

Navigating Childhood Adversity: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Strategies, Influences, and Effects among Congolese & Burundian Migrant Youth

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**In memory of my grandmother who raised us
and my father who inspired us.**

זיכרונה לברכה

זיכרוננו לברכה

Declaration

I, Sean Friedman, declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Community-based Counselling at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



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The 11th day of September 2023 in Cape Town.

Abstract

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) have been reliably linked to a number of deleterious outcomes, with cascading effects through the life course. The children of migrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable to adversity, often living within xenophobic contexts and facing a multitude of economic and language pressures. Additionally, migrations into South Africa have frequently been initiated by traumatic experiences in migrants' countries of origin. Yet despite multiple adversities, many of these children adapt, persevere, and find success. This interpretivist experiential study explored the influences, strategies, and effects related to childhood adversity among migrant children to South Africa. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis to explore common threads from an experiential critical stance. The constructed themes elucidated the environmental influences along multiple levels of the ecology, strategies that orientated, avoided, and made sense of difficulties, and a complex interplay of later effects. These were considered in light of Resilience and Post-traumatic Growth theories, as well as a decolonial psychological lens. Parallels and differences between xenophobia and racism were found and explored. Underlying discourses and collusions with these were interrogated. The study found resilient strategies were intimately connected to contextual influences, and had differential effects, with avoidant strategies likely impeding growth. Resolve, self-belief, and altruism were found to likely be 'real' effects, whereas gratitude was indicated to be a palliative coping strategy. The effects of xenophobia on participants was found to mimic those of systemic racism in multiple ways, though key differences remained. The study extends the existing literature on migrant youth in the South African context, and produces several possibilities for intervention that may foster resilience and growth.

Keywords: African Migrant Youth, Adverse Childhood Circumstances, Xenophobia, Resilience, Post-Traumatic Growth.

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Abbreviations

ACE-Q	Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire
ACE's	Adverse Childhood Experiences
APA	American Psychiatric Association
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease-2019
cPTSD	Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
CTS	Continuous Traumatic Stress
DSM-5	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 th Edition
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MACC	Masters in Community-based Counselling
MSRF	Multisystemic Resilience Framework for Migrant Youth
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PTG	Post-traumatic Growth
PTS	Post-traumatic Symptoms
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
R1 /R2 /R3	Research Question 1 / 2 / 3
RRR	Relationship-resourced Resilience
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SERT	Socioecological Resilience Theory

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter Overview

This introductory chapter begins with a short description of the focus of the study in order to orient the reader to the topic. It then proceeds into a reflection of my own interests, values, and positions in relation to the topic in order that both *myself* and the reader may come to consider the potential biases, assumptions, blind-spots, and orientations that I may imbue, and that will have exerted an influence on the questions that I have asked, as well as the ways that I have interpreted and heard certain answers.

The study aims are then explicated, along with the specific research questions that guided this research. These questions are placed here, instead of the methodology section as they have naturally shaped and guided the literature review, and I have attempted to keep this dissertation coherently melded to these three central concerns.

Theoretical assumptions relating to the broader political approach are explicitly described, as well as their reasoning. Theoretical frameworks relating to the topic are introduced, but are expanded and contextualised in the literature review.

The description of the structure of the report is then outlined, with a brief overview of each chapter, what it aspires to accomplish, and how it has attempted to do so. Finally, the chapter review concludes the introduction.

Focus of the Study

South Africa is home to a substantial population of African migrants, estimated at around 4.5 million in 2022 (StatsSA, 2022). Despite purported progressive legislation and inclusivity, xenophobia has remained a persistent issue, and one that extends through individual and systemic levels. At the time of the study, 'Operation Dudula'¹ a vigilante organisation was enabling violent xenophobic riots in Diepsloot and other areas within Johannesburg. This study

¹ Dudula, meaning to "force out" or "knock down" in isiZulu.

focussed on the experiences of Francophone African migrants as they navigated difficulties as children in South Africa. The influences, strategies, and effects related to navigating adversity and associated hardships such as leaving their home countries, adjusting to language barriers, and pervasive xenophobia, in conjunction with other adversities within the South African context were explored. The findings aim to provide insights into how to foster resilience and facilitate personal growth in migrant children in South Africa.

My Interest in the Topic

In our MA year we were allocated the topic of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) the scope of which our research needed to fall within. Although I had not been exposed to the research on ACE's before this year, I have had a long standing interest in the connection between childhood adversity, trauma, resilience, and later growth as well as their negative effects. The relationships between these different aspects seemed complicated and interesting and I wanted to explore them further.

Positionality

Bandana (1990) writes of white academics: that there is no expectation of them to define a 'white perspective' as this is taken as the 'norm', whereas this expectation is put on black academics. Precisely to counter this, I will describe myself here at the outset: not only am I 'white', but I am 'a white writing about blacks'. The problematic nature of this, in South Africa of all places, is obvious. I hope that by making my positionalities obvious throughout this thesis, that I may engage the reader in considering the limitations of my knowledge and experience when considering *my* interpretations, and to perhaps consider this too as an opportunity to cast light onto some of the tendencies and associations that *some* white South Africans might make. As discourses broader to myself exist (Steyn & Foster, 2008) these must also be interrogated.

Unlike the population from which I sought participants for this study, I am a *white* South African. I am also Jewish. My own feelings about race and position have been skewed in many ways: *whiteness* (and it's corollary: 'non-white') is the central and underlying racist ideology of the Apartheid state, so reflects Straker (2004), and its implicit association with the former regime is likely to induce feelings of guilt and shame in white South Africans. Certainty, I have

felt this way. Moreover, Straker (2004) contends that there are common tendencies to defend against these feelings through disavowal ('knowing but not-knowing'). Perhaps, this explains my reluctance to identify as and with whiteness (although Hook, 2004, notes that the privilege of whiteness is that one doesn't have to contend with it). I have always felt myself instead *Jewish*, brought up within a culture that distances itself from non-Jews. At times I have an uneasy sense when among some non-Jewish whites, that I am white – which is to say, that I belong – under assumption that I am not Jewish. There is some small window into marginalisation that I may experience, but as Fanon (1967) writes, the Jew can 'be unknown in his Jewishness...' whereas the black subject has no such 'luxury' and must always contend with the fact of his 'race' in the world (Hook, 2004, p. 93). Further, I am firmly, and irrevocably, construed of and benefit from a system that has designated me as white, and "like it or not, one is a member of a group that benefits from policies that excluded others" (Straker, 2004, p. 410).

In post-apartheid South Africa being white is naturally associated with all the privileges it entails: economic, educational, and community aspects particularly. I am an English speaker, I went to a very good (Jewish) school, and I did not know 'real' poverty. In the communities and areas I lived, I was not afraid to go outside, afraid of being targeted or attacked, or afraid of deportation, arrest, or harassment. These are real fears for many migrants, and have been very real fears for people of colour, during Apartheid still continuing in many communities today. Many black South Africans are surrounded by adversity and do not feel safe.

Straker (2013, p. 91) cautions: "we as whites, when we do not own our own vulnerabilities, use blacks fetishistically to cover over our own limitations". I understand this to mean, based on her (2004) paper, that there are dangers of defending against the failings and shames of whiteness through frenetic activity (an all-consuming 'manic quality' that ensures denial of one's complicity), of using the Other as 'project' and thereby ennobling one's position; or of projection of that which is bad, onto this Other. I am likely to still defend and collude, consciously and unconsciously. As such, I have taken some care to reflect on my own vulnerabilities and explicitly interrogate my reactions and responses in the analysis.

Being a white interviewer thus presented an interesting dynamic. I felt this to be both an alienating aspect, and yet a signifier of a degree of safety. For most of the participants, xenophobia was associated with black South Africans. This creates a curious dynamic — as a white South African, I am associated with a former oppressor and ongoing privilege in South

Africa to many black South Africans. While historically coming from an outside invading group that benefitted enormously from oppressive and extractive policies — it is black African migrants who are the victims of xenophobia. There is an obvious deflection here from anger and retribution towards the economically dominant and protected minority, towards the weak and unprotected migrant community. In addition, background political processes complicate matters: white South Africans are particularly sympathetic to the plight of African migrants and refugees, who themselves come to reach out to and sometimes rely on white South Africans. In the interviews, I was thus generally not considered a part of the problem of xenophobia, instead I noticed being somehow experienced as ‘allied to’, and yet also as ‘a world apart’.

My own childhood adversities led to complications in my own life: both resilience and growth in some areas, as well as distress and overwhelm in others. This sparked a longstanding interest in meaning, relationship, suffering, and adaptation, and has left me with questions on the limits and borders between mental illness and responsibility, of aetiologies and of treatments. It brought me to therapeutic work, to my studies, and to my training. It has led me to wonder: am I better or worse off for those things that happened?

These were the kinds of questions I sat with before this study, and they were the kinds of questions I wondered about throughout the interviews and analysis. In speaking with African migrants who had grown up with dislocation and xenophobia, and often times economic stress and familial discord, I felt a myriad of identifications and also differences. I wondered about whether this group, who I had selected specifically for their exposure to migrant adversities and ‘successful adaptation’, had become more resilient for what they gone through, or whether these sufferings had only been unfortunate and unnecessary aspects of their journeys.

Like all good questions, it has defied simple resolution. It is complicated and mysterious. This present report does not settle or even attempt to answer its questions definitively, but rather to expand and expose, to show and illuminate the complications of adversity, trauma, and triumph.

Rationale

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE’s) are a common feature of life in South Africa (Manyema & Richter, 2019), and while ACE’s have been reliably linked to a number of

deleterious outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998; Wait & Ryan, 2019), attempts at decreasing or mitigating ACE's themselves have seen little success both internationally and locally (Waite & Ryan, 2019).

Additionally, ACE's are not uniformly distributed throughout the population, but impact differentially along economic and social fault lines: despite proximal conceptualisation of ACE's, they remain “endogenous, downstream determinants of health” (Perreira & Gallo, 2017, as cited in Waite & Ryan, 2019, p. 134) that mirror broader social issues that have been largely impervious to change. In the South African context, a number of adversities are often overlooked. This is especially true of social and community adversities, and these are primarily racially construed. While Black Africans form the majority of the South African population, they remain economically maligned within much of the ‘White, Western, Developed’ part of South Africa as a functional minority.

African migrants however, constitute a ‘minority within a minority’. Migrants comprise a significant proportion of the South African population (from 3 - 7%; Helata, 2018), primarily in the poorest segment of the country, and must additionally contend with issues of exclusion, xenophobia — and for many who have fled their countries — prior trauma. When considering the ACE's of children of these communities we must expand our lens to account for such challenges.

Despite the normative nature of adversity to youth in South Africa (migrant and local) there are many children who are able to successfully adapt, grow, and succeed. Resilience and post-traumatic growth (PTG) are two theoretical approaches that attempt to account for these positive adaptations, even as the research indicates a simultaneous tension between these positive and other negative effects (Liu et al., 2017; Sims & Pooley, 2016). Furthermore, understanding the ecologically embedded nature of resilience and growth is essential for serious intervention efforts (Wu & Ou, 2021): adaptations do not exist in a vacuum, they involve multiple systems and relations.

While protective factors have been identified, there has to date been little to no linking of broader contextual factors to specific resilience strategies, nor the exploration of these in context of later outcomes. Within the migrant and refugee literature, while extensive mapping of migrant specific adversities (including in South Africa), and some exploration of protective

factors and strategies among youth (Theron & Breda, 2018) exists, few studies have been conducted on migrant youth specifically, and fewer within the context of migrants to South Africa.

Thus, such research holds relevance for interventions at a critical juncture in the life course: youth equipped with the psychological skills that promote the navigation of adversity (and that mitigate the effects of previous trauma and difficulties) will be better placed to succeed in the ways that matter to them. Roche et al. (2022) have highlighted the particular importance of considering the potential effects of xenophobia on the developmental phases associated with migrant youth: that of identity, future orientation, and adjustment; while Kumar (2016) has noted that while the body of research on post-traumatic growth has grown steadily in Western samples, there is a dearth of research among refugee (and African refugee) populations in particular.

Specific and recent calls for further research in these areas emanate from the following: Matiasko et al. (2022) have called for further research into ACE's among populations disproportionately at risk; Jayawickreme et al.'s (2021) emphasises the need for research into how particular groups and cultural niches adapt; and Wu and Ou (2021) call for research to pay attention to the contexts wherein subgroups of youth grow and develop.

The underlying purpose of this investigation then is not only to extend the literature on migrant youth in the South African context, but also to contribute to plausible intervention efforts in ways that may promote resiliency in children and adolescents, and that could optimise conditions for post-traumatic growth.

Research Aims

The primary aim of this study was to identify strategies and skills that assisted Francophone African migrant youth in successfully navigating childhood adversity in South Africa. Congolese and Burundian migrants were specifically chosen for the language difficulties faced by this population (being non-English, non-Nguni, and non-Sotho-Tswana speaking) and their subsequent high visibility as foreign nationals making them particularly vulnerable to additional adversity within a xenophobic context.

This was for the explicit purpose that such an exploration may serve to identify avenues that facilitate successful navigation of childhood adversities in the South African context. As such, the concepts of *resilience* and *post-traumatic growth* were of relevance to this investigation.

In addition, contextual influences and resources that contributed to the development of these strategies as well as eventual outcomes was of interest. The inextricable nature of context, strategies, and effects formed part of the basic assumptions of the study.

Research Questions

R1 How did Francophone African migrant children navigate childhood adversity given xenophobia in South Africa?

R2 What brought about, facilitated, and engendered their responses?

R3 How have these childhood experiences and responses affected participants as adults?

Theoretical Assumptions

More precise ontological and epistemological assumptions and paradigms are explicated under the methodology section; while the theoretical frameworks pertaining to conceptual categories employed in making sense of ‘adversity’, ‘resilience’, and ‘growth’ appear in the literature review, along with brief history, conceptual models, and operationalised definitions.

However, it is important to situate from the outset the *political and ideological* influences that encapsulate this topic and study. Xenophobia in South Africa and African migration cannot be divorced from its colonial history: from colonial racialisation of Hutus and Tutsis and subsequent civil conflicts, genocides, and mass migration; to oppression and segregation that continues in new forms in South Africa today. It would be irresponsible not to consider this context and history in making sense of such phenomena.

Decolonial Psychology

Said (1978) theorised that colonisation marginalises the experiences and norms of native peoples, against the imposed standards and values of the colonising culture. It is difficult to think of a discipline more aligned to the practice of creating ‘universal’ norms, standards, and values than psychology. Indeed, historically it was used to justify the Apartheid state, and denigrate Africans – and in subtle and sophisticated ways it continues to do so (Hook, 2004).

Hook (2004) notes that much of applied psychology has separated the person from the surrounds, and depoliticised human experience reframing all problems, socio-political, as coming from within. Fanon (1967) critiqued this arguing for recognition of the enmeshment of the person in socio-political circumstances, and their psychology being inseparable from this. Instead, Fanon insists on historically grounded terms of analysis in psychological theorising, critiquing and challenging power structures (Hook, 2004). While Fanon (1967) recognised the utility in psychoanalytical concepts, he emphasised the need to locate these in terms of surrounding social issues, such as racism.

South African xenophobia is directly tied to colonialism in a myriad of ways. Difficulties assimilating and integrating black African immigrants comes on the heels of the effects of colonialism throughout the continent (Tafira, 2011), while long-standing divisions between black South Africans and migrants Africans were purposefully created and encouraged by Apartheid practices and policies (Sekati, 2022).

Decolonial psychology looks at locating *whiteness* rather than racism at the centre of anti-racist practice. This is not white / black in terms of colour, but in terms of a superstructure of hierarchical privileges and denigrations based on historic exploitation. Fanon (1967) notes that the association of blackness with this was only an accident of political and material history. Locating *whiteness* at the centre in this way, is essential to move the onus of responsibility for change from those who are devalued, to those who consciously or not, enable and benefit from the devaluing (Green et al., 2007; Angu, 2023).

Thus, this decolonial approach is chosen to ground the analysis, and subsequent choice of frameworks and methods, in order to try prevent, and even *reverse*, colonial and racist practice, and to pay respect to local people and their ways of understanding.

Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

Fanon's 'awareness of the variability of human subjectivity' (Hook, p. 89) speaks to his refusal to create a monolithic construction of the 'black' or 'white' subject. Rather, he has interrogated the political and social dimensions as they relate to experience and subjectivity, and how these interact. While Biko (1998) is right to assert that 'blacks should not always be interpreted by whites' (Hook, 2004, p. 107) there may be value in exploring the dimensions that come alive precisely because of the interaction of a white South African man in conversation with black African migrants.

While I have taken care in some respects, there will no doubt be oversights: however, reflexive analysis can only ever be a partial account (Braun & Clarke, 2021), and the imperfect and *human* nature of this attempt may hold value also in its failings. Braun and Clarke (2021) are explicit: in RTA *subjectivity* is viewed as valuable, and a key aspect of qualitative sensibility. It treats knowledge as situated, shaped by surrounding processes, including the practices of the researcher, and encourages an 'owning of perspective'. It is thus compatible with a decolonial approach.

Structure of the Report

This research report comprises five main chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion, and Conclusion. The topic has been introduced in Chapter 1 along with a positioning of myself, and the presentation of the aims, rationale, research questions, and theoretical assumptions in order to ground the rest of the report.

The Literature Review of Chapter 2 outlines both seminal and contemporary research findings as well as theoretical explications that take stock of migrant and Southern African positions, around adverse childhood experiences, resilience, and post-traumatic growth. These are done with consideration for the history of these concepts, some of the difficulties with them, and how I attempt to address these with the choices I made around operationalisation. The chapter concludes with a justification for resilience research in the South African context.

The Methodology section, Chapter 3, outlines the theoretical paradigms, data collection methodology, and method of analysis. A description of the process and principles employed in reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is given with each step described in terms of what actions and steps were actually taken. Ethical considerations (and ethical *thinking*) is described along with relevant principles and how they were achieved. The trustworthiness and validity of this type of qualitative research is considered in light of Yardley's (2000) guidelines, along with description of achievement and links to evidence.

The Findings and Discussion section, Chapter 4, describes the themes constructed from the data, along with a number of excerpts to justify their construction, while integrating discussion in terms of conceptual and decolonial theory. In RTA, the 'results' and 'discussion' are a combined process, and best practise as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2021) is to present these together. An overview of the themes is given, before a fuller discussion of each.

Finally, the Conclusion, Chapter 5, draws together the report from the aims and rationale, into an overview of finding and discussion, a consideration for the strengths and weaknesses of this study, as well recommendations for future directions. A final comment concludes the report.

Chapter Review

This chapter began by introducing the focus of the study, followed by a reflexive preface where the researchers positionalities were explored with consideration to some of the possible effects this could have on the research. The relevance of research in these areas was argued in the rationale, and the associated aims and research questions which direct the remainder of this report were given. The theoretical assumptions, specifically pertaining to decolonial psychology and its relevance for research in post-colonial South Africa was described. Finally, the structure of the report was provided. In the next chapter, a review of the literature and associated theoretical concepts is conducted.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

The following literature review begins with a description and consideration of adverse childhood events, as well as a conceptual review of the distinctions between adversity and trauma. The differential impacts brought about by adversity and trauma, are explored in relation to different stages of childhood. The nature of acute, chronic, proximal, and distal experiences, with consideration to persistent environmental danger within much of the South African context is explored. South African, as well as international, formulations of these aetiologies and effects are considered.

The vulnerability of African migrants, and African migrant youth in particular is then explored. Particular vulnerabilities and challenges as well as protective and enhancing factors are considered, with a special emphasis on xenophobia in the South African context. Local legislation, and the differential impacts of nationality and language are discussed.

Finally, the possibilities and importance of mediating the consequences of adversity and trauma are explored in relation to two complementary theoretical approaches: *resilience* and *post-traumatic growth*. The history, literature, and findings related to these theoretical approaches are considered in terms of their promotional factors, as well as to foreground their relevance toward intervention and enhancement. Conceptual difficulties are resolved with clear operational definitions.

Finally, the relevance of Resilience theory in the South African context, as well as the potential of research relating to intervention, xenophobia, and migrant youth is briefly reviewed. A final summation and reflection concludes the chapter.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)

Background

Adverse Childhood Experiences were initially conceptualised to include abuse, neglect, and various types of household dysfunction, as identified by Felitti et al.'s (1998) landmark study that showed a connection between ACE's and later negative effects in life. The study had emerged from the outcome of prior interviews at the obesity clinic where Felitti worked: of 286 patients interviewed the majority had suffered some form of sexual abuse (1998). This connection between childhood trauma and later physical health problems was impossible to ignore, and the seminal Adverse Childhood Experiences study ratified this connection through a large scale investigation that included over 17,000 participants: showing that even among middle-class Americans, nearly two thirds reported one or more ACE's, and that as the number of ACE's increased so did the risk for these adverse health outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998).

It was not the first time that a link between childhood adversities, and traumas, was proposed. Freud (1896) had explicitly linked sexual abuse histories in his patients to their symptoms, which formed the basis for his and other continued developmental readings into how the past affects the present. More contemporaneously, Herman (1992) advocated for the recognition of the complex effects of childhood abuse before the ACE's study had even been conceived. However, the ACE's study did provide irrefutable evidence on a largescale level of the connection between childhood adversity and later ill effects in a way that could not be ignored.

Conceptual Definitions

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) are defined as 'potentially traumatic' childhood circumstances and events that cause harm or distress (Dube et al., 2003) these include deficiencies such as an absence of necessary care (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2013).

The Merriam-Webster English language dictionary (2022) defines adversity as "a state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune". Majiba and Majiba (2020, p. 2) in considering the role that adversity plays in the development of character, resilience, and

endurance, describe it as “unfavourable fortune, incident or fate; a condition marked by misfortune, calamity or distress” and emphasise that it can be a situation or circumstance.

In contrast, trauma has a more specific meaning, one indicative of much greater severity. The American Psychological Association (2013) defines it as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster”. The important distinction here is that of a response to an event, and not necessarily the event itself. Corsini (2002) draws on two definitions, describing trauma as the result of a painful event defined by an experience of helplessness, or loss of control over one’s own body; or as a toxic mixture of intense anxiety, utter helplessness, and loss of control.

The individuals ability to integrate the experience is overwhelmed, and a subjective experience of threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity is emphasised (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). De Sánchez (2003) notes that an event can also be of a ‘traumatic nature’ (one we would expect to be overwhelming) without necessarily being experienced as traumatic by a given individual. Tedeschi et al. (2018) do not make as strong a subjective differentiation, instead they define trauma as a highly stressful or challenging life-altering event, where the experience of life undergoes a seismic shift.

Bonanno and Diminich (2012) further differentiate between the proximal (in the home) vs distal (in the surrounding environment), and van Breda (2018) clarifies acute (having a specific starting point and relatively brief duration) vs chronic (extending over a considerable period of time). Chronic ACE’s are relatively sustained across time (such as poverty; or the loss of a loved one) while Chronic traumas refer to acute incidents of repeated trauma (such as violence in the home). Tedeschi et al. (2018) also point out that events are often not singularly time-bound, that they persist over longer periods and be made of many experiences. For example, in the illness of a loved one, deployment to a war zone, or through incarceration. These types of ‘events’ may be life-altering and seismic without containing a singularly traumatising experience.

