining their heritage culture while simultaneously seeking interaction with other cultures. Essentially, this conceptualization of 'integration' involves individuals finding a balance between both cultures.

However, culture in itself is a complex concept, somewhat difficult to meaningfully explain. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2001, p. 12) defines culture as the 'distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group' encompassing 'in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs'. Like integration, the meaning of 'culture' is contested and in many ways subjective, with particular aspects of culture being emphasized by one person and other aspects by another. As Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh (2015, p. 264) state: 'Cultural practices develop and are experienced and understood in a manner which is fluid and negotiated.' A culture is generally neither static nor definitive. Hence, when we talk about people either rejecting or retaining the 'receiving culture' or the 'heritage culture', this is by no means clear cut. Within any country, there is no fixed 'receiving culture' or fixed 'heritage culture'. The culture within a particular context is constantly influenced not only by migration but also by globalization more generally and by the continuous flows of information and communication that exist between societies.

Notwithstanding these difficulties with the various terms, the integration and adaptation of migrants involves various overlapping domains, including education, employment, social networks, and language, all of which are relevant in their own right but also influence each other. For children and young people and their families, the process of integrating will have particular child-specific characteristics. For example, the participation in society of children migrating with their parents will clearly be impacted by the latters' experiences of migration and adjustment to the host society. For

those who have migrated on their own, their integration experiences might depend more on the services provided by the state to care for them. However, for both cohorts, their own self-reliance and capacities will play a major role in their integration. In addition, some of the domains of integration that have a particular resonance for adults – such as employment – are unlikely to be as relevant to children, especially those of a younger age.

A key theme emerging from a literature review conducted by Sleijpen et al. (2016) was that young refugees believed it to be most desirable to adjust to the new society while staying connected with their culture of origin, notwithstanding the fact that adaptation to new situations in the new country was challenging for many. There is some evidence that refugees who come to a country at a younger age find adaptation easier (Sleijpen et al., 2016), although holding on to aspects of one's culture of origin might be more difficult in those circumstances. Similarly, Pieloch et al. (2016) refer to both a 'sense of belonging' and 'connections to home country' as factors that promote resilience, which, combined, would suggest the use of an integration acculturation strategy by many refugee young people as depicted by Berry (2001). In their review of risk and protective factors as they pertain to the mental health of displaced and refugee children, Fazel et al. (2012) found that being able to maintain one's sense of cultural identity, however self-defined, was important, though integrating into the new society also served as a protective factor. These findings reflect the findings of my own research in the Irish context (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Ní Raghallaigh, 2013; Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015). For example, in Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) we refer to two of the coping strategies used by unaccompanied refugee children. These were (a) adjusting to the new culture by learning and changing (e.g. learning English, dressing 'like a European guy', listening to different music) and (b) maintaining continuity in a changed context (e.g. eating food from home, continuing to practice one's religion, having friends from one's country of origin) (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Both of these will now be discussed.

3.1 Adjusting to the New Culture

Child refugees generally wish to adapt to their new environment, and pursue this goal both by adapting to the practicalities of daily life and by adapting to the new culture and environment more broadly, which can include learning a new language, changing one's style of dress, and changing one's approach to interactions with others (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Kohli (2011) notes that unaccompanied asylum seeking children search for safety first, then belonging and then success after they arrive. The key processes in resettlement as outlined by Kohli (2011) – acclimatization, adaptation, participation, absorbtion and reciprocation – are relevant not only to unaccompanied children but to other refugee children, as well as to forced migrants more generally. During

acclimatization, many forced migrants have to cope with the shock of the new context. Following this, refugee children usually begin to adapt, by learning, for example, new languages and customs, which enable them to 'get by on a day-to-day basis' (Kohli, 2011, p. 313). Through this adaptation and over time, it often becomes possible to build relationships and to participate in society. However, this frequently happens within the confines of the immigration system, which, for example, might restrict the capacity to study and to work and might hamper one's ability to invest in relationships given the uncertainty at play. Kohli (2011) argues that, if allowed to stay in the host country and with the passage of time, 'friendships grow and steady experiences at schools and colleges provide the scaffolding for material and educational success. There is an extensive period, often of years, of absorbing, and being absorbed by, the cultures of the new country' (p. 314, emphasis added). Reciprocation may become possible, especially if refugee children gain permission to remain: they may be able to give something back to the country that has provided sanctuary (Kohli, 2011). Uncertainty fades and it becomes possible to (re)settle, in the purest sense of the word.