The definition of ACE’s does not account for this distinction of whether it is the increased risk for trauma that the ACE’s produce, or rather the cascading effects of adversities itself that lead to negative outcomes. While some of the proposed ACE’s present as more likely to be directly traumatic events (physical abuse for example), others seem to be more in line with increases in

adversity (divorced or separated parents). This is especially true as the lexicon of ACE's has increased to include more socially distal risks such as poverty, unemployment, racism, or historic trauma (Finkelhor et al., 2015). Thus, while ACE's and their effects have permeated the discourse there is a strange tension and oversight in distinctions between adversity and trauma. For the case of this present study, both are understood to impact as two separate pathways, even as the first likely increases risk for the second.

Expanding our lens on Adversity



Figure 1: Miller, J. (n.d.) Primrose and Makause, unequal neighbourhoods in Johannesburg, South Africa. (with permission).

Specifically, ten items were considered in the original ACE's study and these have been retained in the most commonly used ACE-Q questionnaire (Fellitti, 1998) — for each that was present during childhood, the ACE's score increases by one: (1) physical, (2) sexual, or (3) emotional abuse; (4) physical, or (5) emotional neglect; (6) mother treated violently in the home; (7) household substance abuse; (8) household mental illness; (9) parental separation or divorce; and (10) the incarceration of a household member.

There are some difficulties with these items. The one-way gendered mistreatment of the mother without consideration for violent treatment against a father (or another family member) is an oversight, and the relative adversity related to separation or divorce is contentious without more details (such as timing, remarriage, or cultural norms). Other adversities seem to be missed: the death of a family member for instance. More recently, it has been criticised for a lack of consideration for contextual issues: poverty, community violence, systemic inequalities, and racism are all notable for their absence (Waite & Ryan, 2020; Gladieux, 2023).

More recent progressive definitions have expanded the concept from its initial conceptualisation to include distal adversities, such as community violence and poverty (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2013). In this sense, ACE's can be understood to occur within larger contexts: including physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus in which defined groups of people function and interact (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2013).

Finkelhor et al. (2013) associate ACE's and child health with various community exposures including community violence, property victimization, and bullying. Additionally, peer rejection, low socioeconomic status, experiencing racism, living in an unsafe neighbourhood, and having a history with foster care have all been identified as contributing factors to poorer later outcomes (Cronholm et al., 2015; Wade et al., 2014). Peer rejection is further linked to the development of various disorders, as well as aggression, poor school competence, psychological maladjustment, and overall life status adjustment (Finkelhor et al., 2013).

However, the impact of ACE's differs according to community and may be relativistic (Naicker et al., 2021). Culture influences our perceptions, interpretations, and responses to these adversities, with differing availabilities of coping mechanisms, supports, and normalisations playing mediational roles. For example, Seedat et al. (2004) found that among township youth, poverty was a normalised distal ACE that was not introjected negatively, in contrast to more proximal ACE's within the home.

Effects of Adversity and Trauma

The ACE study among others has revealed that early life adversities, including poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and low-quality resources, have lasting impacts on life course

development (Black et al., 2017; Waite and Ryan, 2020). For instance, early adversity increases later sensitivity to anxiety, heightened baseline physiological arousal, and increased sensitivity to triggers (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2012). These all increase difficulties with relationships and externalizing behaviours in school-age children, antisocial behaviour in adolescents, and eventuate in poorer relationships, educational attainment, income, and health outcomes (Clervil & DeCandia, 2013).

Dose-Response Relationship

Research supports this dose-response model of ACE's, indicating that cumulative childhood stress leads to more severe outcomes throughout the lifespan (Felitti et al., 1998), and a greater number of ACE's has been repeatedly associated with higher risk for various indicators of maladjustment (Brown & Shillington, 2017; Nurius et al., 2015).

ACE's often recur and manifest chronically, with greater chronicity increasing risk for psychopathology (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2013). The severe effects of exposure to repeated acute, proximal ACE's, especially in environments from which children cannot escape, has been linked to severe effects (van der Kolk, 2005; Hermann, 1992).

Cascading Effects

Cascading effects refers to increased risks to successive adversities. For example: ACE's have been linked to post-traumatic stress symptoms in adolescence; these present greater risk for subsequent impulsive, risky, and illegal actions; which in turn increase the risk of maladaptive adjustment in adulthood, including substance abuse and criminal behaviour (Sparks et al., 2021). This chaining pattern results in the stacking of risks and adversities taking environmental, psychosocial, and neurophysiological forms (Nurius et al., 2015; Hesterman 2021; Shafer 2021).

Certain periods of childhood development are more sensitive, or have differential vulnerabilities, as compared to others (Ben-Shlomo, 2002). ACE's are associated with disruptions in neurodevelopment, particularly in prefrontal brain regions, which can subsequently impair social connectedness, emotional regulation, and cognitive functioning

(Bernard et al., 2021). These neurodevelopmental disruptions increase risk taking, substance abuse, likelihood of disease, diminished psychological and physical functioning, and ultimately are predictive of early death (Bernard et al., 2021).

Naicker et al. (2021) reported that type of adversity impacted differentially with distal factors (e.g. unemployment) surprisingly increasing resilience at times, while proximal factors (e.g. sexual abuse) being much more likely to increase deleterious effects in memory and health. Matjasko, Herbst, and Estefan (2022) note that the type, severity, frequency, developmental timing, relationship to perpetrator, and proximity of ACE's all mediate effects, while Smith and Pollack (2021) emphasise that the nature of the ACE itself, individual characteristics, and social and physical features of the context are all relevant to impact. Spinazzola et al. (2003) identify developmental level and the context of an important relationship in the victim's life as determinant of pathological outcomes.

To illustrate these differences, consider that sexual abuse may be experienced and understood as a deficiency of the self, perpetrated within and disrupting close-knit interpersonal safety, while poverty may be understood as a deficiency of the environment in which close relationships may be enhanced as a protective mechanism. This differential attribution with subsequent effects was supported by Bell et al.'s (2012) study of Colombian youth: violence related to ongoing armed conflict was commonly associated with fear, anxiety and sleep disturbances; whereas familial forms of violence were associated with impulsivity-related symptoms, such as suicidal ideation/attempts, aggression, and alcohol or substance abuse.

Trauma Specific Effects

While the link between childhood adversities and later negative outcomes are generally well established, the ACE's literature does not make a clear differentiation for trauma specific effects. While not all people who experience traumatic events develop PTSD or other related mental disorders (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010) clear conceptual formulations offer utility in considering some of the effects that trauma, repeated trauma, and chronically stressful environments may engender. Post-traumatic Stress (PTSD), Complex PTSD (cPTSD), and Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) are three diagnostic categories that can enrich our understanding.

The DSM-5 (2013) describes post-traumatic stress as typically resulting in three main categories of response: re-experiencing of the trauma, avoidance of trauma reminders, and heightened sense of threat. Theorists on *complex* trauma (Herman, 1992; Van der Kolk, 1997) emphasised the particularly pernicious and destructive nature of repetitive trauma within environments from which one is unable to escape. Indeed, Herman (1992) identified chronic childhood abuse as a major progenitor of cPTSD sequelae: in addition to the three categories of PTSD symptomology above, three additional dimensions are identified: affect dysregulation, negative self-concept, and interpersonal disturbances.

Initially developed specifically to account for the Apartheid context, Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) was proposed by Gillian Straker in 1987 (Straker et al., 1987) to reflect the experience of victims of political violence within a context of ongoing state repression (Straker, 2013). The term has remained salient in the post-liberation context where violence and other threats continue to permeate the lives of the majority of South Africans. This is true for both local youth, for example, Kaminer et al. (2013) found that among a group of Cape Town youth, 98.9% had been witness to community violence, as well as migrant youth, who are subject to similar challenges along with the additional challenge of overt and passive xenophobia.

Similarly to cPTSD, CTS includes a recognition of the impact of environments that present realistic ongoing threat and danger, often without safe spaces to which one can withdraw and ‘recover’ (Stevens et al., 2013). The experiences of refugees and asylum seekers displaced by civil conflict, and living in hostile xenophobic communities with endemic violence, coheres with this CTS aetiology and its maintaining factors. Continuous, rather than time-limited, political violence was further found by Pat-Horenczyk et al. (2015) to lead to different levels of distress, symptoms, and relational impacts.

Positive Adaptations

Adversity is a common experience for many children in South Africa, especially those of economically deprived and marginalised communities, yet many of these children manage to navigate adversity in ways that leads to growth and considerable success.

Having some ACE's has even been linked to positive health outcomes, likely as resilience building mechanisms (Waite & Ryan, 2019). The literature is somewhat conflictual: a curvilinear relationship whereby a 'middle-ground' of some adversity allows the development of more meaningful and adaptive perceptions but where too much that leads to overwhelmed being detrimental is generally advanced (Sim & Pooley, 2016). As an analogy, the development of muscles require a certain amount of resistance against which they are able to break, reform, and grow. However, should a force too great for someone's capabilities be applied, there is the possibility of injury and even long-term damage. Similarly, the literature broadly suggests that some adversity may be good, while too much may be injurious, to quote Naiker et al. (2021) directly:

“relative to a history of either no or high cumulative lifetime adversity, a history of some adversity is associated with better mental health and wellbeing” (p. 9)

The concept of growth directly related to adversity, and more so to trauma (which suggests that injury itself may engender other adaptations that would not have occurred without it) is however contentious, complex, and non-linear.

African Migrant Vulnerability

African Migrants

African migrants in South Africa are individuals who have moved from other African countries to settle in South Africa. Estimates suggest that the foreign-born migrant population in South Africa is around 4.5 million (StatsSA, 2022). These migrants are attracted to South Africa due to its perceived freedom, economic opportunities, and promise of prosperity (Krüger, 2010). While many migrants come from neighbouring African countries, a large number also come fleeing war torn areas of Africa to seek asylum.

Asylum seekers are individuals who have applied for refugee status on the grounds of having left their homes due to persecution, conflict, or violence, and who are thus seeking protection. If successful in that application, their status becomes that of refugee. South Africa receives a significant number of asylum applications, and there is a complex process to seeking this

protection which includes navigating local systems, language barriers, and cultural differences (Mukumbang et al., 2020).

Although African migrant vulnerability in South Africa predates the end of Apartheid as a consistent extension of its racist categorisations (Jones, 1997), post-Apartheid discrimination is situated in a more complex intersect of economic, community, and political interests. While the post-apartheid era initially symbolised freedom and safety for refugees (including the allure of better economic prospects and the relative political stability of South Africa) fierce competition for resources, migrant vulnerability, and the allure of a scapegoat for ongoing issues have all fed into a corresponding increase in hostility and intolerance towards non-nationals (Krüger, 2010). This has manifested as xenophobia, but more specifically *Afrophobia*, as these sentiments are largely limited to *African* migrants, and not European or other migrants.

Xenophobia and Afrophobia

Xenophobia has been defined as an orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population (Suleman et al., 2018). The International Labor Organization (ILO) further expands on this definition, adding that xenophobia describes "attitudes, prejudices and behavior that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity" (Suleman et al., 2018, p. 408).

While xenophobia leads to civic exclusion of others based on their cultural or national identity it is distinguished from racism which concerns phenotypic differences in appearance and skin colour (Suleman et al., 2018). Despite the differences in rationale for these orientations, in practice functions of power and privilege relate to both of these orientations (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013); and in South Africa, where language, community ties, and legislation favours locals, the systemic racism of Apartheid can be argued to have been one of many displacements, in this case, cast onto foreign African migrants (Tafira, 2011; Kaziboni, 2022).

The displacement of frustration, anger, and pain at the continued dire circumstances for the majority of black South Africans, can be seen in Langa's (2013) attribution of South African xenophobia to the scape-coating of non-nationals as a cause of social ills (including violent crime, the spreading of diseases, and the taking of jobs and women), and allegations of draining

the healthcare system and other state resources (Opfermann, 2020). While, the causal role of a politics of access has also been advanced: Adjai and Lazaridis (2013) argue that the struggle for political and socio-economic resources prefaces both earlier racialisation, and well as present-day xenophobia. That xenophobic stereotypes are levelled solely against African migrants who add competition for scant opportunities lends further credence to this.

Suleman et al. (2018) argue that the impact of xenophobia extends beyond individual experiences to structural factors: despite their qualifications, immigrants face multiple barriers to job opportunities as compared to their native-born counterparts, leading to job insecurity and poverty; and their access to equitable healthcare is compromised across multiple levels, from discrimination by healthcare providers, to fear of government reprisal, leading to avoidance of help-seeking. Suleman et al. (2018) further note that xenophobia is predictably associated with worse mental health outcomes and depressive symptoms, increased social stress, and difficulties with cultural integration.

Similar finding in other contexts cohere with these findings. In schools and other social networks, students report experiences of segregation and othering based on language and national identity (Isseri et al., 2018); physical violence resulting from xenophobia, often from ostensibly trustworthy figures such as neighbours, health professionals, and law enforcement (Langa, 2021); and famously and most troubling, large scale pogrom-like attacks resulting in death, destruction, and other horrors have occurred on community, regional, and national scales (Kaziboni, 2022).

There are instances of discriminatory practices by governmental institutions such as the South African Police Service and Defence Force, which have been reported to frequently intimidate, arrest, and deport unwanted migrants through targeted operations (Opfermann, 2020). Refugee status can also be revoked ('cessation') through the conviction of a crime. Given that police have been shown to threaten migrants with trumped up charges – in order to elicit bribes, as sexual coercion, or to confiscate their belongings for material gains (Langa, 2013) – there is a very concerning power differential with little recourse in favour of migrants.

Legislation

Democratic South Africa is premised on a legal framework designed to be inclusive and prevent discrimination. The preamble of the South African Constitution states: "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity", while the Constitution guarantees fundamental human rights to everyone in the country, irrespective of their nationality (Republic of South Africa 1996; Opfermann, 2020, p. 379).

Despite this, a number of laws and policies have been adopted that have specifically targeted migrants. These have included progressively tighter visa, working, and benefit restrictions, with subsequent negative effects on the lives of foreign-born migrants in various ways (Mukumbang et al., 2020). Sekati (2022) notes overly selective requirements in the *South African Immigration Act* have restricted migrants from obtaining visa and permanent residency; while more alarmingly during the Covid-19 pandemic, the requirement of state issued documentation functionally excluded many asylum seekers from obtaining vaccines, especially as the state departments responsible for issuing said documentation had been closed. The Covid-19 containment measures implemented through legislation further exacerbated unequal treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees, with exclusion from economic, poverty, and hunger alleviation schemes (Mukumbang et al., 2020).

The South African Refugees Act provides the right for asylum-seekers and refugees to work, study, access medical services, receive life-saving treatment, and have freedom of movement (The Republic of South Africa, 1998). In practice however, it is often impossible for undocumented migrants to secure meaningful and long-term employment, access services, or receive equitable treatment; and even documented migrants (i.e. those who have been approved for refugee status) find that their status is often insecure and they are still excluded from the majority of benefits that locals may have access to (Mukumbang et al., 2020). In addition, ongoing amendments to the refugee legal framework have been argued to have resulted in the increasing disappearance of these once progressive refugee rights (Kavuro, 2022).

To children in particular, the right to adequate care and protection has been specifically named (Republic of South Africa 1996, art. 28). The South African Schools Act (1996) and Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) further reinforce the rights of all children to quality education, free from discrimination and exclusion based on race, class, national origin,

gender, or other differences. The Constitution and the Children's Act of 2005 provide protection for immigrant children and affirm the need to protect them from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation (Isseri et al., 2018).

Sadly, despite existing legal protections, in practice, unaccompanied, separated, and undocumented migrant youth in South Africa remain 'functionally stateless' and vulnerable due to the unenforceability of their rights (Opfermann, 2020). This discrepancy between sometimes excellent and progressive legislation and the inability to implement and enforce legal protections remains characteristic of an overstretched South Africa.

Language and Nationality

Language serves as a marker of identity and belonging, and in South Africa, it has been used to distinguish between South Africans and non-nationals. Langa (2013) points out that during the 2008 xenophobic riots, individuals who were unable to speak local languages were particularly targeted and attacked. Language proficiency contributes to social inclusion or exclusion, and Isseri et al. (2018) found that local language-related difficulties (such as a limited knowledge of isiZulu, the dominant language in certain provinces) contributed to social exclusion and poorer educational attainment amongst immigrant children.

While all non-nationals in South Africa are at risk of being mistreated, the extent of mistreatment appears to vary based on language and nationality. This differential treatment is especially likely for African migrants that do not speak English or languages closely related to Southern African Nguni or Sotho-Tswana languages (Langa, 2013). Unlike, foreign migrants from neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe that are more easily able to blend into South African society, African migrants from further North in the continent are 'exposed' by easily observable differences in language and culture. In the South African context this marginalisation of migrants who are unable to 'pass' as South African, clearly echoes that of 'white passing' and its associated privileges in the Apartheid era.

This is supported by Altbeker (2005) who found that police treat non-nationals differentially depending on their country of origin; and more generally, Langa (2013) who identified French-speaking nationals from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and other

Francophone countries as encountering different treatment compared to non-nationals from other regions. Specifically, French speaking migrants described significant hurdles in their daily lives as they struggled to communicate effectively, access essential services, and navigate their surroundings, leaving them susceptible to discrimination and harassment (Langa, 2013).

Congolese and Burundian migrants specifically have been driven to seek refuge and better opportunities in South Africa due to the long-standing civil wars, militia conflicts, and political instability that have plagued these countries. In the DRC, the rise to power of President Nguesso in 1997 has been marked by oppression and tyranny during his three-decade-long presidency (Tonda, 1997). In neighbouring Burundi, ethnic divisions created by Colonial Belgium were exacerbated by its withdrawal in 1962, with a resultant civil war between Tutsis and Hutus leading to the deaths of between two to four hundred thousand people, and the displacement of at least as many (Eggers & Lemerchand, 2023). Child soldiers have been used extensively in both countries (Child Soldiers international, 2004).

The oppressive conditions and protracted civil wars in these countries has led to the forced migration of families, and particularly young people, in search of better financial security and general safety, with South Africa as a destination of choice (Mayoma and Williams, 2021). As such, the highest proportion of child migrants in South Africa are from Congo, accounting for 45.4% of child migrants (Statistics South Africa, 2014).

Migrant Youth

In South Africa the majority of children experience at least one adverse childhood experience related to the ACE's scale (Manyema & Richter, 2019); however if we expand our lens to include distal, historic, and systemic adversities that are not captured by this limited scale, and such adversities as: impoverished and dangerous community environments, historic trauma, and intense inequalities, the great majority of South African youth can be considered to face *multiple* ACE's. Cronholm, et al. (2015) and Finkelhor et al.'s (2015) expanded definitions of ACE's included poverty, bullying, exposure to community violence, and discrimination. Thus, xenophobia itself can be understood to be an ACE in the South African context. Among African refugee and migrant children, xenophobia, familial disruption, and social exclusion all evince cascading impacts that increase the risk for further ACE's (Mohamed et al., 2016).

Difficulties faced by migrant parents are additionally transferred to their offspring. For example, negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviours impact on caregivers ability to access health care for their children (Meyer-Weitz et al., 2018), while parental mental health — affected by exposure to conflict or migration adversity, economic hardships through un/underemployment and poverty, loss of status, family separation, prolonged asylum procedures, frequent relocations, and acculturation stress — impacts on family functioning, parenting behaviour, and thus parent–child relationships (Wood et al., 2020).

Shafer and Easton (2021) showed that a childhood history of ACE's in turn impacted on fathering behaviours, much as it has been shown to impact on mothering: both of these leading to increased likelihood for either protective or at-risk profiles. In other words, those who have faced ACE's themselves have been shown to be more likely to become more protective towards their children, or conversely more abusive and neglectful. This presents as an interesting dichotomy in the transference of ACE's from one generation to the next, and is a contributory factor as African migrant parents have often faced considerable ACE's in their own childhoods.

Intergenerational trauma and parental PTSD are likely to affect parental sensitivity to children's cues, heighten the risk of harsh or punitive parenting, and negatively affect communication and relationships (Wood et al., 2020). These aspects are especially pertinent to refugees or asylum seekers who have fled areas of civil conflict.

Migrant youth face additional challenges in the South African school system. Kruger and Osman (2010) found that xenophobia in Johannesburg inner city schools took the forms of name-calling, teasing, social isolation, and occasional experiences of physical violence, and note that a lack of trust and fear permeated the relationship between migrant and local children. Differences in cultural environment and primary language further mediate these difficulties, and migrant children report more behavioural problems and less prosocial behaviours toward peers (Gatt et al., 2020).

Migration itself constitutes a unique risk situation for youth. Language and communication barriers, disrupted family dynamics, shifts in role responsibilities, broken social networks, lack of social support, and restricted access to social welfare and other services or adversity, are all anticipated to trigger negative outcomes for youth development (Wu & Ou, 2021). In addition, Gatt et al. (2020) found that migrant youth report a higher mean number of traumatic events

than non-migrants in their previous year, thereby indicating a greater vulnerability to trauma within their new contexts (and not only their country of origin). Norton and Sliep (2017) in conducting participatory research with refugee youth in South Africa enumerated a number of themes common to their experience, among them: prejudice (xenophobia, racism), a lack of resources (food, clothes, school fees), and hopelessness about the future.

In terms of *refugee* children specifically, Ahearn et al. (1999) note that trauma, violence, loss, disruption of socialisation, separation, and deprivation which characterise their experiences of all heighten the risk of reduced resiliency, and that post-traumatic effects are mediated by community, familial, and personal characteristics. This is not surprising as Freud and Burlingham (1943) had already shown that children separated from their parents to the countryside for their own safety (during the bombing of London in WWII) were more emotionally distressed than their peers who had remained. Traumatic events, such as the bombings, were less distressing when mediated by community, parental, and social support.

African migrant youth in South Africa thus face a considerable number of possible adversities: a South African society marred by inequality and violence, overt and covert xenophobia that may manifest in extreme violence or endless administrative hurdles, linguistic and cultural barriers that prevent integration, and disrupted and impaired familial relationships due to past and present trauma being some of the most notable.

Theoretical Frameworks: Resilience and Growth

Conceptual Definitions

Resilience

Resilience is one mechanism through which a positive navigation of adversity is theorised to occur, though a consensus on the concept has been elusive (Southwick et al., 2014). It has been defined as a style of coping with adversity, change, or difficulty that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of protective factors (Dykes, 2016; Richardson, 2002).

However, coping may better be understood as an adjacent though closely related concept, used to refer to the efforts made to deal with a stressful event following its appraisal, and can be positive or negative (Leung et al., 2022). For the purpose of this study, coping then is understood as a sometimes aspect of resilience, as a way of dealing with difficulty. Complex and extensive forms of coping are often observed in individuals who have grown up in challenging environments, such as families with mental illness, substance misuse, forms of abuse or neglect, and poverty, as well as in war-torn communities (Herman, 1992).

Resilience theory emerged through the study of adversity and interest in how adverse life experiences impact harmfully on people (van Breda, 2018), and adversity is thus integral to its' conceptualisation. Dyes (2016) notes that the concept is intimately entwined with difficulty and struggle, and Luther et al. (2000) and van Breda (2018) have both emphasised that along with pre-requisite adversity, and successful navigation, resilience includes 'positive' outcome despite negative circumstances.

Initially, psychological and biological qualities, such as hardiness, optimism, adaptability, and self-efficacy were considered primary to the concept of resilience (Mampane et al., 2021). More recently, resilience has come to be understood as a dynamic processes involving individual processes, in interaction with social and environmental supports, to facilitate learning and adaptation (Leung et al., 2022). In this more holistic conceptualisation, contextual supports are emphasised as protective factors diminishing maladaptive outcomes as risks arise (Ungar, 2015).