Young people's responses to the immense changes that they encounter will of course differ. In my research, young people talked about changing their way of dress, learning about Irish culture, and getting used to different food in the new context (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). For many child refugees, very practical aspects of living might differ significantly between the country of asylum or resettlement and their country of origin. A range of different people, including parents, peers, professionals, and carers, can be helpful in navigating these differences (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Ní Raghallaigh, 2013; Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015). In the following quotation, a friend helped a young person to get used to the public transport system:

> *You know, you are in city. So, in the, in the bus, . . . for the first few months, I was looking just outside, to see, to see Spire (Dublin landmark). If I see Spire, so I, I . . . get off the bus. The bus I didn't know they have bell. That, that bell, what's it for? So, and then one of my friends tell me, this is a bell if you want to stop the bus. If you want to . . . tell the driver that you want to ehh stop.* (Young person, cited in Ní Raghallaigh, 2007, p. 172)

For accompanied refugee children parents will of course usually serve as a source of support in terms of negotiating the new cultural environment. However, parents can also add a layer of complexity to the acculturation process. In general, it has been found that integration is easier for refugee children than for their parents (Morantz et al., 2011). Some parents really struggle with the acculturation process, and this in itself can be a burden for refugee children, who may be asked to take on roles that may not be appropriate for their age, especially if they are younger children. In

particular, the use of children as interpreters can profoundly impact on the parent–child dynamic, especially when the parent becomes somewhat dependent on their child or children (Morantz et al., 2011). Research by McMichael et al. (2011) found that, while families played a crucial role in the resettlement of refugee youth, changing family dynamics threatened well-being and successful settlement. Given the importance of peers, children often want to fit in and thus at times they may choose to adopt more of an 'assimilation' strategy (Berry, 2001). This may lead them to reject elements of their cultural heritage. When this is not what parents want, familial conflict can ensue, although children and young people often adopt innovative and creative ways of managing these tensions. They may carefully negotiate two worlds, emphasizing one element of who they are when at home and another when at school. For example, this may materialize in the way that they dress or in what language they use. In addition, children and young people may take pride in helping their parents, or might come to feel they have a greater sense of control over their situation through the help they give (Sleijpen et al., 2017).

3.2 Maintaining Continuity

Children's ability to maintain a connection with their home country depends on many variables, including whether they have the opportunity to visit their countries of origin and/or stay in contact with family and friends via phone, skype, email or other methods. They benefit considerably from situations where many people from their country of origin live in the host country, or where parents or caregivers encourage cultural continuity and the development of a sense of ethnic identity linked to the country of origin. Research suggests that young people often embrace opportunities for continuity between the past and the present and plan to maintain these ties into the future. A sense of sameness facilitates an awareness of continuity of the self, something that is viewed as important in identity development. In my study (Ní Raghallaigh, 2007), one young person said: 'If I want my Nigerian food I could get it, if I want to go to Nigerian church I could go. I'm in Ireland but if I want to live a Nigerian life you could still get it' (p. 163).

Peers play an important role in facilitating continuity, particularly those who share a young person's own ethnicity (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Luster et al., 2009; 2010). Significant adults, including parents, foster carers, social workers, and teachers also make a critical contribution. For example, for unaccompanied children in foster care, carers of their own ethnic background have been found to facilitate continuity by cooking familiar food, speaking the same language, or talking about familiar places. In other cases, efforts by carers of a different ethnicity (e.g. white Irish carers) to facilitate continuity by linking young people with members of their own community or by buying familiar foods were very much appreciated (Ní Raghallaigh, 2013; Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015).

Of course, for accompanied children, parents are present and can help to ensure that their children retain their cultural heritage or facilitate this to some extent, although as has been referred to above, sometimes the desires of parents and children in this regard may not be the same, thus leading to disagreement and conflict within the family.

Overall, while each child is unique, and while recognizing that cultures are dynamic and changing entities, refugee children generally seem to try to achieve a balance between retaining elements of their heritage culture and adopting elements of the receiving culture. In a study discussing factors that contributed to successful adaptation, Sudanese unaccompanied young people who had been resettled in the United States seven years prior to the study emphasized the need to combine the best from Sudanese culture with American culture: they needed to be flexible and adaptable and 'wisely select [sic] the best from each cultural repertoire' (Luster et al., 2010, p. 205). Just as the concept of integration itself is dynamic and evolving, so too are the factors that impede or promote integration. There are many factors which seem to be important. These include characteristics of the migrant (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, nationality) as well as characteristics of the child's social situation (e.g. whether they are alone or with family and whether they speak the 'host' language or not). The nature and characteristics of the wider society are also important (e.g. the extent of racism and discrimination in the society and the nature of the country's policies in relation to migrants and integration). In addition, the child's experiences before leaving their country of origin and their experiences during migration will have an impact on their vulnerability and resilience, as has been discussed above. The extent of both vulnerability and resilience factors will affect the ability of a child to engage in education and extracurricular activities, to learn the local language, to work, to develop peer networks, and to utilize support services. It is to resilience that we now turn.

4. RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: HARNESSING RESILIENCE

4.1 Resilience Among Refugee Children

A focus on the vulnerability of refugee children has emerged from problem focused or pathology focused perspectives (Saleebey, 2002), as well as from a tendency to view children as helpless and dependent, and from a related propensity to view children who experience adversity as passive victims rather than as competent survivors (Boyden, 2003). Olwig (2011) refers to the ways in which newcomers are treated 'in terms of what they are lacking rather than what they can offer to the receiving society' (p. 186). Given the many challenges facing refugee children, which have been discussed above, it is evident that they are indeed vulnerable. But there is growing attention being paid to the different ways in which children respond to the challenges of forced migration, and to the fact that many emerge as survivors rather than as victims. While there may be a tendency to

categorize individuals as either vulnerable or resilient, I suggest that vulnerability and resilience can exist side by side. So, while refugee children are at risk of harm and of adverse outcomes, they and those around them can ward against this by enhancing their resilience and their capacities to cope.

Masten (2001) describes resilience as 'a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development' (p. 228). Adverse circumstances pose risks to development, but resilient children emerge with more positive outcomes than might be expected. In essence, such children do better than they ought to (Gilligan, 2000). Succeeding against the odds is the hallmark of resilience. Resilience may have a 'social or constitutional origin' (Gilligan, 2000, p. 37), and may arise from an individual's personal qualities or from his or her experiences and the manner in which these experiences were processed. The role of culture and context in relation to resilience is increasingly recognized (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2011).

In exploring the resilience of refugee children, it is important to consider not only the individual but also the social context in which he or she lives. Indeed, Pieloch et al. (2016) contend that resilience goes beyond individual characteristics and includes dynamic interactions with one's family members, one's community, and with society more generally. So while characteristics such as self-efficacy are relevant, so too are one's attachments to family members and relationships with peers, as well as the values that are inherent within society more generally (Pieloch et al., 2016). In particular, given the emphasis on interdependence, relationships, and community within the cultures of origin of many unaccompanied minors, Rousseau et al. (1998) contend that it is important to 'shift the focus of our reflection on resilience away from the person who displays it and more toward the social space where it is woven' (p. 633). Researching the strengths and abilities of refugee children is crucial in ensuring that their agency is recognized and that they are not defined by their vulnerability alone.

Various sources of resilience in relation to refugee children and young people have been identified in the literature. Fazel and colleagues' (2012) systematic review identified risk and protective factors that pertained to the mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in high-income countries. The protective factors that they identified were strong parental support and family cohesion; self-reported support from friends; self-reported positive school experience; and same ethnic-origin foster care. In another review, Reed and colleagues (2012) identified only one protective factor – repatriation – in relation to the mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in lowincome and middle-income countries. The reviews by Fazel et al. (2012) and by Reed et al. (2012) were quite limited in terms of the studies included. More recently, two other reviews by Pieloch et al. (2016) and Sleijpen et al. (2016) used more inclusive criteria in their searches. The

former examined both qualitative and quantitative studies focused on resilience among refugee children. The review identified various factors that promote resilience including social support, a sense of belonging, valuing education, having a positive outlook, having a source of meaning making (including belief in God), family connectedness, and connections to the home country. Similarly, in their review of qualitative studies of resilience among young refugees, Sleijpen et al. (2016) identify social support, acculturation strategies, education, religiosity, and hope as important sources of resilience. They also identified suppression or avoidance of painful memories or of difficulties as a source of resilience, something which was not identified by Pieloch et al. (2016).

4.2 Social Support

Social support can reduce the negative effects of stressful experiences by enhancing people's ability to cope. Given the multiple stressful experiences encountered by refugee children, social support is of crucial importance. Cutrona (2000) distinguishes between two kinds of social support: instrumental social support, where an effort is made to solve or alleviate the problem through tangible or information support, and nurturant social support, where no attempt is made to solve the problem, but instead comfort is provided through esteem or emotional support. In addition, Cohen and Wills (1985) also include social companionship as a form of social support. The role of social support in the resettlement and integration of migrants is widely recognized (Schweitzer et al., 2006; Simich et al. 2003; Williams, 2006). For children and young people, social networks and social support are of key importance given their role in facilitating both adjustment to the new society and continuity with the culture of origin (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Sleijpen et al., 2017). Indeed, research by Oppedal and Idsoe (2005) shows that social support directly benefits mental health and indirectly strengthens young people's capacity to deal with discrimination. Children and young people obtain both formal and informal support of different types from family members, from people with the same cultural background, from peers, and from professionals, including teachers and social workers (Pieloch et al., 2016; Sleijpen et al., 2016). While family members, especially parents, are likely to be of particular importance to younger accompanied migrant children, for teenagers – especially those who are unaccompanied – peers are likely to play a more important role (Oppedal and Idsoe, 2015).