However, while resilience research has focussed on the mediational (or process) aspects of resilience, there has been a lack of conceptual clarity regarding a differentiation of process and outcome (Ungar, 2004; van Breda, 2018). As such, I draw on van Breda (2018), a South African sociologist, who provides a particularly cogent explanation of resilience: he defines resilience as the process of navigating adversity, while he uses the moniker 'resilient' to refer to 'better-than-expected' outcomes. Including multiple levels and systems of the person-in-context, or social ecological view, van Breda (2018) proposes the following definition:

The multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity. (p. 4)

RESILIENCE AS PROCESS AND OUTCOME

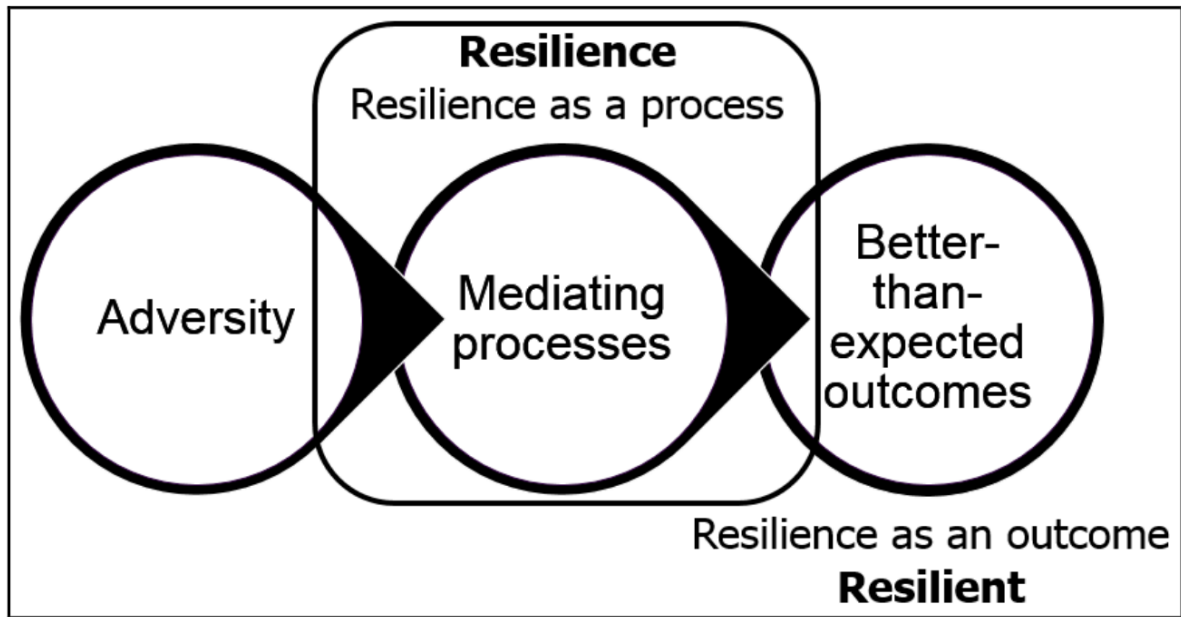


Figure 2: . van Breda (2018). *The Interconnection of Adversity, Resilience, and Outcomes.*

In addition to van Breda's (2018) definition, several other theories and models are appropriate to a South African context: Ungar (2011) takes stock of local and environment conditions, Ebersöhn's (2019) recognises indigenous Southern African resilience pathways; and Bronfenbrenner's (1978) and Wu and Ou (2021) consider multiple levels of the surrounding ecology in interaction with the individual.

Socioecological Resilience Theory (SERT) was proposed by Ungar (2011) and expands Kurt Lewin's (1951) conceptualisation whereby 'the person and his environment have to be considered as one constellation of interdependent factors' (p. 240). Ungar proposed four principles in line with this: decentrality, complexity, atypicality and cultural relativity.

Ungar's first principle of *decentrality* moves the focus of resilience from the individual (i.e. the most central aspect) on to the surrounding ecology, and proposes a focus on the environmental factors that have engendered the response of the child. *Complexity* is the recognition that positive growth under adverse conditions, as well as the protective processes that cause it, are too complex to predict 'singular developmental trajectories' of cause and effect (p. 6). *Atypicality* is used to refer to 'culturally nonnormative adaptations' that are effective (p. 7), even if they do not seem to indicate resilience on the surface. Lastly, the idiosyncratic

nature of local culture, values, and opportunities means that we cannot simply apply one lens to account for what resilience is or isn't.

Ebersöhn's (2019) Relationship-resourced Resilience (RRR) theory proposes a Southern African centric pathway to resilience, in a context of historical inequality. She defines "a social technology that operationalises a supply chain of social resources" (p. xi) as *flocking*, or the use of social support in a massively adverse context, by mobilising social capitals (such as cultural, collective, social, and economic resources) through cultural practice. Ebersöhn (2019) describes mechanisms that take the form of borrowing, lending, reciprocal donations, smart partnerships, as well as small societies; that are enacted through interdependent cultural values, and directed by norms of communal benefit and agency, as well as respect (rather than shame) for vulnerability. Ebersöhn (2019) contributes to a recognition of resilience as embedded within a particular historic and cultural locale, that pays attention to inequality:

flocking... clothes those made vulnerable systematically over ages of systemic exclusion with the benefits of cultural beliefs of communal agency to buffer the collective. (p. x)

This importance of surrounding factors in the role of resilience, are advanced by Wu and Ou (2021) who describe an ecological framework specific to migrant youth, which locates resilience in terms of the interaction between the individual and multiple levels of the environment, with a focus on agency given constraints and opportunities. This draws from Bronfenbrenners (1979) ecological systems theory, a developmental framework that emphasises that individual development is a function of interaction interconnected levels of a surrounding system: the microsystem (immediate surrounds, such as family or school), the mesosystem (the interactions between these microsystems), the exosystem (other formal and informal structures that influence microsystems, such as the neighbourhood, or workplace), the macrosystem (the social and cultural, including policy, economics, and geography), and the chronosystem (changes over time, including historic factors). In Wu and Ou's (2021) migrant youth are positioned as active agents in the centre who mobilise resources from and facilitate interactions across these systems. They define resilience specific to migrant youth as: "positive adaptation and development despite the challenging environmental changes and life transitions resulting from migration" (p. 377).

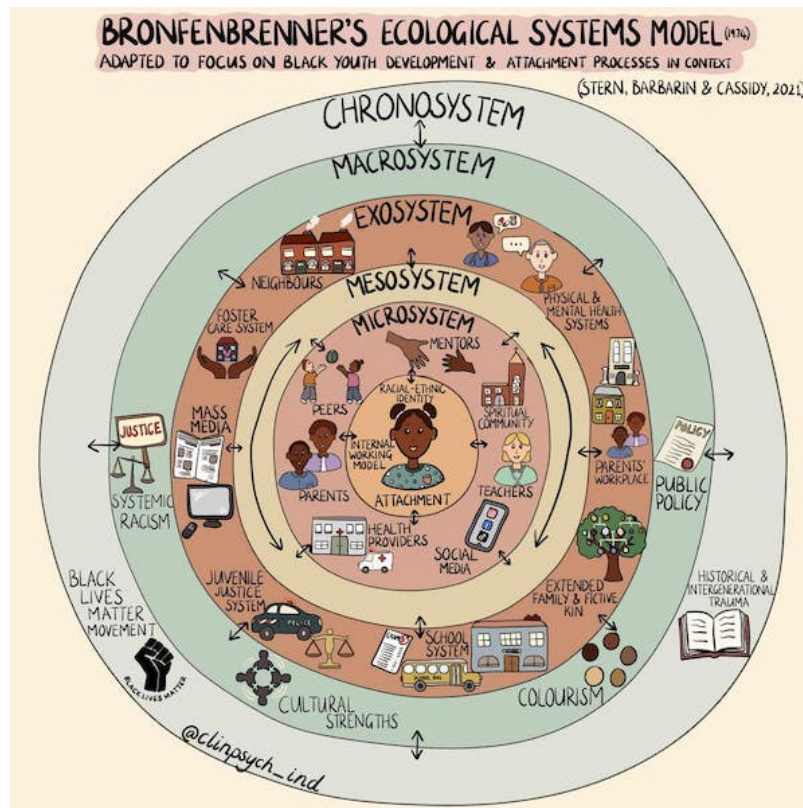


Figure 3: . Stern, Barbarin, and Cassidy (2021). Bronfenbrenner's Model Adapted for Black Youth Development

For the purpose of this study, I will use van Breda's (2018) definition of resilience as it allows for a discrimination between process and outcome, as well as the consideration of 'multilevel processes of systems' (or how the surrounding ecology contributes). I also draw on Wu and Ou's (2021) ecological framework which considers the interaction of multiple levels of systems as well as personal agency in navigating developmental and sociocultural challenge. However, as Wu and Ou's (2021) ecological framework redefined microsystem to mean individual factors, while effectively reducing the number of external systems to only two, I have expanded their model to include all of Bronfenbrenner's proposed systems, and have used the definitions as supplied by Bronfenbrenner. The model has also been expanded to account for van Breda's (2018) resilient, 'better-than-expected', outcomes, as well as one other aspect related to adversity (and trauma) that has not been adequately conveyed by resilience theory. This is the concept of personal growth that otherwise would not have occurred, but for the adversity or trauma. The modified model appears below, followed by an exploration of such growth:

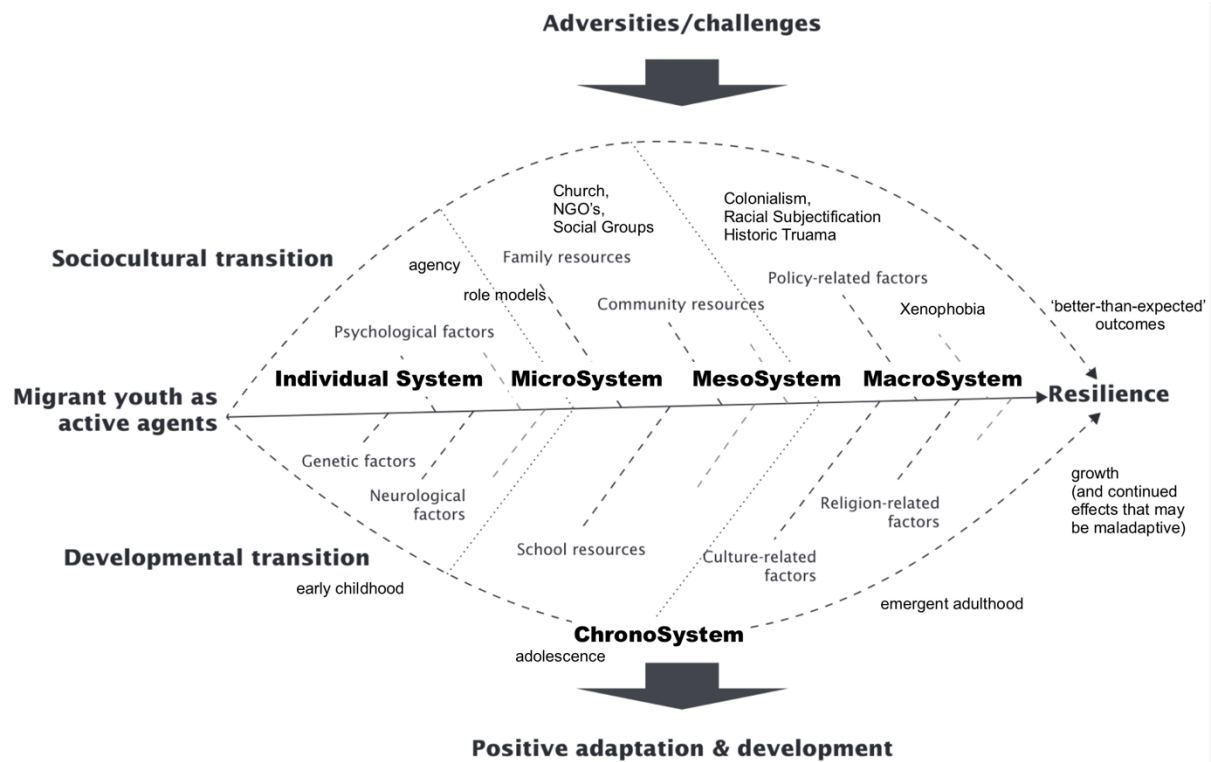


Figure 4: Wu and Ou's (2021) Multisystem Resilience Framework for Migrant Youth, Modified for this Thesis.

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)

Resilience implies an ability to withstand stress and 'return to the norm', and while there has been some attempt to integrate growth or positive adaptation into the concept ('resilient reintegration' is offered as the development of insight or growth through disruptions: Richardson, 2002), the concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG) has become the most common term in the literature to describe the positive personal changes that have occurred precisely due to adversity or trauma (Sims & Pooley, 2016).

Positive adaptations that resulted from adversity and trauma were first introduced into the conceptual literature by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) and Park et al. (1996). Understood as the development of new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving beyond prior functioning, it lent a crucial distinction to both resilience and recovery which referred to return to baseline or resistance to trauma (Tedeschi et al., 2018). As such, PTG is indicative of changes borne from the struggle to cope with suffering, and is construed to cover several domains: a greater appreciation for life; more meaningful interpersonal relationships; recognition of personal strength; changed life priorities; and spiritual development (Tedeschi et al., 2018).

A number of models have emerged to account for how this growth may take place, the most common being the dynamic system model: whereby growth is understood as the result of the disruption of a system that is then able to reintegrate the experience in a transformative way (Mangelsdorf et al., 2018). Integral to this is a constructivist perspective whereby people are understood to create individual cognitive categories of their experience, along with core beliefs about the self, their future, and the world (Tedeschi et al., 2018). In the context of ACE's, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2014) define it as the personal growth and development that results from the struggle with significant childhood challenges. An alternative theorisation is that of an outcome through a 'real' engagement with threat: by coping in the face of trauma one develops genuine ability, belief in these abilities, and increased self-esteem (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1998). It is likely that both of these pathways play a role.

However, these models have not been able to account for so-called 'illusory growth' (Brooks, 2014), that is where *reported* growth may be a cognitive strategy in the service of avoidance or denial *when positive behavioural or other changes have not occurred*. Maercker and Zoellner (2004) give an example of illusory growth in a description of a patient who reported having realised the importance of love and relationship (and thereby having grown) following a severe trauma: but who had become incapable of intimacy and avoided others. In order to account for distinctions between 'real' and 'illusory' growth, they proposed the Janus-face model.

This Janus-face model describes two apparent expressions of PTG, the 'real' and 'illusory': 'real' growth is considered to be related to aspects of adjustment or well-being in both the short and long term, and is supposed to reflect the result of active struggling with the trauma; while 'illusory growth' is assumed to have been triggered by the perception of threat and to serve mainly as a palliative coping strategy (Maercker and Zoellner, 2004).

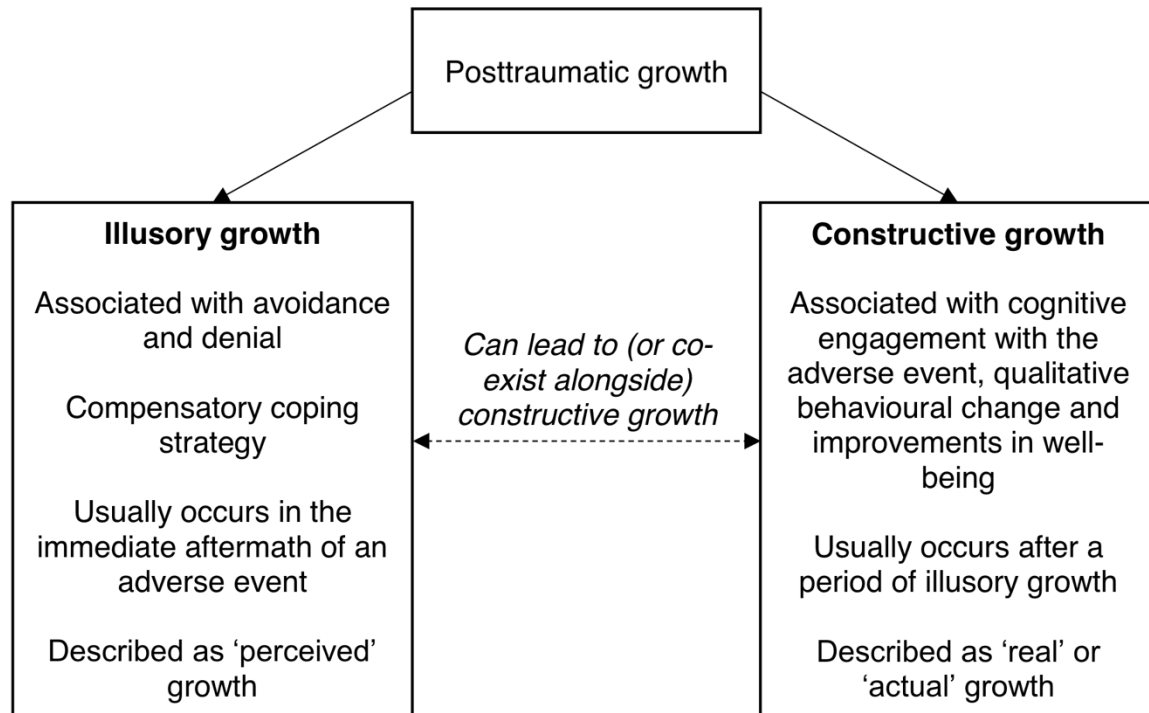


Figure 5: Brook (2018). Maerker and Zoelner's (2004) Janus-face Model of PTG

This model allows for the consideration of how resilience processes that may be effective in the short-term: such as denial, avoidance, wishful thinking, distortion of meaning, unrealistic optimism, self-aggrandizement, or an exaggerated sense of personal control (Maercker and Zoellner, 2004) may inhibit later actual growth. They relate this primarily to two other processes: when these strategies become aspects of *denial* they propose that they are likely to inhibit growth and become unhelpful, whereas strategies related more to *openness to experience*, allow for the necessary grappling with difficult thoughts and feelings that allow for subsequent growth.

Brooks (2018) introduces a cognitive explanation: when world views are threatened, new information can either be assimilated to maintain the pre-existing world assumptions by minimalizing or denying distressing information, or the world view can accommodate and thus incorporate this new information. Positive accommodation (e.g. ‘I am more capable than I realised’) is further linked to PTG, as opposed to negative accommodation (e.g. ‘The world is dangerous and unpredictable’) which is linked to PTSD (Joseph et al., 2012 as cited by Brooks 2018). Vloet et al. (2017) similarly explain this plausible illusory nature of PTG as being driven by an assimilation of the experience into one’s self concept, and that individuals in seeking to

see themselves as improving in some way over time may misattribute growth to such traumatic and adverse experiences.

The Relationship of PTG to Resilience

It is logically consistent that individuals with higher levels of resilience will be better equipped to withstand the detrimental psychological effects of trauma (Henson et al., 2021). At the same time, theorisations put forward by Tedeschi and Colhoun (1995; 2014; 2018), begin with the assumption that it is overwhelm (i.e. a traumatic response) that leads to growth, and research consistently demonstrates same: trauma and subjective distress are the precursors of this growth (Hensen et al., 2021). Much like the findings on the effects of moderate adversity: a moderate degree of trauma reaction as well as symptomology (as opposed to too little, or too much) is associated with the greatest degree of post-traumatic growth (Kumar, 2016; Vloet et al., 2017).

Research has revealed the significant role of resilience in mitigating the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, particularly in specific populations such as firefighters (Lee et al., 2014). Ironically, greater resilience also decreases PTG likely precisely due to its protective effects mitigating the shattering and overwhelm necessary to bring about growth (Lee et al., 2014). Higher levels of resilience have been linked to lower levels of post-traumatic growth (Henson et al., 2021). This is conceptually consistent, as resilience refers to an ability to withstand negative impacts and return to baseline, while PTG is trauma dependent.

The converse of this inverse relationship of Resilience to PTG is seen when it proceeds from the other direction. While Resilience ‘prevents’ the necessary traumatic response that leads to PTG, trauma exposure (including both PTG and PTS) leads to greater resilience: trauma-exposed migrant youth have been found to be more resilient, demonstrating higher levels of wellbeing in comparison to their non-migrant trauma-exposed peers, and showing higher levels of wellbeing than non-migrants in the presence of trauma (Gatt et al., 2020).

Promotive Factors

Not all children exposed to a traumatic event will develop trauma symptoms (Little et al., 2011). And multiple protective factors comprise numerous biological, psychological, and social systems as well as their interactions (Ungar, 2015). In terms of PTG, there are too a number of facilitative and promotive factors. Both protective and facilitative factors are explored here.

Biological

The relationship between biological factors and resilience highlights the influence of genetic susceptibility, specific characteristics of stress, and epigenetic mechanisms. Waite and Ryan (2020) connect vulnerability to genetic factors as well as specific aspects of the stressful event itself: such as its nature, intensity, and duration. While the prenatal period is marked by genetic developments, environmental factors such as maternal stress hormones, nutritive deficiencies, diseases, or teratogens (substances that exert a negative effect on the developing foetus) all significantly shape prenatal brain development (Gaskill & Perry, 2014).

Postnatal brain development is more profoundly influenced by experience (Waite and Ryan, 2020). Epigenetics, or the bidirectional influence of environmental factors and experiences on gene expression, plays a crucial role. Experience has been shown to lead to changes in gene expression, highlighting how experiences may lead to biological changes that increase both protective and risk factors (Waite and Ryan, 2020).

As an example, nurturing care during infancy has been found to activate genes in the brain that regulate stress, leading to the development of socially engaged, curious, and confident children (Waite & Ryan, 2020). This is in line with Bowlby's attachment theory (1982), and merely describes a corresponding biological change mediated by the caregiving relationship. The important implication of this, is that as epigenetics is associated with experience, there exists potential for enhancing biological aspects of resilience (Brendtro, 2015; Waite and Ryan, 2020).

Pre-puberty is a critical developmental period in relation to resilience, particularly in the context of experiences such as abuse and adversity. Neuroanatomical research suggests that abuse occurring before puberty has more selective effects on the hippocampus, while abuse

after puberty appears to have more selective effects on the prefrontal cortex (Andersen, 2015; Waite and Ryan, 2020), thus the onset of abuse has differential impacts on emotionality and decision making respectively.

Psychological

Cognitive abilities contribute to adaptive responses and problem-solving skills, enhancing an individual's ability to cope with adversity, and individuals who possess elevated problem-solving abilities can proactively respond to challenging situations in ways that minimise or avert adversity (National Academy of Sciences, 2014). These cognitive skills enhance self-efficacy, decision-making, adaptive functioning, and coping strategies (Brodowski & Fischman, 2013).

In reviewing the research on rumination and its connection to PTG, Volt et al. (2017) determined that both intrusive and deliberate rumination are likely essential components in the genesis of PTG, and that these two forms of rumination are difficult to separate with intrusive rumination likely leading to and becoming deliberate after a period of time. Kashdan and Kane (2011) found that in the aftermath of trauma, people reporting lower reliance on experiential avoidance also reported greatest growth and meaning in life. In other words, not avoiding distressing memories, thoughts, and feelings is associated with increases in PTG.

Strong social competency, including skills such as identifying feelings, effectively dealing with thoughts and emotions, and resolving interpersonal problems, have also demonstrated positive outcomes later in life (Waite & Ryan, 2020). Children with strong interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence are more likely to attend college, secure full-time employment, and are less prone to substance abuse or criminal behaviour (National Academy of Sciences, 2014).

In terms of personality: agreeableness, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness have all been positively correlated with PTG; as are a sense of purpose (finding meaning in non-materialistic aspects of life), having goals, higher self-worth, and hope (Hensen et al., 2021). Specifically, openness has been identified as the most predictive personality trait for PTG (Mattson et al., 2018). Again, this supports the importance of integration of experience as contributory to growth.

Interestingly, Levi and Bachar (2019) have linked narcissistic tendencies to PTG apparently as the result of increased likelihood to adopt positive, and exclude negative, attributions. Smith et al. (2011) found that self-control mitigates the onset of PTSD symptoms, while the belief in control, both realistic and unrealistic, is linked to PTG (Henson et al., 2021). Kaye-Tzadok and Davidson-Arad (2016) indicated that perceived control over one's immediate environment facilitates growth, while a belief in social complexity, or that the wider world is difficult to control, has been positively associated with PTG (Nalipay, Bernardo, & Mordeno, 2016).

Compelling findings from a large meta-analysis (Mengelsdorf et al., 2018) show that studies which have measured effects within 6 months of adverse events have shown declines in functioning, in contrast to those measuring effects 6 months or later after events which showed increases in functioning. This may be due in part to the time needed to adapt and grow from traumatic experience: for Foa and Kozak (1986) they attributed this to a required processing of trauma-related information before it can be integrated into a coherent model of the self.

Mikutta et al. (2022), Xiu et al. (2018), and López et al. (2017) have all demonstrated that a high sense of coherence is positively related to growth. Highly accessible and vivid personal memories have also been suggested to contribute to PTG by giving meaning and structure to life narratives, and Berntsen and Rubin (2006) proposed that such memories anchor and stabilize our self-conceptions.

During adolescence, individuals develop a more nuanced understanding of the role of race and ethnicity in their daily lives and its relation to their overall sense of self (Quintana, 1998; Rivas-Drake et al., 2022), and the development of ethnic-racial identities have been associated with more prosocial behaviours, greater expectations for future community involvement, and positive orientations toward classroom and neighbourhood communities (Rivas-Drake et al., 2022). However, young migrants to South Africa face a dual task of developing these identities in a context of an othering environment, and are challenged to find ways to engage in educational, peer, and cultural networks and practices while maintaining connections to their own nationality (Mayoma & Williams, 2021).

In a critical review of South African child and youth resilience studies, Theron and Breda (2021) analysed resilience-enabling factors of 61 articles in terms of the social ecological approach. They identified factors across personal, relational, structural, and broader social and cultural

levels: concluding that the personal and relational factors held the most salience in terms of enhancing resilience. While they caution against an individualistic focus on resilience, and emphasise the need to consider the interconnections and interactions between these levels, their review of the literature reveals the important mediating role of strategies utilised by children. Personal agency, adaptive meaning making, a commitment to education, and self-regulation were identified as broad areas of important skills (Breda & Theron, 2018).

Adaptive responses accessible to migrant youth specifically that have been noted in the literature include: being able to think positively, maintain a long-term vision and focus on particular goals and aspirations; having an enduring belief that their life had meaning and value; appreciation for what they have; pro-social behaviours and valuing kindness; helping others, distractive behaviour, and humour (Wood et al., 2020). While these are similar to the criterion of PTG, and Sims and Pooley (2016) note that PTG can thus be regarded as both a process and an outcome utilised by refugees, it is plausible that in learning these strategies to cope with adversity children are equipped with additional tools that help to foster later growth and success.

Social / Environmental

Este and Ngo (2011) emphasise the importance of recognising that children do not develop their competencies in isolation, and that the so called ‘resilience’ of individuals is enabled and enacted through multiple surrounding systems. If not, they caution, one can end up “blaming the victim” (p. 29). There are a myriad of environmental and contextual factors across time, that span the social ecology and influence how individuals develop their resiliencies.

The microsystem represents the ecologies closest to the child, such as family and peer relationships, as well as systems intimately connected to the family, including family functioning and school environments (Hornor, 2017). It plays a vital role in shaping a child's resilience. Ray (2006) asserts that individuals cannot aspire to what they do not know, and therefore their surrounding interpersonal contexts, what they see and hear individuals do in their daily lives, sets the templates for their own decisions and likely choices.

In early childhood, healthy attachment relationships serve as the foundation for self-organization, physiological self-regulation, self-control, and social skills (Arditti, 2012;

Bowlby, 1982; Waite and Ryan, 2020). The presence of a secure attachment figure provides a safe refuge for children, fostering self-assurance, exploration, and understanding of the world, while reducing susceptibility to subsequent adversity (Arditti, 2012). Regarding at-risk children and youth, such as migrant youth who often face more extreme forms of adversity, these types of nurturing factors are of increased importance (Kim, 2017).

Positive family functioning thus serves as a protective factor, mitigating the negative impact of other adverse characteristics, such as parental divorce on adolescent mental health (Balistreri & Alvira-Hammond, 2016). Additionally, peer support becomes more influential during adolescence and can provide a buffer against the negative effects of ACE's, contributing to overall well-being (Kim, 2017).

Waite and Ryan (2020) highlight that healthy connections with parents, siblings, older adults, faith or spiritual communities, schools, and peers can serve as protective factors. These connections provide individuals with a network of support, guidance, and positive influences, which can help mitigate the negative effects of ACE's (Waite & Ryan, 2020).

Other strategies involve engaging in activities that promote community, and serving others in meaningful ways. Waite and Ryan (2020) suggest that community engagement: through working collaboratively with others, participating in community spaces, or engaging in acts of service, fosters resilience. By participating in meaningful activities that benefit others, individuals can further develop a sense of purpose and connection, both of which contribute to positive outcomes in the PTG literature (Waite & Ryan, 2020).

The exosystem encompasses communities, and service agencies, that exert indirect influence on individuals' immediate environment, even if they do not actively participate. A resilient community effectively manages challenging circumstances and learns from them (Waite & Ryan, 2020). Within the exosystem, resources and structures designed to facilitate collective action and to transform the environment positively can impact resilience substantially. Educational policies, legal systems, and socioeconomic status all impact on fostering resilience (Waite & Ryan, 2020), as does their implementation.

The most favourable development occurs under community conditions where children are neither preoccupied nor oblivious to issues of safety (Barbarin & Richter, 1999), and children

living in moderately safe neighbourhoods (neither very safe, nor very dangerous) function better socially and academically than their peers, this being true across the entire socioeconomic spectrum. Education plays a significant role in enhancing the resilience of marginalized migrant youth, offering them opportunities to pursue their valued goals, including overcoming poverty in their host countries (Mkwanzanji & Wilson-Strydom, 2018).

The macrosystem encompasses the broader societal and cultural factors that influence individuals' lives, including politics, beliefs, and freedoms permitted by the national government, the economy, and cultural customs (Waite & Ryan, 2020). Cultural beliefs, social policies, and societal structures significantly shape childhood development and resilience (Boon et al., 2012; Kovacic, 2015), as do social and material inequalities. Along with marginalization, these can create challenging conditions for underprivileged youth, exposing them to various stressors and deficits that influence their life trajectories (Nurius et al., 2015; Waite & Ryan, 2020).

Legislation as well as its enforceability (as explored earlier) play a crucial role in the lives of migrants to South Africa, while other systemic factors, such as policies that perpetuate continued segregation in the post-Apartheid era (consider the placement of RDP, and low-cost housing) further institutionalise wealth accumulation and disparities (Waite & Ryan, 2020).

It is important to note that the effectiveness of these protective factors may vary depending on the specific context and time. As Waite and Ryan (2020) state, not all protective factors, such as family support, transcend every situation. Protective factors are situational and context-driven. The availability and impact of certain protective factors may depend on the individual's circumstances and the broader social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated. Kovacic (2015) emphasizes that the meanings and practices associated with resilience are embedded within these broader contexts, and that strategies for preventing negative effects related to ACE's must consider these factors in shaping individuals' experiences and opportunities for growth.

Complications and Criticisms

Wortman (2004) problematises the concepts of both Resilience and PTG as decreasing vigilance for the severe effects of social issues, instead individualising the concept leading to inadvertently ‘blaming the victim’ for failing to adapt, grow, or develop from adversity and trauma. Even the converse however, when Resilience and PTG are ostensibly apparent, can obscure and invalidate important issues and experiences.

For instance, while it may seem unusual to associate discrimination with positive mental outcomes, studies suggest that individuals belonging to stigmatized groups may be more prone to developing positive changes due to their life experiences (Rzeszutek & Gruszczyńska, 2018; Wei, et al., 2016), possibility facilitated by a strong sense of belonging (Henson et al., 2021). However, stigmatised groups face more adversity, distress, and trauma, and any associated growth must not trivialise these aspects.

This ‘growth’ at a cost, is demonstrated by Palmer et al. (2016) who found that (American) veterans tended to report growth only after reaching a "turning point" following a traumatic event, which often only occurred several years after living with symptoms of PTSD, and only once being prompted through experiencing extreme levels of despair (Henson et al., 2021). The pain and suffering in the interim period, as well as that which continues alongside any eventual adaptation or growth, cannot be dismissed.

These symptomatic effects of trauma have been shown to co-occur with growth, and even increase together (Liu et al., 2017). Thus, while migrant and other children that face adversity may develop adaptive responses and grow significantly from their adversities, they must still contend with painful and negative effects. While PTG allows individuals to live a fuller and more meaningful life, it does not lead to a complete return to normality (Henson et al., 2021) and it is highly contentious whether one ‘is better off’ for their traumatic experiences. Additionally, not all individuals who have experienced trauma will necessarily experience positive psychological changes (Henson et al., 2021).

Protective factors that contribute to resilience may vary depending on the context and developmental stage of individuals. What may be advantageous in one situation may not necessarily generate resilience when other adverse factors are present or during different

developmental stages (Kim, 2017). There is thus an associated risk of pathologizing adaptive responses that were developed in one context when misapplied to another (Viladarga & Hayes, 2011). For example, aggressive behaviour developed in response to a violent context may be very adaptive.

Lastly, an array of evidence that has been collected on PTG that is sometimes difficult to reconcile: PTG has been shown to be connected to PTSD in synergistic, inverse, and unrelated relationships, likely due in part to a lack of conceptual, operational, and measurement clarity on the concept (Pat-Horenczyk & Brom, 2007).

Justification

Resilience theory and research has been described by van Breda (2018) as having special utility in the South African context: an understanding of resilience processes can inform policy and practice in a way that an understanding of adversities only does not allow; it celebrates local and indigenous knowledge and thereby contributes to decolonising theory and practice; as it is qualitative it is amenable to an emic approach and allows for the voice and experience of participants to come to the fore; and through such approaches, the utility of local knowledge and practice has a good chance of emerging. A similar logic extends to research into PTG.

In terms of enhancing adaptability and growth, Ungar (2011) emphasises the need to shift a focus from individuals to social and physical ecologies, and to recognise cultural and historic embeddedness. The use of the proposed models and definitions facilitates a recognition of the surrounding context, including history, and are thus compatible with the decolonial approach.

While a significant body of literature has been developed around the theory and role of resilience there remains a lack of clarity as to the protective factors and that eventuate into the diverse range of strategies and behaviours employed by resilient youth in the Southern African context. Sims and Pooley (2016) note that while evidence of the factors that promote and hinder PTG is important to the field of clinical intervention, the current research into strategies that facilitate growth in refugee populations is insufficient to inform practice.

Chapter Review

This chapter introduced the concept of ACE's, exploring the background and history of the concept, before providing definitions and distinctions between adversity and trauma. A review of the literature pertaining to the effects of adversity and trauma was considered, in light of the dose-response relationship, cascading effects, trauma specific effects, and positive adaptations.

African migrant vulnerability was then introduced, with particular focus on migrants to South Africa and a differentiation of terminology between asylum seekers and refugees. Xenophobia and associated legislation, language, nationality, and youth aspects were explored in terms of the extant literature.

The theoretical frameworks of Resilience Theory and Post-traumatic Growth were introduced, along with their complications. The lack of conceptual clarity in these concepts was explored along with explicit definitions and models for use in the analysis. The promotive factors related to the biological, psychological, and social / environmental, with a multisystemic focus, were described in terms of research findings and theory.

The sociocultural influences, strategies employed, and various effects pertaining to growth as well as symptomology, including illusory effects were thus addressed. Finally, justifications for this study that proceed from the review of the literature was described. The need for intervention, applicability of these frameworks to South Africa, and calls for research into these populations and contexts in particular were highlighted.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter Overview

This section begins with making explicit my underlying assumptions and theoretical choices, as well as how these are connected to the research approach that I have taken, along with the methods used and why these are justified and appropriate. I then move on to locating myself with more specificity in regards to this project and research.

The ethical concerns of this study are explored along with how they have been handled. Specifics around informed consent, confidentiality, and ethics approval are described. Considerations related to good quality qualitative research more generally, and to Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA: the chosen methodological approach in this study) in particular, are discussed along with accompanying examples of how I have attempted to adhere to them.

I then move to describing the population of study, and why this population in particular was selected as appropriate for meeting the study's aims. Particularities around data collection and the procedure followed are described before moving into a more detailed description of the six-phase process of RTA which include descriptions of exact steps followed in data-set familiarisation, coding, theme development and review, and report writing. These drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) seminal article, as well as their more recent (2021) book which has further detailed and updated best practice in RTA.

Paradigms and Assumptions

An *interpretivist* paradigm with its emphasis on experience and interpretation (Henning, 2018) was chosen as appropriate for the methods of the study. This type of paradigm stresses the unique nature of context and history, with a focus on subjective experiences.

I have therefore taken an *experiential* orientation to this research project in order to centre the meanings and experiences articulated by participants, and in line with a 'hermeneutics of empathy' (as proposed by Ricoeur, 1970; and delineated by Braun and Clarke, 2022) I have tried to understand what was meant by participants during the process of interpretation and

theorisation, attempting to stay close to these meanings in ways that would be recognisable to participants.

I have thus assumed an *intentional* understanding of language whereby I have understood it to be used by participants in order to convey their unique perspectives, and rather than a universal meanings outside of the person, I have understood meaning to be located within: as mind-dependent truth. This understanding of truth as dependent on perception is aligned with the *critical realist* ontology that has underpinned this research, and well as a *contextualist* epistemology that I have relied upon.

This critical realist ontology was chosen to reflect my belief that reality itself is not directly attainable and that instead perceptions of it will be indelibly shaped by social context, language, and positionality (among other determinants: Braun & Clarke, 2006); the epistemological approach of contextualism (Pepper, 1948) or of ‘the person-in-context’ (Ushioda, 2009) clarifies the bounds of this understanding of knowledge and ‘truth’ whereby rather than a search for any ultimate reality that truly exists ‘out there’, a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data grounded in the situated realities of participants is sought (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The pragmatic truth criterion is broadly applied: I have aimed towards an account of the data that is both convincing and useful.

As such, I have read and listened to participants in order to understand what they have meant and to try understand what their experiences, strategies, responses, and behaviours may have been like in context, despite the inevitably imperfect nature of this understanding. The accounts that I have named are not taken to be ‘real’ categories but are acknowledged to be constructions that are applied in order to offer utility. ‘Utility’ can only be understood in terms of the values against which it is measured, and my values in this study have been explicitly aimed towards increasing understandings of adaptability, resilience, and growth.

The broad theoretical categories of resilience and post-traumatic growth that have been utilised in order to give meaning and shape to understandings of participant experience are compatible with the above ontological and epistemological assumptions. Similarly, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) which has been employed is particularly well suited to a critical realist ontology and allows for the contextualist influences — including my own process, subjectivity, and entanglement with participants (our intersubjectivity) — to be explicitly considered (Braun

and Clarke, 2022). Statistical procedures to identify the most utilised or adaptive strategies would thus make little sense, and would obscure the constructed nature of meaning. The specificity of sampling in this method has been an additional advantage.

Research Design and Methods

A qualitative approach allows for the collection of rich and in-depth data which benefits contextual, exploratory, and descriptive understandings that foreground the experience of subjects (Henning, 2018). As qualitative research allows flexibility in the gathering of data, allows for ambiguities/contradictions, and is not overly constrained by the initial hypothesis, it has allowed me to pay attention to subtleties and complexities that are often overlooked (McLeod, 2008). These benefits are ideal for an exploration into adaptive strategies and skills with a consideration to context, as they allow for complexities, while accounting for the importance of language itself in conveying meaning (Henning, 2018).

The purpose of the study has been exploratory, including the identification of plausible patterns and relationships. Marshall and Rossman (2011) note that to this end, semi-structured individual interviews are appropriate as they allow both in-depth and follow-up questions, towards producing rich and detailed data for analysis.

Semi-structured interview that allowed exploration of the key themes, as well as additional follow-up questions to clarify and go in-depth into the experiences and responses were employed. Interview questions were derived from the research questions, which themselves followed from the aims of the study. In this sense each area of the study was assigned exploratory questions that could be asked, along with additional questions to clarify².

Selection Criteria

The population chosen for the study were *French* speaking African migrants from central Africa who came to South Africa as children (under the age of 15), and who were able to navigate adversity and reach some degree of successful adaption. In some cases this has meant

² See Appendix A: Interview Schedule

enrolment in tertiary education or professional work, for others it has meant economic stability and family orientated life, while a few have migrated further to high income countries for work.

This group was chosen due to the higher propensity of ACE's associated with migration, exacerbated in particular by the language and cultural differences in a xenophobic context. In contrast with other African migrants who come to South Africa who are able to speak English (e.g., Zimbabwean), or who because of religious affiliation are able to settle into supportive community areas (e.g., Somalian Muslims), central African migrants are additionally alienated by language and cultural differences. These populations have also left war-torn societies, and have often either been directly exposed, or in the case of children, often must deal with the familial effects of trauma. Several of the interviewees had themselves directly faced war-related trauma. Some had been forced to flee from their homes (one through kidnapping, and another fled overland alone). Many had lost family members, or had lost contact with family for substantial periods of time. Others, suffered victorious trauma through the events that continued to occur back in their home countries or through xenophobic violence in South Africa. While all were exposed to xenophobia to some degree, experiences differed markedly.

In terms of sampling, qualitative in-depth analysis is incompatible with a statistical representation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Yardley, 2000). Instead, care was taken to choose participants for their representativeness to the topic of interest, and to include a somewhat diverse and heterogenous sample within an homogenous selection so that divergences and difference could also be explored. However, specifically constraining the population to the sociodemographic group does provide some measure of population estimate even within a qualitative frame (Jayawickreme et al., 2021). To this end, I chose both men and women, of various nationality, as well as participants that covered a diverse range of years of arrival, economic and familial supports, and later outcomes and developments. Some of the differences that were noticed in regards to gender, economics, and class were thus able to be explored.

Recruitment

Participants were found via a number of channels. I used google maps to locate organisations that serviced refugees and migrants, and called them directly, explaining who I was and what I was hoping to do. Of the ten or so organisations I called, only one led to an interview. I made

use of social media to reach out to community groups, advertising the study³. This led to a few responses, but again only two participants met the study criteria.

A friend of a friend worked at a NGO that worked with migrant children, and said that he had someone that he would like me to meet. He put me in touch with Daniel, who had fled war torn Burundi as a child, arrived in South Africa destitute, and gone on to become a social worker. My supervisor too was able to put me in contact with a psychologist who worked in the field of trauma. He put me in touch with three migrants who had arrived in South Africa as children, all three of which were now financially successful, and two of which had moved abroad. Another contact put me in touch with my final participant, Aaron who he knew from boxing, and who had become an international champion, boxing coach, and then teacher.

Convenience sampling was thus followed, although snowballing (where participants direct the researcher to other similar participants) was attempted, it was not successful. This may have been due to the somewhat stringent requirements of success, an unspoken reticence among migrants to bring up the pasts of others when not offered. These eight participants were able to provide enough data so that saturation was reached. The heterogenous sample lent validity to the commonalities that emerged despite their differences.

Research Participants' Information: An Overview

No.	Pseudonym	Age, Gender & Nationality	Arrival: Age, Familial, & Class⁴ in childhood.	Current Life Circumstance
1	Aaron	28, Male, Congolese	9, Arrived with father and siblings, chronically poor.	Employed and working as a teacher and boxing coach.
2	Becca	26, Female, Congolese	6, Arrived with family, vulnerable middle class.	Moved abroad, studying and working.
3	Caleb	20, Male, Congolese	10, Family, middle class, stable middle class.	Studying first year IT.
4	Daniel	31, Male, Burundian	15, Arrived alone, orphaned, homeless, chronically poor.	Graduated and working as a social worker.

³ See Appendix B Recruitment Poster

⁴ Class was construed according to Zizzamia et al.'s classifications (2019). These are only estimates based on what participants indicated, and the categories are self-describing.

5	<i>Edith</i>	<i>41, Female, Burundian</i>	<i>11, Arrived with father and siblings, transient poor.</i>	<i>Married with children, financially stable.</i>
6	<i>Faye</i>	<i>33, Female, Congolese</i>	<i>3, Arrived with both parents, vulnerable middle class.</i>	<i>Moved abroad, working in banking.</i>
7	<i>Gabriel</i>	<i>22, Male, Congolese</i>	<i>14, Arrived with both parents, stable middle class.</i>	<i>Graduating in Mechanical Engineering.</i>
8	<i>Hannah</i>	<i>20, Female, Congolese</i>	<i>12, Arrived alone, orphaned, taken in by church orphanage, transient poor.</i>	<i>Studying and working.</i>

The Interviews

As the interviewer, I myself become the predominant research instrument. As a qualitative enquirer it was important to consider: what I know and how I know it; what shapes and has shaped my perspective; and in what ways I voice and will share my perspective (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

It was important to be sensitive to how I am likely to be perceived as well as the biases', knowledge, and assumptions that I could bring with me. While I was aware of some of the issues and difficulties faced by refugee populations in South Africa: difficulties with 'papers', home affairs, daily struggles to make ends meet, and the disappointments and fears associated with xenophobia and violence: it was important to recognise that I have preconceptions, as well as ongoing blind spots, and to remind myself to follow what emerged in each interview anew. While there were commonalities of experience, there were also wide differences in perspective, identity, and support.

With some interviewees I was able to connect more strongly than with others. As I only speak English, and participants ranged in their degree of fluency, there were times where they may not have been able to express what they meant as well as they would have liked to, or where I may not have been able to understand exactly what was referred to. I tried in these instances to clarify during the interview, and in interpretation to consider what they may have meant from more than one perspective — and given the context of the rest of the interview.

Cultural differences were marked between myself and interviewees. I could not really relate in the ways that a practicing Christian might be able to understand and notice subtext. Of being black in a post-colonial society, or being a migrant or refugee — I endeavoured to educate myself, read, and take care in considering the lived and felt experience of the positions of participants, and what it may have been like to talk to me. Questions of trust and openness, meanings that may have been hidden from my own limited understanding, or hidden purposefully for a variety of reasons were important to grapple with.

Once participants had been contacted and informed about the topic, purpose, and requirement of the study, if they expressed interest, they were informed of how their confidentiality would be maintained. Once they had given preliminary consent, a time for the interview was arranged.