In my own research in the Irish context, unaccompanied refugee children appreciated the support they received both from peers and from their foster carers in adjusting to their new culture and context (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010; Ní Raghallaigh, 2013; Ní Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015).. For example, one girl, reflecting on her earliest days in Ireland, when she was living in a hostel for unaccompanied minors, states:

> *. . . [Laughing] They served me spaghetti bolognaise. I started crying. [Laughing] I started*
> *crying because like . . . Ah . . . I remember it. I ate, I have ate spaghetti before but usually we*
> *grate it and we mix it with rice. We don't eat it on its own like that. But to give me just like*
> *that, you know. And it's not grate. It's very long and coily. It's like . . . Oh my God! Then she*
> *gave me this cream . . . I think its mayonnaise, but then I didn't know the name. And she gave*
> *me chips. I love chips. I was wondering, what's . . . you know the mayonnaise was in a cup in*
> *a small plate, and . . . What is this? Is it an ice cream? What am I supposed to do with it?*
> *[Laughing] I was looking at, at another people eating chips with the mayonnaise. Ah . . . but I*
> *was really crying. And there was this girl. She now came over and [she said] 'what's wrong*
> *with you? Where are you from?' I say 'Nigeria'. 'I'm Nigerian too. You are all right. . . . We*
> *are a lot of Nigerians here. You will be fine'. And she went to call about three or four girl . . .*
> (Young person cited in Ní Raghallaigh, 2007, p. 173)

Thus, seeing that the newly arrived girl was upset, a peer of the same nationality supported her emotionally and reassured her. In my later study (Ní Raghallaigh, 2013), when young people were no longer living in hostels but were instead in residential units or in foster homes, the support provided by peers was still mentioned, but residential care staff and foster carers were also identified as people who provided assistance. The support from foster carers ranged from emotional support to practical support and advice. Some young people stated:

> *All I can say is [my foster mother] is very supportive. She tells me what to do. You know? . . .*
> *If you don't have someone telling you what to do and advising you on things you should do,*
> *you just go and do the wrong things, like.*
>
> *If we want to talk about something its open, we always talk openly in the family.*

These experiences are similar to the findings of other studies on foster care for unaccompanied children (e.g. Luster et al., 2010; Wade et al., 2012). In addition, it has also been found that for some refugee children, both accompanied and unaccompanied, family members who are living in the country of origin or elsewhere continue to serve as important sources of social support despite the challenges of communicating transnationally (Oppedal and Idsoe, 2015). While children who migrated at a younger age are less likely to have these transnational relationships, they may play a particularly important role for older refugee children (Morantz et al., 2011).

4.3 Religion and Spirituality

The important role of religion and spirituality in the lives of migrants and refugees is increasingly being recognized in the literature, although there is still a dearth of empirical research on this topic.

Several studies have highlighted the role played by religion for refugee young people (Nardone and Correa-Velez, 2015; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011; VölklKernstoc et al., 2014). It has been suggested that religion serves multiple functions, including as a source of continuity, as a source of support, as a guide to how to lead one's life, and as a facilitator of meaning making and acceptance in the face of adversity (Sleijpen et al., 2016). I have argued elsewhere (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010) that religion plays a key facilitative role in enabling various coping strategies among unaccompanied refugee children. Drawing on Pargament's (1997) work on religious coping and on my research with unaccompanied children (Ní Raghallaigh, 2011), it is evident that religion is both a 'relatively available' and a 'relatively compelling' (Pargament, 1997) way for these young people to cope with the challenges they face post-migration. In the context of so much change and upheaval in their lives, religion can serve as a key source of continuity, thus providing a sense of stability amidst much instability, and a sense of connection with one's culture of origin. In addition, relationships with God can provide a sense of meaning, comfort, and companionship. In a context where children are dealing with multiple loses and with the challenge of re-establishing their social networks, this relationship can be particularly important. In my own research (Ní Raghallaigh, 2007; 2011) religion and, more specifically, relationships with God were sources of help. In a context where young people found it difficult to trust, their relationship with God was considered crucial by many. One young person stated:

> The only, only, only friend [laughs] I trusted all the time, that's God. . . . I don't have any more friends . . . I trusted more than God, I don't think so. You know because, always God knows more than everybody. And God's [going to] help you all the time. . . . God always [going to] help. (Young person, cited in Ní Raghallaigh, 2011, p. 548)

The participants sought help from God by praying and attending religious services and shared that they believed that God was guiding and protecting them. One young person stated:

> [God] is important,'cos, ehm . . . I have been through many things and here I am, I'm still, I'm still alive. So, he is very important in my life. Though I don't know him, but I know he is there. You know. I know he, there is somebody who is looking after me. (Young person, cited in Ní Raghallaigh, 2011, p. 551)

The literature refers to optimism and hope as further sources of resilience for refugee children (e.g. Goodman, 2004), and for many it may be that religion facilitates this optimism or sense of hope. In addition, membership of a religious community can allow children and young people to feel a sense of belonging in the new country. Depending on the particular religious community, this membership may connect them with others from their country of origin, with other refugee children or, indeed,

with members of the majority culture in which they are now living. Either way, adaptation and integration is facilitated as it creates a sense of belonging, participation, and inclusion. In their research with Somali refugee families in Boston, Betancourt et al. (2015) found that both parents and young people viewed religious faith as a resource for healthy community functioning. It helped them both to cope with past trauma and to adjust to their new environment.

4.4 Broader Societal Context

While religiosity, spirituality, and social support can all be harnessed in order to enhance the resilience of refugee children and facilitate their integration, the need for wider supportive contexts cannot be overemphasized, particularly given Rousseau et al.'s (1998) emphasis on the importance of the 'social space' in which resilience is woven. If a supportive context is not in existence, then it will be difficult to strengthen social support and to facilitate the religous beliefs of refugee children; as a result, their ability to integrate and participate in society will be reduced. In particular, government policies towards asylum seekers and refugees will hugely impact the ability of refugee children to maintain connections with their cultures of origin while also adapting to their new environment.

Being a child within the asylum process, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, usually implies diminished rights when compared to other children in terms of education, accommodation, or welfare entitlements. In many instances, this means that asylum seeking children are viewed as different. This perceived difference, along with the confinement of their rights, can, depending on the nature of the asylum system in place, limit their capacity to integrate. What Schwartz et al. (2010) term 'the context of integration' is crucial. Citing Bronfenbrenner (1979), they state that: 'The effects of context of reception on acculturation might be considered in much the same way that context affects many other social and developmental processes' (p. 247). For example, in the Irish context, unaccompanied asylum seeking children are generally cared for in foster families, a type of care which facilitates – at least to some extent – linkages with local communities, connections with both Irish and migrant populations, and a sense of belonging to both a specific family and a broader society (Ní Raghallaigh, 2013). By contrast, accompanied children are cared for with their families in a system of 'direct provision', in which asylum seekers are accommodated in large institutional settings (old hotels or convents, for example), and provided with meals and a small allowance. This system has been widely recognized as something that hinders child development and causes social exclusion: it prevents integration both in the short and longer term, by severely limiting opportunities for children and adults to participate in society (Martin et al., 2016; Moran et al., 2017; Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016, Ní Raghallaigh and Thornton, 2017). Thus, it is evident that, even within

particular national contexts, different policies can have differing impacts on refugee children's opportunities to integrate. When international comparisons are made, furthermore, these differences become even more apparent. For example, it is well known that, in Australia, asylum seeking children are subject to immigration detention, which leads to psychological, physical, and developmental harm (Mares, 2016). While in detention, participation in society is virtually impossible, and even once children are released, the impact of the trauma of detention, particularly if it was long term, negatively impacts integration over time.

5. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that refugees and asylum seekers encounter a multitude of stressful experiences in their lives prior to migration, during the migration journey and transit, and in their post-migration lives. These experiences and situations place refugees in a position of risk, where their well-being is threatened by the adversities they encounter. Refugee children, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, are viewed as a particularly vulnerable group, at risk of adverse outcomes given all of the challenges that they face. Yet, increasingly, the agency of children and the resilience of those facing difficult life circumstances is being recognized. In order for asylum seeking and refugee children to integrate into their new environments, they must find a balance between adapting to and being actively engaged in their new cultures and maintaining connections with key aspects of their cultures of origin. As they negotiate this integration process, their resilience needs to be harnessed, whether through social support, religion, a broader supportive context, or through other means.

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