Prior to the interview, electronic forms⁵ were created that stipulated the conditions of the study: The purpose of the study, the research process and the ethical aspects of the study were clearly outlined and explained, as were their rights around participation: that they could refuse to participate and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was additionally elaborated, that my supervisor would have access to our transcript and recordings if needed, but otherwise their names and identifying information would be removed. These forms required each section to be read and accepted, before finally signing and submitting the form. Written consent was thus attained first before conducting interviews. At the beginning of the interview, informed consent was once again obtained verbally.

The interviews were scheduled for an hour, though some reached saturation earlier, and others continued for longer. As interviews were online, covid protocols did not need to be observed. Interviews were recorded using video when possible, though audio only was used with one participant as they felt more comfortable and protected doing so, and with two others due to technical issues. Note taking during interviews was done to record my reactions and impressions during the interview process. In concluding the interviews, participants were thanked and given an opportunity to raise any concerns or questions. Information related to lodging ethical complaints, or for referral to psychological services, remained available to participants in writing.

⁵ See Appendix C Information and Consent Forms

These semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed follow-up questions to delve deeper into particular aspects of their experiences, strategies, and contexts. These were useful to further understand what participants meant when their answers were unclear, or to follow a topic that had not been anticipated prior to the study. Interviews were transcribed using automated transcription services along with detailed and multiple listening, note takings, and transcription corrections: all as part of data familiarisation. Transcribed interviews were then available for coding and analysis.

Data Analysis and Report Writing

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and thereby construct themes that were identified via coding the interviews. The assumptions embedded within reflexive thematic analysis considers themes to be a process of active construction on the part of the researcher. As such, clarifying my experience, process, and perspectives that have contributed to this has been important throughout the analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise the necessity of engagement with theory before data analysis, to prevent an unreflexive introduction of assumptions: as such, I took care to read widely before attempting to make sense of the data. However, this was a continual process of reading, interpretation, and further reading. Six steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and refined in their (2021) work on RTA follow. These steps are not linear, and I engaged in them in a recursive manner: immersion in the data, reconsidering and refining codes, reconceptualising themes, and deepening my interpretations with subsequent readings.

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the dataset

I familiarised myself with the data in successive stages over a period of months. As interviews were recorded via video, I first watched them in their entirety adding my impressions to my initial notes. Aside from tone and pauses, video provided other useful non-verbal information such as facial expressions and body language that assisted in reading what was meant by a participant, or in noticing avoidance or hesitation. I found that for the 5 of the 8 interviews that were recorded by video watching, these were more helpful than the audio alone.

Later, I listened to the audio alongside an automated transcription. As participants often had thick accents and localised expressions, the quality of these transcriptions was very poor and often incoherent. I found that careful listening with frequent pauses and repetitions was needed to finalise these transcriptions, and that in doing so I was becoming intimately familiar with the interviews. I paid attention to other elements besides the language of participants and allowed myself to be guided by a number of questions set out by Braun and Clarke (2012): *How is this participant making sense of their experiences?; What are their assumptions?; and What kind of world does this reveal?* (p. 61) as well as questions of positionality and reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2021): *How might this participant experience me?; Might they shape their answers in some way due to this?; What are my assumptions here and might these be influencing my understanding?; and Is there an alternative account?*

Once the transcriptions were complete, I continued to gain an ongoing familiarity through successive readings and iterations of coding, and even the late stages of analysis I found myself returning to these transcriptions, at times noticing details that I had not before.

Phase 2: Coding the data

Following transcription I worked through each, systematically coding⁶ excerpts that spoke in some way to the research question and its corollaries. I used *Scrivener* a specific word-processor that allows detailed note taking, memos, and linking of information⁷. This facilitated revisiting codes for subsequent coding sessions, and allowed for editing and organisation.

I considered both semantic (“the explicit meaning, close to participant language”) as well as the latent (“the deeper, more implicit or conceptual level”: Braun et al., 2019, p. 853) of meanings during this process as both were relevant to my research aims. The semantic content spoke more to the actual strategies employed, whereas contextual factors as well as later effects required a more in depth reading, and at times critical consideration of what participants expressed in context.

⁶ See Appendix D Examples of Coding

⁷ See Appendix E Notes

Rather than a purely inductive ‘bottom-up’ or deductive ‘top-down’ theoretical approach, I used a combination of these. I attempted to stay close to the data, coding broadly, but could not divorce myself from the literature and theoretical concepts that I had read. Indeed, while my initial coding session had left me with over 100 different codes, the construction of themes to make sense of these drew on existing theoretical concepts and discussions, and as such subsequent rounds of coding leant increasingly towards a deductive approach. Nonetheless, I took care not to limit myself to any one conceptual model and did not ignore or disregard data that seemed to fall outside of an existing category. Instead, these became useful focal points for contradictions within the data and were included as such.

Phase 3: Generating initial themes

My initial construction of themes involved grouping codes into “clusters of meaning” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 855) to form general areas that cohered. I found that visual mapping⁸ allowed me to move codes among groups, and to develop multiple levels of groupings. At this stage, the process was largely exploratory and inductive as I worked towards coherence among the codes rather than a theoretical positioning. Several broad themes were developed into which codes were grouped⁹.

Phase 4: Reviewing and developing themes

As codes were laid out and grouped visually, it became apparent that a number of these could be more usefully grouped, or collapsed into one another. This led to once again working through the transcription and reconsidering and redefining codes with the new more categorical definition preceding the specific, for example “playing football” was more usefully coded as “sport: displacement” signalling the explicit strategy as well as the latent indicated function.

I used *MindNode* a visual mapping tool¹⁰ that allows one to cluster information, and I spent some time imagining ways that the codes could be grouped. However, this part of the process was difficult for me: it was not a question of a right or wrong way to group the data, and it

⁸ See Appendix F Initial Code Map

⁹ See Appendix G Thematic Maps

¹⁰ See Appendix G Thematic Maps

relies on a creative *choice* as to how to do so. I conferred with an experienced researcher in the department who was able to give me some possibilities in terms of how to think of possible groupings, and spent several days over the next week looking at the visual map, sometimes leaving it alone, and sometimes sleeping on it before I came upon a possibility for grouping that could address the research question and aims in a coherent manner, while still allowing for a comprehensive yet succinct account of participant strategies and influences.

I eventually regrouped the data, collapsing two broad themes into one (emotional and cognitive became ‘internal strategies’) while extracting and regrouping several sub-themes into the new theme that related to contextual factors. Two other discrete themes of PTG and PTS were regrouped into a theme characterised by contradiction: ‘after-effects’.

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

While the initial groupings were able to comprehensively cover the codes, it was important that these groupings could indeed do justice to the research questions and do so in an understandable and convincing manner. My initial groupings were unsatisfying in this regard, they were too numerous, and while they were conceptually distinct in some manners (internal vs external) these conceptual differences were not always relevant to the aims of the study.

The first analysis, along with more in-depth readings and consideration of theory, left me realising that the themes did not adequately address the research questions, nor communicate what was interesting and essential about the study. The themes were thus reworked: again I used a visualisation tool, but this time I mapped out the research questions and connected the codes to these, before constructing them into themes. The naming of themes themselves aimed to capture what was essential about them, while connecting them in some way to the topic. I played around with these throughout the analysis until they felt right.

Phase 6: Producing the report

Once the first thematic map was produced began with describing these themes along with excerpts. Subsequently more specific and detailed readings of the literature were conducted in order to connect these descriptions with current research and a theoretical understanding; but

along the way this changed my understanding. Braun and Clarke (2021) caution that the analysis has limited interpretative power if not used in combination with a particular theory or concepts. I realised in readying the first draft of the report, and with feedback, that my analysis was weak, and that I would need to reconsider and reinterpret in light of additional theoretical understandings. To this end, I began the reconstruction of the themes as described earlier, while continuing to update my literature review and reworking the analysis. Improving my understandings, my interpretation were continually reworked and refined, along with reflection of my own role in the process and interviews. Iterative cycles of this blending, along with continual rounds of editing and integration followed, until a ‘satisfaction’ was reached.

Ethical Considerations

I have applied *ethical thinking* in an ongoing way throughout this research project: before (in the course of my design, the population I was working with, and in the design of informed consent and other forms) during data collection (in my interaction with participants, in the ways that I listened, asked questions, and interacted), and in the analysis (in considerations of how I was interpreting, and in the potential damage or benefit that such analysis could bring about). This approach is in line with best practices as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021) and advised by Tolich and Tumilty (2020). An ongoing reflexive approach has additionally been applied: both in consideration of the methodological approach that I have adopted (RTA) as well as to make my subjectivity explicit.

Principles

Non-maleficence: As study participants were likely to be drawn to such a study precisely because they may have had some ACE’s or may have difficulties in some areas, it was important to manage expectations and make clear that the study was not a therapeutic intervention. Furthermore, the potential negative impact that an interview delving into the past may have had was considered; questions were kept relevant, appropriate, and non-invasive; and participants were provided with therapeutic and crisis referral options to make use of if needed.

Informed consent: Participants were informed in line with the guidelines of the APA (Smith, 2013): the purpose of the research, expected duration and procedures; their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once it has started; potential risks, discomfort or adverse effects; prospective research benefits; as well the limits of confidentiality (supervisor's access) and how it will be enforced were provided. This informed consent was provided verbally, as well as via a written document¹¹. Participants gave both signed and verbal consent.

Confidentiality: To ensure confidentiality, participant names and identifying details have been changed in ways that obscure their identity, but do not alter the relevance of the data. Interview transcripts and recordings have been protected and kept in password protected files. Video recordings were deleted after the transcription, when accompanying notes were completed. Audio recording were deleted after the first round of analysis. While transcript would be kept indefinitely for research purposes all identifying information has been altered.

Debriefing: After the interview participants were debriefed. An opportunity was provided for questions and to address any anxieties about the interview. The purpose of debriefing is to leave participants with a sense of dignity, knowledge, and a perception of time not wasted (McLeod, 2015). I took the opportunity after these interviews to thank participants for their time, and to ask whether they had any questions or wanted to add anything. I also paid attention to how the interviewee seemed to be doing, and reminded them that the option for crisis counselling or short-term talk therapy was available if needed. My own contact details as well as that of the ethics department and my supervisor had already been provided, and participants were reminded that they could make use of these if they had any concerns they wished to communicate at a later stage.

Deception: Full transparency was provided throughout the interview: as to the purposes and aims of the research, and as to how they information would be used and published. I took an open and transparent approach with participants, and endeavoured to keep my questions straight forward and clear.

Reciprocity: As participants will be offering their time, it was important that they understand what they will get out of the process. Making clear the aims and purposes of this study (an

¹¹ See Appendix C Information & Informed Consent

investigation into the influences, strategies, and effects relating to childhood adversity) and the hopeful gains of the study: expanding knowledge in this domain, and perhaps contributing to intervention at a later stage, was balanced with honesty in my own interest and benefit from the study as part of my masters requirements. Care was taken to make clear that there was no obligation to participate, nor was there a financial or other remuneration. I made my position as a student clear, I did not have a material or other advantage that I could offer participants. Reciprocation was here offered instead in terms of the opportunity to reflect on what has worked, to be involved out of one's own curiosity and interest, and to contribute if such contribution aligns with one's own values.

Ethics Approval: The research proposal was presented to the University of the Witwatersrand Psychology Department, before being sent to the university ethics committee for approval, which was granted¹². No unforeseen ethical issues arose during the course of the study though my research supervisor was available for consultation if needed.

Covid-19: The latest in national regulations, guidelines and protocols were consulted. As it was the tail-end of Covid regulations, online interviews were utilised both for safety and convenience. While the option for in-person interviews were provided to participants living in Johannesburg, all opted for the online option.

Trustworthiness and Validity

I have been guided by Yardley's (2000) guidelines for good qualitative research across four evaluative dimensions, outlined below and linked to the practices and choices that I followed in order to try and ensure a trustworthy and valid account. In addition, procedure to ensure attention to reflexivity, as well as active theorisation on race, culture, and context as outlined by Jayawickreme et al. (2021) is explicated.

¹² See Appendix J Ethics Approval

Sensitivity to Context

The context of theory and previous research is essential in grounding good qualitative work, and this is especially important in terms of a sophisticated interpretation whereby the particular is linked to the abstract via existing theory and literature (Yardley, 2000).

As such, I have utilised a broad reading of existing theoretical concepts. From resilience, post-traumatic growth, and childhood adversity, to associated, underlying, and critical conceptions that are connected to these ideas. Some of the history and controversies of these ideas are presented throughout the literature review, along with a closer reading and use of these concepts in the interpretation itself.

The socio-cultural setting and history is especially important in light of this research topic: of migrant African migrants within postcolonial Africa. The South African xenophobic setting, and the often unstable and vulnerable position of participants in this society needed to be considered in light of this. I have tried to broaden my understandings of these experiences and positions via readings that covered some of the cultural, historic, and experiential dimensions of colonial subjects and black African migrants. Mostly these were towards sensitising myself, though some of these sources appear in the literature review and the analysis itself.

As I take language, social interaction, and culture to be central to participants meanings (Yardley, 2000) the ways of speaking, beliefs, and expectations of participants are considered in light of ideological, normative, historical, linguistic, and socioeconomic influences.

This approach locates validity in the recognition of the multiplicity of meanings that can be constructed rather than of a singular valid 'truth'. An ongoing *reflexivity* throughout this report has been provided in order to locate my own active role in making meaning of the data. The type of questions asked, way of asking them, mutual influence in data gathering and interviews, and ways of perceiving and thinking are considered.

Commitment and Rigour

Yardley (2000) described commitment as a prolonged engagement with the topic, the development of competence and skills in the methods used, and immersion in the relevant data, with Rigour referring to the adequacy and completeness of the data for a comprehensive analysis.

I was able to meet these criteria in different ways. In terms of commitment, the MA program facilitated a long-term engagement with the topic. In November 2021 a comprehensive reading list on the topic of adverse childhood experiences was required to be completed before the start of the program. Throughout 2022, in the M1 year, continual engagement with postcolonial theory, systemic and structural inequalities, and topics relating to migrants, resilience, trauma and its effects was provided.

I was directed to and engaged with seminal literature, and during the literature review as well as the latest in empirical findings. In order to develop competence in the methodology used, I began with Braun and Clarke's (2006) article on thematic analysis, before working carefully and systematically through their latest (2021) book on Reflexive Thematic Analysis. A number of other articles and dissertations demonstrating RTA were used in addition to ongoing supervisory feedback. Finally, in terms of immersion in the data, I took care to take notes during interviews themselves, listened to the interviews multiple times along with a continued note taking, and then read and reread the final transcripts while coding over several rounds. These iterations of listening, reading, note taking, and coding helped me to become intimately familiar with the data, and an initial analysis facilitated an immersion.

The rigour of the data pertains in a large part to the sampling procedure, a purposeful approach to gain an in-depth and diverse understanding of the topic was taken, along with an open-ended question approach with interviewing to saturation. This allowed a rich and comprehensive data set to work with. The particulars of this was outlined under 'selection criteria'.

Transparency and Coherence

Transparency and coherence relate to the rhetorical quality of the account and its ability to be convincing (Yardley, 2000). A good fit between the research question, methods, and philosophical approaches also relates to coherence, while detailing the process, methods, and data used in coming to the account relates to the transparency.

I have preceded in this research in an iterative manner as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2021), explicitly elaborating the philosophical positions and assumptions that underly the approach that I have taken, and moving back and forth between my analysis, assumptions, research questions, and design choices to ensure coherence and fit. I detail the procedure used more exactly later in this methodology section (including coding technique and rules used, as well as thematic choices), maintain an ongoing reflexive account throughout the report, and use exemplars from the data to support my account throughout the section on data analysis so that the reader may understand how and why I constructed my account in the way that I did.

Impact and Importance

Yardley (2000) argues that the decisive criterion against which research must be judged is ultimately whether it is impactful and useful — and that this must be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis, the applications it was intended for, and the community to which it was deemed useful.

From the outset, my engagement with this topic has been on extending our knowledge into a better understanding of how African migrant and refugee youth are able to exercise their resiliency in an adverse environment, with an explicit interest in using this knowledge for guiding intervention in ways that may promote resiliency, and mediate the impact of adversity. As a counselling psychology MA student, an underlying aim of this research has also been to increase my own competency and knowledge in these domains, as well as in developing competency in research methods and techniques.

As this has been an understudied area, this report does help to extend existing knowledge, and it is hoped that it may be usefully employed by practitioners or others working in this area. The

section on recommendations that concludes this report addresses how this knowledge may be made available. In terms of my personal training, engagement in this process has allowed me to appreciate the struggles, strengths, and particularities of this community with which I engaged, as well as to develop a competency in RTA, especially in regards to a reflexivity that benefits both my clinical as well as research orientations.

Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Lastly, sensitivity to this particular population is a notable concern. Jayawickreme et al. (2021) recommend active theorisation on the roles of race, ethnicity, and culture in identifying growth competencies, types of adversities, and in identifying mechanisms that can support growth. I have utilised multiple sources to gain an understanding of the population selected: localised writings on the refugee experience in South Africa, decolonial literature, and active reading, viewing, and dialoguing around the experience of African migrants. While I cannot gain an experiential understanding, learning about the history of colonialism, internal civil wars, local cultures, and migration has benefitted an understanding of challenges and resources.

Chapter Review

This chapter has considered the methodology of the study, from the initial design and participant selection and sourcing, to the procedures themselves, and the steps taken in RTA as conducted by myself in this particular study. Ethical considerations were made in terms of ethical principles (as well as ‘ethical thinking’) and the achievement of these was described along with examples. The characteristics of a good qualitative research as set out by Yardley (2000), as well as those of RTA as described by Braun and Clarke (2021), and those pertaining to reflexivity by Jayawickreme et al. (2021), were considered along with accompanying explanations.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with an overview of the themes. Each theme then follows, organised according to the research question that they pertained to. Themes pertaining to the surrounds (R2) were presented first to foreground the situated nature of the strategies that participants made use of. This was followed by the theme relating to strategies (R1), and then finally the theme relating to effects (R3). Exemplars in the form of extracts have been included throughout as to allow the reader to review for themselves the words of participants that I inscribed with the meaning that I did, before segueing into a fuller discussion of each theme in light of current literature and theory. A review of the chapter follows to conclude this section.

Overview of the Themes

Rather than representing truly distinct natural categories that ‘emerged’ from the data, the following themes were carefully chosen and constructed by *this* researcher in order to group findings related to the influences, strategies, and effects in an understandable and coherent fashion. The sociocultural influences, responses, and effects are inseparable aspects of a unified whole, and cannot simply be disjointed from one another. For example, while religion and church were sociocultural and contextual factors, they influenced psychological strategies of acceptance and trust, played out behaviourally through prayer, meditative study, and church attendance, and contributed to sense-making as well as later gratitude.

Four themes that pertained to three questions are briefly outlined below. Each theme included sub-themes that served to organise the findings. A corresponding thematic map¹³ is attached at the end of this report illustrating the groupings, along with several earlier iterations for comparison¹⁴. The branching network shows the relationship between themes and sub-themes, with the outward most point of each branch elucidating the codes and their specific qualifiers.

¹³ See Appendix H Final Thematic Map

¹⁴ See Appendix G Initial Thematic Maps

The theme of *If not me, then who?* explored the intimate connection between adversity, necessity, agency, and response. In consideration of the second research question, R2: ‘What brought about, facilitated, and engendered their responses?’, the catalytic role of adversity itself could not be ignored. Altruistic motivations, differences between adversities and how they connect and cascade, and the interpolating role of self-reliance when social support leaves gaps is explored.

The theme of *We Become Through Others* was a secondary theme related to the R2, and was used in order to group the many supportive and influential surrounding factors utilised by migrant youth that were external to themselves and located in their contexts, environments, and cultures. This was the largest of all themes, and included sub-categories relating to the *Macrosystem*, and *Microsystems*. These indicated the ‘fertile ground’ from which the more explicit psychological and behavioural strategies emerged, and to which they could be linked. The subtheme of the Macrosystem explored the influence of policy, religion, and culture; as well xenophobia, racism, and the mediational role of language in inclusion. The subtheme of Microsystems, focussed on the role of community and family supports, across different periods of childhood. The importance of *relationships* was common to these supports.

The theme of *We Do What We Can* related to the R1: ‘How did Francophone African migrant children navigate childhood adversity given xenophobia in South Africa?’, and incorporated the many strategies that participants had made use of. Behavioural and psychological strategies were delineated, and explored in terms of their specific manifestations. They were organised into three sub-themes: those relating to *Orientating*, *Avoiding*, and *Sense Making*. The opportunistic nature of these strategies, their connection to their former influences and contexts, and the intermediary nature that they played towards later outcomes and effects is considered. Parallels between strategies relating to xenophobia and racism are explored and interrogated.

This final theme of *We Bring What We Have Learned*, spoke to the R3: ‘How have these childhood experiences and responses affected participants as adults?’, and was chosen to represent the complex interplay of effects that adversity and trauma seemed to produce among participants. Two sub-themes were used, the first, *When The Past Invades The Present*, spoke to the continued effects across three categories that are generally related to PTSD symptomology. The second, *Real or Illusory?*, considered difficulties and differentiations related to so called ‘real’ versus ‘perceived’ growth.

Theme 1: If Not Me, Then Who?

Ahakalire hakakuha amenge

Through Challenge, Comes Solution

Proverb of the Nande People, Congo.

It was necessity that drove participants to adapt, and resilience arises from, and can only be understood in the context of adversity. Depending on what was needed, participants were impelled to rise to the occasion. Thus agency, and self-reliance were connected to participants lack of any other choice, but to do what they could. Altruistic motivations were an extension of this, and participants were driven to care for and help their families precisely because they did not have other support. Adversities differed among participants, and self-reliant strategies related to the particular ‘gaps’ that existed for them, between their available supports.

Necessity is the Mother of Invention

The premise of ACE’s is that of negative outcomes precisely due to adversity. Yet, it was also precisely due to difficulties that these migrant children had to learn to adapt, and research corroborates that the emergence of resilience is a consequence of childhood adversity (Bonnanno & Mancini, 2008). During the interviews it was apparent that all participants had faced adversity in some or another way, and that their resiliencies were expressed in relation to this. van Breda’s (2018) model of the interconnected nature of adversity and resilience spoke to the intractable nature of these concepts: without adversity we cannot really speak of resilience, it is after all only in the face of challenges that resilience becomes meaningful.

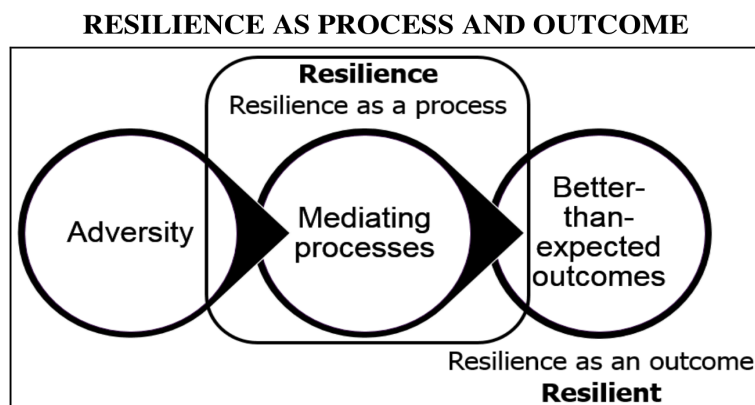


Figure 6: van Breda (2018)

Aaron had endured periods of extreme poverty, his family lived on the charity of others for shelter, and at times he went days without food. During his adolescence he made some money selling ‘things’ at school, but had been assaulted and mugged. The selling of ‘things’ and going to school for ‘the wrong reasons’ needs to be understood in light of the *atypicality* principle of Ungar’s (2011) social-ecological theorisation of adversity (SERT): within a context of availabilities, resiliencies do not always look like we expect them to, and even illegal and other apparently antisocial actions may be highly adaptive. For Aaron, providing for himself and his family in this way was an act of resiliency and health. Aaron further expressed this relationship between adversity and resilience simply and clearly: poverty had led to entrepreneurship, and being attacked had instigated a pivot into boxing, which later become his career:

Aaron: So remember today we grew up we'll go without food. So, I used to sell things at school and in turn that would like help us buy food at home or whatever. And so I will go to school for that reason.

Aaron: And then one day I got jumped. So I started learning boxing to get my revenge

Fellow participants expressed similar ‘turning points’ and these too have been found within the literature. Leung et al. (2022) determined in their study that participants often referred to a ‘turning point’ or pivotal moment where they had been brought to consciously alter their decisions and behaviours. Sometimes these pivotal moments were immediate, as indicated by Aaron’s statement above, but for other participants they expressed how a period of suffering and difficulty might have prefaced any conscious decision to change. Edith had been witness to the xenophobic attack and murder of her neighbour as a child, and for many years she evinced symptoms of vicarious trauma, including withdrawing from others, constant fear, and depressions. She thus had to contend with these ‘internal’ adversities in addition to those of the external. She described a chance encounter with a doctor as inspiring her to make a change that lead to her reconnecting with others, finding purpose in the church, and marrying.

Edith: There was a doctor in the hospital when my mother passed away, and because I was in and out of the hospital, he said to me, he asked me ‘do you have friends?’ I said ‘No, I don't have friends’. He said to me, ‘Why? Why you don't have friends?’ And I told him ‘I don't know how to make friends’, But he said ‘The love is there. Why not make friends? You know, you need to talk to people. You need to be around people and talk to people’. And then I said ‘what if they don't want to talk to me?’ And he asked me, ‘Have you tried to talk to them?’ Then I said I have never tried to. ‘You say you have never tried to talk to them? Do you know that they don't like you?’ So from

there. When I came out, I wanted to practice what he said, Okay, let me talk to that person, maybe that person is lonely, and I'll never get a chance to talk to them again. So I started trying, 'Hi, what's your name?' That's how I started getting to know people.

Hannah had been kidnapped as a child and taken from her grandmother to a soldiers camp. There she had managed to escape with a fellow child soldier, though she was never able to reunite with her family. She had come to South Africa without knowing it, disembarking to an unknown country where people spoke an unfamiliar language. She had been assisted by a security guard who spoke French, and through him was taken in by a Catholic children's home. She reflected on how she had come to a conscious decision following these adversities

Hannah: Okay. I wanted, you know. I also wanted something different. I mean, after what I've been through, I told myself, I just want to be different. I just wanted to be different. There was so many times that I would look at someone I would be like... okay when she finishes school she's going to meet the aunt. She's going to meet a sister. But I don't have those that sister, I don't have that aunt. I'm the only one who's gonna be always there for me. So I'm here on my own and have to deal with this. If I don't finish... what I've started now, I don't know where I'm going to be.

Researcher: So you were thinking of the future?

Hanna: Yeah, most definitely.

Self-reliance is considered an important precursor to 'self-righting abilities' or the ability 'to take effective actions to adapt... within the constraints imposed by the environment' (APA, 2023) or 'to appraise one's own stress and respond accordingly' (Leung et al., 2022). In Hannah's account above, although she was assisted by others, she also describes how she was 'the only one who's always gonna be there for me'. All participants reported strategies in the interviews that were tied to *self-reliance*, describing a 'lack of any other choice', and how they survived, adapted, or worked because they had to:

Hannah: I'm here on my own and have to deal with this if I don't finish... what I've started now, I don't know where I'm going to be.

Daniel: I'm left on my own. No one else to be on my side. And I was like, OK, so I had to think actively, think like right there, and make some decisions.

A variety of strategies and behaviours fell into this area: planning, remaining goal focussed, solution finding, and readying oneself for negative outcomes were all commonly employed by participants. This area spoke most clearly to the *agency* taken up by migrant youth as they navigated their difficulties, and cohered with Wu and Ou's (2021) MSRF model of migrant

youth: as migrant youth face both developmental and sociocultural challenges related to migration they ultimately must take on responsibility for what they can control in often very limiting environments:

Daniel: I was sleeping on the road and later on, social workers were able to place me into a shelter. The situation was not good, it was very abusive. Locals were not friendly towards me, but I knew that I wanted to study and look after my siblings, even though I didn't even know if they were still alive. My mum's words kept coming into mine and I did my grade 8 there and grade 9. I was able to move out because I was like this is not good for me, and now I can speak the basic languages, so let me go out and start selling on the street.

I was studying at the same time and raising my own income so that I can rent a room even if it would be a place where I'll be sharing with others. That worked out for me. I would sell sweets at school, studying at the same time, I was excelling in math and physics. So I had to create a lot of friends because now they're like, 'oh you are very good with this'. They would pay me like 10 Rand, 5 Rand, and I would assist them with assignments and Portfolios... but then my business kept growing and growing. At some point I had a table, I was selling sweets on weekends, and I did domestic work, so I had multiple sources of income. Although it was like a 20 and 50 and 100 Rand. But I was able to rent myself a room.

Daniel had become entrepreneurial out of necessity. He had arrived on his own as a child, and spent a year homeless before finding his way into a school. He recounted how the school, social workers, and a shelter assisted him: but he also described how without when no one else was available to support him, he was motivated to find ways to provide for himself financially. Daniel went on to matriculate with good marks, and to graduate university, supporting himself through the entire program (despite his good marks, he was not eligible for a bursary as an asylum seeker) and then later providing for his family in South Africa and those back in Burundi.

Altruistic Motivations

Thus self-reliant and responsibility taking strategies extended even further beyond the individual into Altruistic motives: that is looking out for others. Altruistic motives were especially common among those who did not have financial or familial stability in place that could support their loved ones. Finding a way to support his immediate family was the driving force for Aaron to succeed as a boxer, for Daniel the possibility to care for his siblings and family (even before being reunited with them) was described as his recurring central motivation,

and for Faye she was motivated to be a good mother 'one day'. Children forced into adult responsibilities do learn particular coping skills, increasing their self-efficacy, maturity, responsibility, and resourcefulness (East, 2010).

Aaron: I turned pro to feed my family.

Daniel: So when I was born.. my mom I was very close to my mom. She always says to me you will look after your siblings. You will look after us... so even when I was moving around this country I knew I wanted to die, but there was another voice which was saying you have to study, you have to study and look after your siblings. So all the words which my mom spoke into my life, they kept coming back every now and again... I wanted to die, but there was another voice saying no, you have to look after your siblings.

All of these participants found success in their area: Aaron went on to become a professional boxer; Daniel reunited with his siblings and was able to support them financially after finding work as a social worker; and Faye was married, living as the mother she hoped to be, and taking care of her children. For Caleb, who had grown up in a close-knit and supportive home with his parents, caring for others was important and meaningful to him. Caleb related how during periods of xenophobia and overwhelm he had steadied himself by remembering how others needed him:

Caleb: ...you're like, no, like, I'm playing a certain role in people's lives, you know?

Participants also related overcoming their own difficulties as bringing them to care to others. Dykes (2016) noted that among a cohort of South African social work students, enduring ACE's had allowed them to develop the self-confidence and strength that motivated them to persevere and assert themselves and sensitised them to social needs and suffering, and indeed Daniel attributed his journey in becoming a social worker to his own childhood experiences with adversity.

Daniel: I managed to get some donations from the schools and my journey began. I was linked to social workers, my therapy sessions began, and that's when I fell in love with social work because I felt like I also want to be there for others.

I heard in this that precisely because of his childhood adversity and the help that he had received, Daniel had come to appreciate both the extent of suffering that existed for migrant children, as well as recognising the impact that others could make.

Self-reliance has been linked to both protective and problematic aspects. For example, emotional self-reliance can hinder social intimacy in that individuals might keep their difficulties ‘secret’ from those around them (Leung et al., 2022). McDermott et al. (2018) similarly reported that norms of self-reliance and emotional control were associated with stereotypical expectations of masculinity, and that these oft prohibited asking for help or showing vulnerability, while Lenkens et al. (2019) noted that masculine roles generate the strongest and most consistent negative correlates of intentions to seek help, with higher self-reliance further deterring self-compassion and inhibiting the accessing of existing social supports.. Among participants, it was true that the men had seemed to take up more self-reliant roles relating to the *financial*, and this may have been influenced by gender and cultural expectations.

When I had met Aaron online, I was surprised at his accent — it was very much a Johannesburg South accent, one I would have associated more with working class white South Africans. He had a way of talking — interspersed with ‘bru’, ‘bro’, ‘champ’, ‘understand?’ — that was quite masculine and informal. He was younger than me, but in some ways, he reminded me of my father, a biker who mostly lived in the era of 70’s masculinities. There was something of the ‘outlaw’ in Aaron: even in his friendly suggestive joke at the end of our interview: ‘I hope you get top marks. If you don’t, we can go and jump the professor’. I liked him and felt myself during the interview to lean a little into the masculine in the air between us. When I asked him about mental health however, he replied:

Aaron: Now, so depression, anxiety... those things I never struggled with. I have been speaking to a friend not too long ago, I didn't believe... I thought those things are made up... for me because coming from Congo. .. Yeah, you only know about physical struggles, like someone is sick. Like cholera. HIV, diabetes, whatever it is. Like, mental stuff doesn't make sense, people feel depressed? I never thought about it.

I wondered here, whether there was space in this kind of masculinity to admit to emotional difficulties, and more so to ask for help. It may too have been that a masculine discourse had settled into the air between us, leading him to downplay such adversities (Cho et al., 2013). Although Aaron dismissed these mental health concerns, he continued to mention depression several times throughout the interview, which seemed at odds with something he never thought about.

Adversities Differ, They are Subjective, and Cascade

Adversities however, did differ significantly among participants, and were not uniformly distributed. When speaking of these cause and effects, the multiple and differing stories of participants continued to speak for themselves. There was no single trajectory. For some participants, like Gabriel, he enjoyed a childhood that was supported, financially stable, and safe. He reflected on this as a particularly privileged position despite his immigrant background.

Gabriel: I was, I think I was just blessed to have parents that you know, were financially stable to be able to, to achieve those marks. Yeah, not a lot of people have the privilege to have food on the table and be able to study and do whatever you want.

The structural and familial support around Gabriel was salient, and his contrast to others who did not have these basics made it clear how much more difficult it must have been for them. Yet, he still tempered this with the adversity attached to being a foreign migrant in other aspects. The move had led to him repeating a year of school, and it had taken him a while to adjust to a new language and culture. As a young adult, he had gone on to achieve very well at university in his engineering program, however due to his status, he had not been eligible to apply for the medical program he had dreamed of as a child. More recently he had been denied a job at every placement he had tried to secure: again on account of not being a citizen. Seedat et al. (2004) found that among township youth, poverty being a normalised distal ACE was not introjected negatively, and in the same way the exclusion from South African opportunities seemed to be a distal ACE that Gabriel had been able to externalise to the environment while growing up, to a place that was ‘not home’, rather than to any internal failings, and this seemed to have motivated him further:

Gabriel: Unfortunately, we have to work harder than anyone else. We are not home. And yeah, we have to work harder, the pressure is on us to, you know, to get somewhere. To get to varsity, to get work.

The initial literature review had also suggested that a middle degree of adversity would be optimal in the development of resilience (e.g. Naicker et al., 2021). I was unsure how to determine this with participants: it ultimately seemed to be a very subjective call to make. The participants who had been through the most dramatically traumatic events (Daniel, and Hannah, who had both fled across Africa as children) seemed to be the most resilient, though this was in comparison to their histories, their ‘better-than-expected’ outcomes being the most striking. However, they were also the participants who were most clearly affected by their early

experiences in negative ways. As adversities challenge, they also lead to increased risk for exposure to subsequent adversities (Nurius et al, 2015), internal as well as external, and a complex and vacillating interplay of adversities and responses thus results.

Resilient Strategies ‘plug in’ the Gaps

Adversity did not only lead to self-reliance that was distanced from others. Participants related how as their adversities increased so did their reliance on others too. However, this was a much less reported area of resilience as compared to self-reliance, and this was likely due the emergence of self-reliance as a strategy precisely due to a lack of surrounding support which exposed them to adversity. This does not mean that self-reliance is more effective, but as *the support of others reduces adversity in the first place* (Este and Ngo, 2011) self-reliance becomes more obvious and identifiable as it is utilised in the face of adversities that participants faced precisely due to the lack of surrounding resources that were available to draw on.

Migrant youth are also particularly susceptible to this as *a consequence of migration means the loss of social networks and community supports* (Ebersöhn, 2019). That migrant participants did not have extensive networks from which they could draw, may explain why *flocking* — a Southern African specific resilience pathway — was less prevalent than expected. In RRR, Ebersöhn (2019) defines *flocking* as social support that mobilises social capitals through ‘drawing on social resources that includes mutual borrowing, lending, reciprocal donations, and smart partnerships’ (p. x)... common to Southern Africans who have endured long histories of oppression and inequality. Yet for migrants, this was constrained, something that Ebersöhn (2019) had predicts: ‘flocking is delimited to in-group affiliation. This has negative consequences for displaced people’ (p. xi).

This did not mean that participants had not relied extensively on the help of others, or that social supports had been completely lacking. As much as self-reliance and individual agency were important, social support and important relationships played crucial roles in how’s participants adapted and survived.

Aaron: And then what happened is my dad ran out of money. And so, we got kicked that of that place. And then so, I don't know, from then, we were just living at other people, at the mercy of other people... I mean, a friend of us put us in one of his rooms,

all of us in the room, for a few months. And then another lady, shame she was nice... she put us in her garage. For about two years. Ya, for about two years.

And so people helped us all along.. in that way. Like me and my brother, we went to live with my trainer. Then my sister went to live with someone else, and just people helping where they can, where you live with this one or that one...

In the next Theme, the decisive role of the broader context, and how this was mediated through community and relationships is explored.

Theme 2: We Become Through Others

umuntu ni uwundi

A Person is a Person because of Others

An Ubuntu Expression in Kirundi a Burundian Language

This theme explores how the surrounding ecology influenced participants, in ways that were both visible and invisible to them. It is broadly organised into the Macrosystem and Microsystem, however goes beyond these categories. Of particular importance to locating this study, was situating the Macrosystemic roles of policy, religion, culture, and xenophobia. The intermediary role of language in facilitating access to community, including and excluding, and constructing ‘the Other’ is included. The influence of these factors, however distal, occurred through community and relationships, and this is explored further in the sub-theme of the Microsystem.

Macrosystems: Religion, Culture, Language, and Policy

In the surrounding ecology, numerous factors are identified, theorised, and shown to be effective at facilitating ‘better-than-expected’ outcomes (Este & Ngo, 2011; Waite & Ryan, 2020). Here in this theme, the mediating roles of *language* and *relationship* are emphasised. Language for mediating access to community; and relationship as mediating the transmission of culture, learnings, and resources *across all levels of the ecology*. Relationship functioned in terms of providing templates for later behaviour; as facilitating goals, values, ideals, and directions; and in facilitating healing, motivation, self-belief, and determination. This theme traces these surrounding influences beginning with more distal factors, before moving into the more direct and proximal influences.

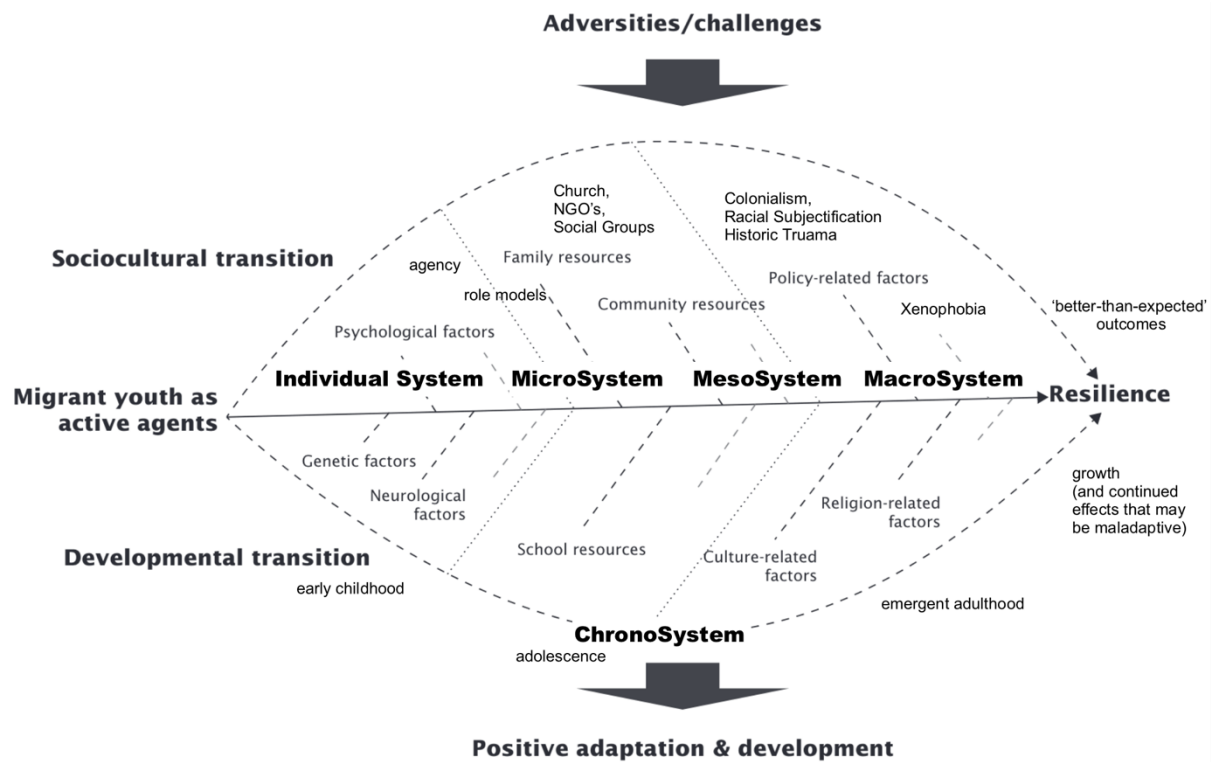


Figure 7: Wu and Ou's (2021) Modified for this Thesis

We Survive by Design

Participants did not mention social policy or restrictions directly. At times they alluded to certain exclusions as an adult (from bursaries, programs, or job opportunities) and the precariousness of their position in regards to documents and renewal processes. However, social policy influenced these migrant childhoods in a myriad of ways that were more indirect, and at times invisible to them. Institutional supports in the environment are connected to more distal policies. For example, the Children's Act and Education White Paper 6 guarantee inclusion of refugee and immigrant children into school (Isseri et al., 2018) while the Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996;) guarantees fundamental human rights to all people in South Africa, which finds expression in child shelter inclusion of orphaned migrant children, and the provision of social workers even to non-citizens. Other organisations influenced by culture and religion also provided funding for NGO's.

Thus, policy enacts itself through schools, children's homes, and other institutions that are influential in the lives of migrants. For Daniel, the school he joined provided an important source of support as a homeless child, facilitating the provision of a number of services,

including a social worker (and thus therapy and placement in a shelter), and even employed him post-graduation in tutoring roles. Importantly, employees of these institutions played important roles for participants: Daniel and Aaron were both encouraged and motivated by teachers who believed in them:

Daniel (Age 14, Burundi, Orphan, Destitute): But she (his teacher) was really one of the people who gave me courage as well, she showed me that I was worth something

Aaron (Age 8, DRC, Family, Destitute): When I started selling things at school, the teacher Mrs M___ she... Yeah, she was one of the teachers and she mentioned that I should look into business because I had a good business side.

For Hanna, the Catholic children's home provided a place to live, food, stability, and a safe environment for her. While individual people came and went in participants lives, institutions enabled a degree of stability by ensuring that important roles remained filled.

Hanna: I've been through it by talking to the ladies. I mean there was a sister this Catholic sister you know... a nun. Yeah, I would talk to her and explain to her what happened and... you know, I used to have that connection with the nuns... You know they will be like giving me some advice too. So I think that's also helped me besides the therapist. I think also the nuns, in a way I'm lucky...

Teachers, doctors, nuns, and therapists all played supportive roles for participants. Sometimes they offered validation and a sense of worth to participants, at other times guidance and coping skills, or a place to talk and be heard. Leung et al. (2022) elucidate the important role that a significant other plays in the lives of youth by offering guidance or support. As explored, Edith's long-standing history of social avoidance, isolation, and depression had found a turning point in her visit with a doctor. The provision of therapy, however was particularly useful for participants that had been through trauma, and Kumar (2016) connects psychotherapy to facilitating subsequent adaptation as well as later growth.

Daniel: They (the school) outsourced an external therapist and she only had, I think, about three to four sessions with me. But she spoke so many words in that short period of time that gave me even more strength and made me even more bold to say, 'OK, I can make this. I can make this'.

Hannah: The most important thing that made me overcome everything that I've been through is I took a therapy. I mean, I went through sessions. I went through sessions, I had to see someone to talk to... And, you know, I had that kind of communication with a therapist, so I feel yeah. Like, I went through a long session. It was a long journey. It took about a year, and so I was just meeting the person to talk twice a week. Also, yeah, it was a long, it was a long thing.

Researcher: So how long did you see them for?

Hanna: It was, I think it was about a year or so maybe. Yeah, and some months, it was a long, a long session, very long. Yeah. So I think they, they really helped me because I could meet someone who could openly talk to me in a comforting way like I could feel more open. So I was told to open everything, so I felt like opening up... It's, it's really healed me... Before I couldn't talk to you like this, because tears will be always flowing when I try to talk about myself.

Thus, these more distal factors ultimately exerted their influence through *people*, interacting in relation with participants. However, negative distal influences also played a role in participants lives.

Racism / Xenophobia

Racism has held multiple definitions and is at times an ideologically contentious topic (Tafira, 2011). An essential element to my understanding, and the definition that I wish to employ here, includes “the exercise of power against a racial group defined as inferior by individuals and institutions whether intentional or unintentional” (Bernard et al., 2021, p. 233). Here, *power* is essential, along with an *exercise* of that power in a downward relational dynamic. This was the case for much of modern South African history, a clear downward exercise of power that was unrelenting. Kaziboni (2022) has shown that South African xenophobia mirrors the structural racist dynamics of the previous Apartheid state, while Tafira (2011) argues for the recognition of *cultural racism* that moves from phenotypical appearance, to recognise that prejudices and discriminations are occurring in South African communities based on cultural identity.

However, xenophobia among black South Africans did not begin after 1994. During Apartheid, African migrants were solicited as another source of cheap labour, and made to compete with black South Africans (Sekati, 2022). In addition, not only were they treated differently and allowed privileges that black South Africans were not given (such as having access to certain restricted spaces), but they framed as being better educated and thus ‘superior’ – yet differences in education were by design: the Bantu Education Act restricted education for black South Africans (Sekati, 2022), and animosity was thus instigated by these colonial practices.

This background is important to locate the issue of South African xenophobia, in light of participants experiences. Faye, for example, expresses this sense of competition and resentment

in her account of xenophobia. She had arrived in South Africa as a three-year-old, and despite growing up here, it was clear that she did not feel an attachment to the country. She described coming from a 'very stable' if poor home, and had found success in the financial sector abroad. Faye described relying primarily on herself, despite her familial support, and evinced a strong independence. I felt in talking to Faye that our meeting was kept business like, formal and impersonal despite the subject matter. During the interview Faye was conscious of the time, and as she took a call part way through, I wondered about her descriptions of not having many issues in South Africa 'besides xenophobia', which she related in a very detached way.

Faye: I wouldn't really say I faced like major, major difficulties in South Africa. I think the only major difficulty was, you know, xenophobia in South Africa, yeah.

Faye: I grew up with no issues while living in South Africa besides xenophobia, having the fear of, you know, maybe one day they'll come burn your house or beat you up because you're a foreigner coming in a foreign land, taking over their stuff. So yeah.

The fears that Faye related were evocative, and expressed in one way or another by all of the participants. In listening to participants recount their childhood difficulties I was reminded of stories of the experience of black South Africans under Apartheid. For example, Colonial pass laws (which predated Apartheid) were used to segregate, exploit, and control the movement of black Africans, and required internal passports to be carried in 'white' areas (Savage, 1986). There was something of this in the fear that participants expressed of being found without their 'documents', and more so, their fear that the police could easily exploit and discriminate against them with impunity. Just such scenarios were mentioned by participants, and have been described by Langa (2013).

Becca: You've got to walk with your documents like you know, I mean, I was lucky to have a green ID. But not the majority of my friends did and every time they had to step out they are taking documentation with them. You could see the fear they had walking around because police could, even though you were minor, you could be in your uniform, and you know the police will stop you to give you a hard time.

Becca had left the DRC as a young child, and had grown up in South Africa with her family. She described finding learning English to have been an easy transition, but that she felt like an outsider who did not belong. She had also moved abroad, and was supporting herself while studying in a large metropolitan city in the US. She described herself as a perpetual immigrant, forever moving from danger:

Becca: I personally, I would say, I've been an immigrant all my life, arrived from one danger to the next. Like I ran from political conflicts in the Congo to South Africa to find safety, and even then I had to flee because of these xenophobic attack and all those fears.

Despite leaving South Africa, she described a continuation of fear in her new environment, this time as a black person, along with the additional fears associated with being a woman. Sidanius and Veniegas (2013) note that gender compounds these experiences of discrimination as black women must contend with the interacting effect of both sexism and racism. However, Becca contrasts these gender differences in another direction, in terms of America she describes it as more dangerous *for black men*.

Becca: It's safer here, but still the danger is still there. Being a black person in America is is crazy, because racism is real. I'm not gonna lie. It's not like being a foreigner (in South Africa), of course, but being black in America is worse than it is in South Africa. The feeling of fear living as a black person here. I mean, and I'm a woman, so...

Becca: There is a comparable comparison I would say. And the feeling of fear living as a black person here. I mean, I'm a woman, so. I'm not saying it's not as dangerous, but you know, as a as a black man. But it's it's the same. For black men...

The distinction of the difficulty of being *black in America*, as opposed to *black in South Africa*, stood out for me; Becca was equating being black in America to being an African migrant in South Africa, and this coheres with Tafira's (2011) claim to a cultural racism at play. Tafira (2011, p. 116) drew on Wievorka's (1997) description of a racism where, 'the Other is seen as a new danger to society, a threat, an invader intent on usurping the hard won materialities which the locals earned with sweat and blood', which resonates with the sense of xenophobia displayed in South Africa today.

Becca: I remember like one time I was hanging out with a few friends and one person did not bring their ID. And then one person comments is like 'how can you be a black man in America, and not have your ID?' Because if you get stopped by the police, anything could happen to you. That's, that's a crazy feeling because I could relate to that feeling.

However, while the comparison to racism does well to capture the many effects of xenophobia in the present, it neglects explicating its connection with the past. As Sekati (2022) has explored, divisions among black people and migrants began in the Apartheid era: African migrants were given special treatment and privileges, and as the Bantu education act prevented black South Africans from educational attainment an associated 'superiority' was allocated to migrants.

Fanon (1967) attributes this to an effect of *racialisation* of the self, and the overarching order of a white supremacy that *enforces* itself through the establishment of internal hierarchy amongst the colonised. This is important to recognise, as within Becca's account above, and other descriptions by participants throughout the interviews, there is a clear sense based in the reality of their treatment that they are marginalised, excluded, and victimised. While this is true, how colonialism entrenched these practices in the first place becomes hidden, and narratives of equivalence may serve to sustain division among black Africans, facilitating the same diversionary process.

Religion and Culture

Before I had begun the interview process, or indeed conceptualised the study, I was aware that many refugees and African migrants do frequent church and that there is a community aspect to these institutions. I was also aware that for many, religion likely played an important role in their beliefs and perspectives. Despite this I found myself surprised in interviews that this area came up with such frequency. My own relationship to religion, as a secular Jew, has generally been incredulous, and I am often antagonistic or mistrustful. I needed to take care in these interviews to not let this bias limit exploration of the topic or to become inadvertently dismissive. To do so, I broached the topic neutrally aiming to stay aware of overcompensation or avoidance, and made an effort to probe further when religion was mentioned: and indeed, it was mentioned independently of direct enquiry in every interview.

Although this was in the sense of the church and its community support at times, the sub-category of religion here represents religious feeling, belief, or relationship to Christian divinity. This was described as a powerful influence *rooted in familial and childhood experience* for all of the participants, and formed some backdrop to their lives. For instance, Aaron located religion as being an important part of his life in the Congo before coming to South Africa:

Aaron: So, even in Congo as far as I can remember, my dad was involved in the church. Yeah, so we grew up in a family church, and church had always been something that I grew up with in front of me, but what happens... you transform from a place of where you going through the motions... to your own experience with God. I think that solidified over the years. But I mean, I've always grown up around church... and I've believed in Jesus for as long as I remember.

Here I understood the above to mean that it his involvement and exposure to the church *through his family*, that Aaron developed his own religiosity and relationship to God. The single participant who had changed from one religious denomination to another continued from a basis that had been *rooted in her relationship with her grandmother*:

Hannah: Yeah, I enjoy it, I do enjoy it because even my grandmom was... she was a Christian. I mean, she used to be. She used to be a believer. So from back then I was still in that category of Christianity. So I do love what I'm doing, even though I've changed from Protestant to Catholic.

This religious influence seemed to be a location of comfort and meaning, and to lay the foundation for many other strategies employed later. For instance: trusting and being accepting of 'God's plan', and praying for and feeling some degree of protection. The community provided by the church and associated religious organisations further provided important supports in the social context. These aligned with finding by Henson et al. (2021) who discuss the contributions of religious orientation and identification as bolstering a sense of belonging within community, as ensuring the presence of social support, and as promoting beliefs that encourage the search for meaning. Within religious practice it was additionally apparent that *the relationship with God brought strength and comfort*.

Becca: ...you know, it's helpful because you can talk to God, like like you're talking to a friend, you know, you cry out and you feel and the more you talk to him, the more you feel connected to him.

Edith: I always, before I leave, I tell myself, 'Okay, God, I want you to be there for me'. Like I tell myself like this, every day

Cultural aspects of community support also proved important here, and the othering by wider local communities reinforces reliance on migrant community supports (). Ungar (2015) posits culture as everyday practices together with values and beliefs associated with these practices. Collectivism as opposed to individualism, or communal values and expectations that emphasise care for others, mediate such supports, and Kumar (2016) found just such with collectivism among Sudanese migrants in South Africa. Edith expressed how the church community looked after her:

Edith: I got a lot of help and support from people in the church, and also friends... They took me in at that time, and helped me to talk... there was too much love...

Religion and culture are entwined, and all participants found inclusion in religious community: though this was limited to their cultural sphere, they attended *French* African churches that accommodated to African migrants. Culture and religion include and exclude, but one especially clear and potent mediator of inclusion was language.

Language

Tafira (2011) notes that the derogatory term ‘amaKwerekwere’ used to identify foreign African nationals, comes from isiXhosa and roughly translates to ‘someone speaking an unfamiliar language.’ This xenophobic term encapsulates the centrality of language to group identification. Fanon (1967) further positions language as a powerful tool to include or exclude, while Tafira (2011) theorises a ‘New Racism’ as being *constructed and enacted through language which others and diminishes*.

Congolese youth in the South African school system have been found to experience *French as a marker of difference* from their South African peers who regard them with suspicion when using the language (Krüger, 2010), and for Congolese youth that arrived later in their childhood a diminished form of French could also alienate them from their Congolese peers (Mayoma and Williams, 2021). Participants spoke of how linguistic and cultural alienation from their surrounds constrained their community grouping. Thus, migrant youth thus have a dual and sometimes competing task of navigating inclusion into migrants groups as well as that of locals. These coincide with important developmental tasks of adolescent identity formation (Erickson, 1950), which has implications for integration into South African society more generally. Aaron talked of how his own network had been limited initially to French speakers, but that later as he learned English he was able to connect with South Africans more generally. As linguistic barriers were overcome, integration into other communities becomes possible.

Aaron: I mean, you couldn't understand anything you know, so you get a translator, but then they become your friend and then their friend becomes your friend. So next was his friend, but obviously they can speak English, and they got South African friends. But I mean, we had a lot of Congolese friends always because you're connected to people that can understand you. So yeah, mostly Congolese at the beginning but then over time, yeah, then it just, you learn English as well. Then you just learn to connect with everyone.

While Aaron had gone to a school that was predominantly South African, Gabriel's school was primarily made up of foreign French speakers. The large immigrant community within the school created a culture of acceptance.

Gabriel: I went to an International High School, which was full of foreigners. So it was easy for me to adapt. Because I had French speaking people.

For Becca however, this alienation from South Africans was not worth overcoming.

Becca: ...you know, just be with people that are like you, you know that speak the same language as you, you try to avoid, you know...that interaction where you kind of like, feel like an outsider because you don't speak the language, so you just be friends with your people.

Even so, learning English was an unavoidable necessity for all participants as they were in English school systems and needed it more generally to function in South Africa. English is more closely related to French (and thus easier to learn) than are Southern Bantu and Nguni languages to those spoken in Congo and Burundi. All participants reported that it had come without too much difficulty, and the younger they were at their time of arrival, the easier it had been. All participants had learned English first, something that left them alienated from black South Africans generally as local South African languages also play connective community roles (Isseri et al., 2018). The exclusive use of a 'white' language also conveys certain privileges: people are seen as more educated, and *whiter*, shifting them on a social hierarchy (Fanon, 1967). Fanon (1967) calls this process *lactification*, and Hook (2004) notes that Fanon recognises that the black subject becomes *proportionally white* in direct ratio to his mastery of a 'white language' (p. 98).

English then not enables participants to converse and connect with *white* South Africans, but it further divorces participants from local South Africans. In addition, South African xenophobia whether as *cultural racism* as construed by Tafira (2011), as displacement of Apartheid trauma and systemic oppression onto vulnerable African migrants along with increased competition for limited resources (Langa, 2013), or as scapegoats for South Africa's problems (Crush, & Ramachandran, 2016) is relegated to *black* South Africans. This no doubt played into the interview situation as participants referred to black South Africans as 'them' and 'they', and even directly as 'black people' on occasion.

Aaron: Yeah, black people when they see another black person. They tend to speak in Zulu because they think, they expect you to understand... Even me, I mean a lot of us, most of us, got connected with white people, because white people speak English.

.. so like being around like black kids... black kids was hard because, then when they in a group they speak Zulu or whatever they speak and you don't understand. So you feel like a reject... you feel like rejected with your own people per-se.

This was problematic for several reasons. On the one hand, my whiteness likely facilitated an ease to speaking to xenophobic experience, and participants seemed to speak freely and openly, in a way they might not have with a black South African. On the other hand, I felt myself to be separated from the problem of xenophobia, and thus it is important to interrogate what seemed to be happening in the background, unsaid (Straker, 2004).

Firstly, as explored earlier the culpability of white South Africans in post-Apartheid dynamics was hidden: construing xenophobia as a black South African problem obscures the active role of colonialism in creating division, as well as the *continued* enactment of these categorisations, hierarchical framings, and thus divisions. I felt myself during these interviews to be unaware of this dynamic: I had construed xenophobia as an issue that related to black South Africans borne out of frustration. This precisely played in to what Green et al. (2007) warn as to how white people are able to distance themselves from the *white* supremacist positions that underpin and maintain racism through discourse and practice. This was not conscious, but spoke to an *unconscious* dynamic that avoids disputing the privileges associated with racial injustice (Angu, 2023): simply, although I did not intend it, the framing of xenophobia as a problem of Black South Africans colludes with a broader racist discourse at work.

Secondly, several other underlying discourses broader to our interactions were at play. South Africans are framed as sympathetic to, and in a sense allied with foreign African migrants, and implicit to the issue of xenophobia is the framing of it as a failing of the 'new South Africa'. Steyn and Forster (2008) connect positions like these to narratives that serve to discredit the grievances of local black South Africans, while perpetuating tropes of white South African's as saviours, and the 'new South Africa' and all its policies concerned with restitution as a place where 'the worthy are punished and unworthy disproportionately rewarded'. Furthermore, Straker's (2004; 2013) description of defensive fetishisation plays out: in positioning good migrants blacks versus bad local blacks, one group becomes the Project, while the other becomes the bad Other, and both of them then serve to maintain a hidden white superiority.

Of all the participants, only Daniel expressed a predominant connection with local South Africans. He was also the only participant who had become truly fluent in multiple local languages.

Daniel: So South Africa was quite easier for me because I was able to learn languages and also I realised that South African citizens enjoy people and their languages more. There were other migrants in the school where I was schooling, but they were not quite friendly to them because they could only speak their own languages...

However, even with developing competence in this area, annunciations and accents often betrayed migrants. Some participants related how they were still othered for being African immigrants, even when speaking the language of instruction. Krüger (2010) in their study on African immigrant migrants in South Africa found that all participants had experienced humiliation as a result of speaking English in the classroom, and Becca expressed her own reluctance to speak despite having some fluency:

Becca: It helped me, you know, to... to get through, because I was able through that, I was able to understand a lot of the local languages like Zulu, Xhosa, Setswana... I don't speak it because I was really afraid of speaking and making a mistake, but I did understand Zulu especially.

Caleb for example, demonstrated this tension and dichotomy indirectly. He referred to how his local friends would help out when he was spoken to in Zulu, but lurking beneath this I felt the presence of xenophobic threat, why must his friends 'jump in', and what if they did not?

Caleb: ...then for example, someone comes to speak to me in Zulu and then they will jump in and answer for me or something...

While a tension between a generalised mistrust of *black* South Africans who were strangers — taxi drivers, fellow passengers, people in the street — and the possibility of xenophobic violence often coexisted with a reliance on some South Africans that they felt they could trust. For Becca, 'the South African community' was just too dangerous.

Becca: For you to engage in the South African community, it's like, Oh my God, you know, you gotta watch it, you know, gotta watch what you're saying, what you do. You know how much you express, expose.

Daniel's account was more subtle, he expressed an ease with which he integrated, and throughout the interview insisted on a love for South Africa and South Africans, yet in his

description and choice of words, of 'expose' and his initial evasions of describing himself as a migrant, I still detected a discomfort with being noticed.

Daniel: True, true. I mean, at this stage, even I remember at university, people never believed me that I was a migrant. It's only my names which would expose me, my name and surname. But language wise, I've been always speaking local languages and they will be like, 'where are you from?' I'm like 'no, I'm from Bloemfontein. I'm from Limpopo'. They are like 'what languages? I mean, what languages did you? It sounds like French. Are you French? And if you are French, how come you speak so fluently?'

For other participants, like Edith and Hannah, although they learned a local language, this fear of exposure was more salient. Especially, in their inability to obscure their accents.

Hanna: Yeah, it is it is it is useful because you know there are a lot of local people. Especially the older ones they don't know how to speak English. So sometimes it's easy because it's, it's make it easier for you to communicate with adults. Yeah. And also it helps it helps in different ways. Yeah, you can communicate, you feel like you're at home, but you have to remember, you're not home.

Researcher: By speaking Zulu, do you find the people are more open towards you?

Hanna: I don't know about it, but I think, you know, when I'm speaking Zulu, I have an accent, no, I have an accent in that will define me as I'm not the same. So yeah, it's always there and I look different. I sound different from them even though I know what they're talking about, I can speak with their language but there is that accent that defines me, to say, like 'this one is not'. It's so I always get those xenophobic ways. You know, yeah. It's always there.

I heard in this too, the implication that not being able to answer in Zulu would have been taken even more negatively. Faye and Becca specifically spoke to the importance of local language in avoiding animosity:

Becca: You know, especially if you don't speak that language it's really difficult. You know, trying to communicate or reaching across to somebody. If you do not speak that language. And of course, you know, there's 11 official languages so it's easy to be mistaken. You come across one person and speak Zulu, then the other person speaks Xhosa. Somebody else speaks Setswana. And if you do not relate to them and their language, they get upset.

Faye: I was afraid to go to school because of how they treat us. Maybe they might beat us. So we are forced to learn Zulu so that we don't get, you know, in trouble.

For participants who distanced themselves from 'locals', there was less interest in either learning local languages or integration, often seeing these as unlikely, or not aligned with their

goals. For Caleb, Spanish would be more useful as an ‘international’ language, while for Becca who had set her sights elsewhere, it was ‘unnecessary’ to commit deeply to any local South African language.

Microsystems: Community and Family

Community

Nurius et al. (2015) found that a strong sense of community mediated similar psychological wellness levels across those with lower or higher number of ACE’s, importantly finding that the absence of this among those with high ACE’s was starkly associated with poorer mental health. As such, as ACE’s increased, so did the relative importance of community factors, and their absence becomes more detrimental. This stands to reason, the less support one has in the home, the more important support in the community becomes.

All the participants referenced different *communities* in which they were able to find refuge: there was the church, sports team, boxing gyms, and groups of friends. Descriptions of inspiration and guidance as attached to particular context and environments (in sports, family, or church) were described more fully by Caleb and Aaron during our conversations. Here, in the following excerpts, it was apparent to myself that important values had been absorbed through involvement in community, in which wisdom, practices, and insights were transmitted. In this sense, *culture* is understood to be transmitted via community and relationships with others (Ungar, 2011). Through these relationships *roles, values, ideals, behaviours, hopes, and directions*, are typified and transmitted beyond any one single individual in and of themselves.

Caleb: Especially when you grow up, you know, like I was a church boy and then. You learn things going every Sunday. You learn things about future periods. You must be patient, you must be, you know, kind. And you know it's like you just learn as you grow. So I wouldn't say I was always this patient with life.

Aaron: I was in school but I was spending time with these guys (in the boxing gym) and that's what I was thinking, because I knew what they had to do to make an income and even though they were like the bosses of their companies, they still had to put in more hours than the workers themselves. And so I learned business, and learned how to speak to people, from them, people in the gym. I learned business in there, so... not just boxing, they know life, right? And, they were much older than me. So, you sort of take from that... you take, where you can.

For all participants, Church was an important part of their lives. For some like Edith, it was one of the few places that she found support. While Becca described the commonality of struggle and of finding comfort in a community that could understand her difficulties:

Edith: I didn't have anything else apart from people around me and going to church.

Becca: Uh, yeah. And you just feel better. You know, we all had the same issue because I went to a church that was predominantly Congolese. Now, you know, like myself. So they understood what I was going through because we were all in the same boat. And through that we were able to comfort each other, you know, give each other advice and so forth, you know personally, I did find comfort in church.

Henson et al (2021) specifically reference the positive effects that spirituality may foster in religious community: in proscribing social support as well as promoting beliefs that encourage individuals to search for meaning. Bernard et al. (2021) further attribute the importance of a community as a societal resource that assists in making sense of negative events, especially when those negative events are commonly experienced by that group. The common struggles of migrants in South Africa, as well as for those who have come from previously traumatic circumstances in their home countries, can be better integrated and supported through communities of common understanding.

This does not have to be verbal, and often social support existed through *practice* in community. The church was a notable example, but one other sense of community that offered connection, and transcended the linguistic realm was reflected by Aaron.

Aaron: But, but the one thing that did connect us, And I got to be grateful for this, is football, because I was a very good football player... so sport, always sort of connected everyone, you know, so people didn't care that you didn't speak Zulu, or whatever it is. They would make an effort to speak to you in English because of sports, and sports connects the world.

In terms of accessing social and community supports: the women and men interviewed expressed accessing these differently. Women spoke at times of relying on others to 'talk' with in these spaces, whereas men expressed more activity based forms of bonding. This may have been due to gender and culture norms, or male and female tendencies towards externalising and internalising respectively (Christiansen, 2017). Dawes and Donald (1994) in their work with South Africans showed that the key requirement in developing resilience was having at least one person in the community who could provide emotional support and sensitive

interpretation, and as van Breda (2018) noted the essential factor in all of these influences is not simply having others in the same location, but there must be some interaction between them.

Family

The literature shows that parental care fosters resilience (Dykes, 2016) and even for those that arrived in South Africa without this care, their early familial relationships had influenced them considerably. For example, Daniel and Hanna spoke of the continued importance of their early caretakers despite their separation from them at a young age: Daniel's routine referral to the importance of his 'mother's voice' that continued to guide him, and the importance of Hannah's grandmother to her as a model and inspiration were evidence of the importance of this early parental care.

Daniel: I'm very religious and I went to church. I go to church every now and again. I found a lot of role models in church, senior pastors who would speak good words in my life. And so I have a lot of models, but my mom still outshone everyone because until today when I'm moving, I can still hear her voice in some way speaking to me.

Hannah: Yeah, I think my grandmother will always be there. No matter what she's always there. She's my first priority. So the rest can come and they can give me advice but at the end of the day, I'm the one to decide. So other people, they do help me in terms of giving me ideas or advising me on what to do and what not to do. But my grandmom, she's always gonna be my role model. She's been my super woman so yeah, I don't know if there's anyone who can change that.

Straker et al. (1992) showed that among township youth this supportive *early* childhood predicted later resilience. In the context of surrounding adversity, this support was all the more salient. Leung (2022) attributes this dimension of social support to the provision of 'normalcy' and 'safe refuge' in an otherwise stormy world. Having at least some respite, even if it were internal, proved to be important for participants. When I considered the descriptions of participants of the importance of their caregivers along with Leung's attribution of a 'safe refuge', I was reminded of Winnicott's (1957) description of the 'good enough' mother (or parent), and this internalisation of safety among those participants who had lost actual safety and familial support seemed crucial to their survival. The role of dissociation, as a 'retreat' to an internal safety in children when overwhelmed (Herman, 1992).

Parenting practices were often credited in participants' adaption and not going down the wrong path. This was especially true for the male participants who referenced their father's as 'strict'. Leung et al. (2022) found in their study of developing youth that supportive others discouraged participants from risky behaviours, encouraged prosocial behaviours, and facilitated the deliberation and development of the will to master skills and thus build confidence beyond adversity. Furthermore, Ungar (2011) cites Sameroff et al. (2003) to show that parenting practices that *deemphasise* democratic decision making are *more* functional in particular contexts. This spoke to the principles of *cultural relativism* and *atypicality* that Ungar includes as aspects of resilience: in environments where there are more risks, stricter parenting practices are more effective than *laissez faire* approaches that may be better suited to safe and privileged contexts.

Caleb: So yes, cause you know when you grow up with, like, strict parents, Christian parents, parents that would be with you, parents that pray for you. Yeah, it's just hard for you to drift away.

I was a young boy with the dream to be a soccer player, for example. And when I told that to my dad once, he was like 'no', my dad was like, big on education. They like, in fact, African parents, they have a very high opinion of education.

While Caleb went on to study engineering, Aaron had seen his future in sport and had successfully brought his focus there. However, he also described how within his own community, nefarious figures were also available for representation and identification. He described how a mix of protective factors had prevented him from going down a dangerous path:

Aaron: That was the easy way, of course for us. Now... you look back. Like they didn't really have money, but back then as a child they seemed like the superstars of our communities, because they drove, and they had women around, and they had the symptoms of a lot of money. Back then, if I could get 20 Rand, that was a lot of money for me.. and you'd see 20 Rand, 50 Rand in their hands, and you'd feel like, this is the richest man, and so there was always that temptation to have gone into that life.

Researcher: And what about that temptation? What kept you from going down that path?

Aaron: All right. So there's a few things. The first thing was remember, we grew up in the church environment, and my dad was very strict. So there was always that fear that my dad might find out. And then, I was gonna make it through football... it was a long-term thing... and also football gets you away from that. And that's another thing, sport

does get you away from the street because the more time you're spending in the street, the more you're tempted by these guys. But if I go play football, I come back, I'm tired. I go inside and I sleep and I don't spend too much time seeing these guys. And so I think football, sport, and just growing being raised, well, I would say, being raised a God fearing man, in a God fearing home.

For Caleb, the influence of his parents manifested in a very concrete sense. He described actively asking himself how his parents would behave in a situation, or how they would react to his own behaviour and choices. Consider his words:

Caleb: I would always ask myself what... what would my dad say? What would my mom say? What would my dad think? What would my mom think? What would they do?

In the context of our conversation, he indicated this as being a way of guiding his own behaviour, through careful consideration of how his parents would handle difficulties. Aaron similarly described a behavioural role-model for responding to adversity and difficulty in his brother:

Aaron: But yeah my brother is my role model, but not through boxing. So another thing, I mean my brother is very sociable. I learned a lot from him. He's very calm and it influenced me to try and be calm. And so, yeah, I look up to my brother, a lot. He's a good human.

Here, he was describing his brother's attitude and response to difficulties, and his own subsequent emulation of this stoic response. Close familial role models representing for participants a kind of template for navigating difficulty and challenge was common among participants, and mirrors Zivic's (1993) finding that the surrounding adults ability to cope with trauma and difficulty was the most predictive factor in children's own successful coping. Gabriel described how his father's own success and resilience continued to inspire his own perseverance:

Gabriel: So my dad he's my role-model, and my older cousin... but mostly my dad, because my dad, obviously lost his dad when he was 11, he made it. He put his brother through school, and everything he had to work out, he taught himself.

Kearney and Levine (2020) draw on Bandura's social learning theory to explain the importance of role models and representation among disadvantaged groups: Bandura posited that individuals learn by observing, imitating, and modelling behaviour they witness, paying attention to the consequences that they observe (Bandura, 1977). Having models with which youth can identify, and whom they can emulate is highlighted as especially important, and they

describe the role of media personalities as ethical and behavioural models for youth from backgrounds where figures of success within the community to emulate are scarce. Aaron's identification with iconic *African* football stars that had endured hardship and poverty to achieve great success was an exemplar of this:

Aaron: They come from a poor background. And so watching them excelling at the top level, being the best ever always gave a hope that things are gonna change for you... because if they can do it.. I can do it, you can do it. And that motivates you to not give up. And you know it's not gonna be easy, but you have to push through it.

Let's look at someone like Eto.. they come from Africa. Not the nice part, but from Cameroon, poor Cameroon, and they've made it to international level! I felt like, I'm in South Africa at a much better place than they were in Cameroon. So if they could achieve whatever they achieved then so I could too.

I think that drives that work ethic. That's not just for one thing because remember I took my work ethic from football, and then I took that into boxing. Because that becomes part of your life, right? Everything you do, you got to do very good. You work, work, work, work, you know, you got to work, you gotta get the job done. So that's what that did for me. You don't give up. You want something? You cannot give up.

The particular importance of role-models to teenage adolescents is discussed by Ray (2006) who refers to a time of particular fertility in this developmental stage, referring to an 'aspirations window' where individuals draw from the lives, achievements, or ideals of those who enter their world. Ray (2006) contends that identification with a plausible role model, one that is *relatable*, allows for an identification of the 'gap' between one's current circumstances and desires, and when this gap is viewed as plausibly bridgeable, an individual can be greatly motivated towards those ends. In Aaron's description, I noticed his identification with the footballer Eto, who comes from Africa, and 'not the nice part, but from Cameroon, poor Cameroon', and an identification with someone *even worse off than himself* who thus demonstrated what is possible.

The importance of this, of *representation*, has been discussed widely (Kearney & Levine, 2020), and bears relevance not only to the migrant context, but with all marginalised groups and communities. In addition, I found it useful to consider Erickson's (1968) fifth stage of psychosocial development, of identity versus role confusion, where children test and integrate different roles: here the availability of role models for these children was especially important in light of the context (Kearney & Levine, 2020).

Erickson's theory further allow us to understand the importance of a guiding or symbolic other in development, as well serves to highlight the risk of continuation of destructive patterns and influences within communities without positive role models. Perhaps one of the most pernicious and destructive aspects of South African colonialism was this break-up of the African family through enforced taxation and thus migration of African fathers (Richter et al., 2010). Interestingly, participants family structures (in this selection) generally had available fathers (when their families were present) and it's possible that this available modelling and support in the home may be a protective advantage of African migrants to South Africa.

Theme 3: We Do What We Can

Ntango ozali na mino, buka ndika.

As long as you have teeth, break the ndika (nut).

A Proverb in the Lingala Language of Congo.

In the previous themes, the requisite nature of adversity in engendering resilience was explored, as was the crucial influence of the surrounding ecologies, on the macro and micro levels that ultimately transmit culture, values, and practices through community and relationships. In this theme the strategies that participants made use of were explored. No participant relied solely on one, and their use of strategies altered over time. An important finding was the contextual nature of these strategies: participants used what was available to them. These were clearly tied to both their supports and limitations. When nothing else was available, participants could rely on what they could change: their perspective, hopes, attitudes, or fantasies. Though they could not control the unpredictable surrounds, they could find comfort and stability through planning for the unexpected. When nothing could be done, they might ‘turn off’: sleep or dissociate completely. These were not usually conscious choices, but rather necessary adaptations; however personal agency, deliberate rumination, and determined planning and focus still played a crucial role.

Orienting

Long-term plans and goals recur throughout participants accounts. For Aaron, a long-term vision in making it in football brought dedication modelled by his hero Eto and mentors in the boxing gym.:

Aaron: My role models were football players... growing up, I switched from football, you know, but I used to play football and I was a good football player, and so I would see my future.

The importance of staying focussed and having a clear idea of what it was that they were aiming for was emphasised by all participants, and they related how staying future-orientated motivated them to continue through difficult present circumstances. In terms of resilience, these orientations have been modelled and taken in from the surrounding adults and culture, and they exert their influence on the agency of the child (Wu & Ou, 2021).

Caleb: You know, so my reason obviously was to study and you know to further qualifications. So whenever something will happen it will be like I just have to roll with it. I'm here to study, I'm here to you know. Let me just stay focused on what I'm doing. There's days where you're just like you're why am I doing this? God, why? Why? But then when you think long term, how it will help you to build your life, your future... you just have to remain focused on what you were here for. And it's not easy like it's, it's, not easy. It's not easy at all. Like no. It's not easy at all.

Hanna: Okay, I can even say my studies went first. I'm even proud because in the whole children's home I was the first person to pass with the distinction. That's one thing I really. Yeah, I was very proud of myself.

Researcher: It sounds like it was an achievement... how?

Hanna: Because I've said it, I tell myself I will do it. So I was, I was self-motivated, so I was self-motivated because when you know, in my home I used to tell them this, they would laugh at me, but I used to tell the ones that are close to me. I told them, you know, being in Grade 11 at my home, it's a big achievement because people only think of marriage and farming, and babies. That's all. So I told them, You know, in Grade 11 in my home, it's a very big achievement. So I motivated myself, I could study harder and try to make it to the top. So I had motivated myself all along. Yeah.

Edith expressed the importance of knowing what it was she wanted, and was aiming for, and included in this too, the importance of *avoiding* what she didn't want. As much as the surrounding influences can inspire, they can also allow one to know what one doesn't want. Edith expressed how she wanted a different childhood for her children, because she knew from experience what she didn't want them to have.

Edith: You must know what you want. I did meet friends who smoke. They drink, they do drugs. I did meet people like this at school. But I knew what I wanted. I knew what I wanted in life. That was not my way to become a smoker or drink. I told myself every day what I need to be.

Edith: I want to give my children what my parents would have been, if I had lived with my parents.

Leung et al (2022) described how self-reliance increases an individual's agency to avoid people or situations that might create stress in their lives, and thereby increases their self-righting capacity and goal focus. Edith was specific in how she exercised her agency here, in her choices to avoid certain people and paths that would have undermined her goals. Hanna, who had been placed in a Catholic children's home as a teenager contrasted her own steadfast determination with that of a fellow migrant who had not had a clear focus, and who ultimately did not finish school:

Hanna: I had a friend of mine, we used to stay with him in the children home and he also, like he was the opposite of what I was. I mean how can I even say, like, he never thought of his future. He was acting like he's a citizen but he's not a citizen.

Here, the discriminatory disadvantage and vulnerable position of herself as a migrant comes to the fore of her account, and yet, it is precisely this precariousness that played a motivational role for herself. In contrast to her peer, a migrant who 'acted like a citizen' she described the felt uncertainty of her position as motivating her out of a necessity.

Caleb: ...you're not home. You know you're not home.

Gabriel: We must work harder than anyone else... this is not our home.

Careful planning, thinking through contingencies, and readying oneself for negative outcomes were all importance adjacent strategies underlying self-reliance. This was especially linked to xenophobia, and the possibility of a sudden change in circumstance, as Daniel, Faye, and Caleb describe:

Daniel: I know I will fit in some way if they come to ____, I will move to Limpopo. I will move to another place. I have everything planned. In a sense that I won't be affected in any way.

Faye: And how the whole situation would change my life, because at the end of the day we were, as humans were, were designed to learn how to adapt. So in a way, I did note that I'm gonna settle down with xenophobia. But I did learn to adapt. It might happen today, or some other day it might happen. I think two years or three years ago there was xenophobia in South Africa, and now again. So yeah such things you know that you have to prepare for them, you should expect them.

Caleb: Well, how will it be in the next two weeks, three weeks, three months? You know, I always think about how we would be in the next year or so.

Whereas planning for negative eventualities was done beforehand, solution-finding was a strategy that participants described using during difficulties themselves:

Caleb: Yeah. I think with any problem that I have, I think I always find the solution to there's always a solution to everything. I think that's how I think, that's what I believe.

Daniel: My mind was as soon as I can jump into the country, I will find my ways in. I've been always finding my ways in. In other countries there is no way I can struggle in South Africa as well.

The confidence expressed by Caleb and Daniel here came in different ways. Caleb expressed how his solution finding had been modelled after that of his parents, where they had shown

him how to think through situations, and where he had introjected their values and methods. Daniel's instead, had been borne of successfully navigating severe adversities time and time again: he had lived on the streets of several countries, learning languages, and surviving by selling sweets and other small items along the way. His resourcefulness was directly tied to the adversities that he faced, without recourse or support. This fit the description by Fontana & Rosenheck (1998) who theorised that through active coping in the face of trauma and adversity, one develops genuine ability and self-belief, and thus were tied to potential growth effects.

Avoiding

Clark et al. (2006) described how previous experiences of racial discrimination leads American Black youth to become particularly vigilant of their surroundings in efforts to mentally prepare themselves for future discriminatory events. A similar process seems to have happened for participants here, with both personal experiences and reports of xenophobia leading to a vigilance among participants. While vigilance serves an important and contextually adaptive function, protecting mental and physical well-being, the energy needed to sustain a constant state of vigilance can be exhausting (Clark et al., 2006). Himmelstein et al. (2015) note that sustained vigilance affects sleep, focus, and eventually functioning. Thus, vigilance can be understood as a situationally protective mechanism, but one that can lead to ill effect if not given respite.

Conversely, and maybe due to vigilance which is tiring, I noticed a trend in participants in making use of sleep as a strategy to break from and come back to problems and difficulties at a later stage. This seemed to exemplify how 'turning off' and 'waiting out' were sometimes used wisely by interviewees to get through difficult periods.

Caleb: And you know, sleep also helps you. So you have a problem... just go to sleep. Wake up. It will be less painful, less stressful.

Nurius et al. (2015) argued that sleep (along with physical activity) are broadly accessible resources that individuals are able to make use of as defence against stressors, and are additionally effective in reducing dysregulation that has resulted from stress sensitisation. For participants with little recourse to other means to reduce their stress, and where periodic violence erupted in their surroundings, avoidance in this form offered a way to conserve their energy and wait out these difficulties beyond their control to subside somewhat.

Suppression was another strategy of avoidance that participants relied on in various ways. Yet, there was something insidious about this: suppressing difficult feelings and thoughts seemed to be both useful and problematic for those who relied on these strategies.

Researcher: Then how did you get through those difficult times, like when things like that happened, what did you do?

Becca: I just kind of like ignored it... It was there, you know, the feeling of fear is always gonna be there, especially when it's xenophobia you know, that was scary. But many of us believe we just suppressed it.

Becca: You never know at which point something's gonna happen to you, you just expect it. It may not be today. May not be tomorrow. It'll be one day. And so you just take that fear, push it under. Under the carpet or put it behind you and just...

Here as Becca described, it seemed that even as she had learned to 'push it under... behind you', that a sense of dread remained about the future, that 'one day' something would happen. I interpreted this to mean that despite being pushed away from apparent awareness, and ignored, that the fear (and other difficult feelings) continued to exert an effect. These and other avoidance behaviours, are very effective in the immediacy of difficulty and thus contribute to resilience, however they also reduce engagement with difficult affect and cognitions which are theorised to be important for later growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2018).

Becca: How would I say this? I try to keep myself preoccupied a lot. Like once I finished high school, I did a lot of stuff to keep myself busy, not to think about these things... so I never had the time to think about it. You know, it was just like I said... try and find things that make you not think about these things.

Dissociation lay further along a similar continuum, reserved it seemed for the most intensive of experience:

Daniel: And at that time, I was no more. How do I put this? I don't think I was conscious of what was happening, although I was able to see, but my mind was not easy. It's like I had. I was living in my own world, cause I wasn't bathing. I wasn't getting proper basic meals and I just wanted to die. So I kept on moving.

Daniel: It was very hard and that's why I wanted to kill myself, because I also felt like there is nothing to live for and as a child I was like, how am I going to make it? I still need emotional support. I still need parental guidance, so I might as, but it didn't happen. All the attempts that I used, they didn't work out, so it was very, very difficult for me. I think at some point I was no longer conscious.

Dissociation is related to the experience of trauma, to that intensity of experience that is beyond our capacity to integrate; it is a *non-conscious* reaction, a way of *surviving* more than 'coping' (Herman, 1992). Daniel and his descriptions of overwhelm were at times illustrative of this distinction between 'adversity' and 'trauma': and to survive, dissociation pertains to a resilience in the face of the extreme.

Becca described distracting herself from difficult thoughts by keeping busy, while Aaron coped with pervasive hunger with soccer, and then later boxing. Not only was he able to distract himself, but he described *conversion* of these feelings through activity.

Aaron: I guess you.. you turn to sports. And that's how you.. get those feelings out. It's almost like you. Like convert.. exchange the two.. you're feeling sad, you feeling done and then you go play football. I wanted to be a football player, so that brings that inspiration being there... motivation, brings that hope...

The use of physical activity was common among *male* participants, using their body in some way to busy themselves with sports, handiwork, or gym, and may align with externalising tendencies more prevalent in men (Addis, 2008). Nurius et al. (2015) further note that physical activity, especially when social in nature, combines the biological, psychological, and social mechanisms to reduce stress effects while stimulating adaptive health behaviours.

Caleb: And at home I was the handyman, you know, my mom would be like oh, 'please come fix this', then you know, I'd be using the screwdriver, anything. You know, those things helped me also. You know, to just like forget.

Gabriel: Yeah, gym is important. Another thing, I try not to think a lot... to think about it, so I don't just stay quiet in my room thinking about it. It usually drains me so I'll get out and go run. And if it's really disturbing me I'll watch comedy, watch something.

A cultural component may have played a role in gender expectations and opportunities. Ungar (2011) notes that as a form of cultural expression it is highly sensitive to variations in the surrounding social ecologies. The boxing gym, for example, was a male dominated space, as were the boys football gatherings. Edith was the only female participant to mention having used physical activity at times, and then only in going for a walk which would usually culminate in meeting a friend to 'talk'.

Researcher: I'm also wondering, you know, when you did have difficult feelings and difficult thoughts, what did you do with those feelings and thoughts?

Edith: Difficult thoughts or feelings? I go for a walk. Okay. Yes, I go for a walk. I go maybe I go to a friend's house to stay in. And then we'll talk and then I come back.

Hamer, Stamatakis, and Steptoe (2009) showed that exercise is a well demonstrated and robust mechanism through which psychological distress could be mediated, and the possible lack of the use of this resource among female African migrants in South Africa may be due to the surrounding social context. For instance, several of the female participants voices their reluctance to leave their homes due to concerns for their safety. The additional vulnerability of women in a country known as the ‘rape capital of the world’, with one of the highest rates of femicide worldwide (SAPD, 2021) likely constrains women’s availability of physical coping mechanisms. Sekati (2022) examines this intersectionality with specific reference to poor migrant women, finding that due to xenophobia they have the least recourse and are thus most vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Staying home, or in their places of safety, was one way that participants avoided potentially dangerous xenophobic encounter. This was sometimes facilitated and supported by institutions or those around them: Faye described how her school had arranged to hide her and other migrant children during xenophobic riots, but many times she and her family made the decision to stay home.

Faye: It was sad because, you know, I wanted to go to school, see my friends, you know, make sure I finish my education. So definitely I was sad, but really, there was nothing that I could do. My life was first come first, so I had to stay at home. I did stay at home. Yeah.

A related but converse of this, was finding places and spaces where they could enjoy themselves and forget about their problems for a time. As more than one participant termed it, finding ‘getaways’ allowed for a cherished respite from their more general circumstances. For many it was a place like church or school, while for some it was more particular to themselves: their boxing gym, sports field, or a treasured space.

Aaron: ...so remember when you're young. Yeah? When you grew up in my situation you look for... What? So, you look for places that feel like getaways. The early years of school, I loved school because that was the getaway for us... and churches that, you know they look like a place to get away from your misery, so when you go home there's no food, whatever, and you got to a church space, it's like a better place, right? It's like a therapy, you're with kids... people... it's happy. There's sandwiches. Yeah, so yeah, I loved church back then for those reasons.

Faye: ...if let's say sometimes at work it does get really hectic, you know, I'll go in the bathroom, talk to myself, it helps me to centre.

Ultimately, avoidance strategies were strongly related to *survival*, they were necessary, at times related to trauma experience, and highly effective at keeping participants safe.

Sense Making

Trusting in a broader meaning to difficulty, and making meaning of one's suffering, were prominent among participants. These seemed to be directly tied to a broader framework (often religious) that could incorporate adversities and difficulties, traumas and sufferings, into a coherent and meaningful whole. Beliefs such as 'everything happens for a reason' and 'it is part of God's plan' allowed participants to make sense of what would otherwise be senseless difficulties and injustices around them.

Caleb: And as a Christian, we always believe that cause you don't know God's plan. You know he's the one that's in control. He's the one that knows. So if you have that patience, that trust, and you know if you keep praying for what you want then that's how you get what you want.

Faye: You know, with religion it's everything happens for a reason. It could be that it happened, maybe, you know, to avoid maybe a certain tragedy in life. So even though I'm sad, but only God knows why he permitted for that to happen. So I tried to look at things both negatively and positively. So if something bad has happened in my life, probably it was just, you know, God trying to help me to avoid a certain tragedy.

Tolfree (1996) theorised that the traditional and religious heritage's within cultures enable broader resources that facilitate the attribution of meaning to events. This is of particular relevance considering the often traumatic circumstances that asylum seekers have had to face in their home countries, and then often again in South Africa. A religious framework that incorporates suffering as a premise will not fall apart when it is encountered, and Tedeschi et al. (2018) note that inherent to Christianity is the idea that Jesus's suffering held the power to transform pain into something greater for human beings. Such a meaning making framework facilitates a tolerance and understanding for suffering, and in the lives of these migrants seemed to allow for an attribution that was not simply meaningless but perhaps even of spiritual or religious significance.

Similarly, in terms of attribution, Naicker et al.'s (2021) study on South African youth found that chronic unemployment in the household had a *protective* effect, reducing somatisation and anxiety. They theorised that the increased resilience, despite the poverty and hardship that characterises so many South African households, may have been due to the 'normalisation' of this adversity in the community, thereby mitigating its impact on mental health; while still providing a context of challenge with adults that modelled resilience. A similar process may have been behind the resilience of these participants, whereby their difficulties were able to be externalised, and therefore were not *introjected* as failures of the self. Whereas this introjection of colonial values, that is the denigration of blackness and everything associated with it, is explicated by Fanon (1967), it is uncertain whether the same denigration applies to 'cultural racism' in a South African context, or can be applied to non-racialised introjection.

Strategies of soothing, regulating and calming one's emotions, were most closely aligned to religion. Henson et al. (2021) define spirituality as distinct from religious coping, as an 'an individual's sense of peace, purpose, and connection to others, and beliefs about the meaning of life' (p. 4), whereas religious coping was defined as a set of beliefs and practices associated with a particular tradition. However, all participants relied on prayer, and their religious practices clearly facilitated their spiritual outlook, often facilitated in community. For every participant, this had in some way been modelled by important figures:

Daniel: But my mom was a believer to a point that even when we did not have food, I saw her going on her knees and praying. So she somehow dragged me to the spiritual life. And I've been a prayerful person ever since, ever since. In the midst of everything I would pray. At some point, I felt like God wasn't listening, but I kept praying because that's the only thing I learned from my mom. Pray, pray, pray, pray, pray.

Hanna: It's helpful because you can talk to God, like, like you're talking to a friend, you know, you cry out and you feel, and the more you talk to him, the more you feel connected to him. So I feel like it's helpful when I have my sorrows and all that. I go down and pray and I'm like 'God, you know, I really want to change this'. So I talked to him like I'm talking to a friend. I put my problems on the table. I feel more alive. So, I think it's too helpful. For me.

Biblical texts and sermons were an additional source of comfort, extending into meditative and contemplative practice at times. It was clear that participants were able to find meaning in biblical texts.

Edith: We find a comfort in the word of God that reassures us that you know things are gonna get better.

Faye: So I'd take a version of Bible... I usually meditate on that. I read it, I take notes, I write OK.... OK. So God, God is showing me something.

Becca: Sermons too, you know, in the sermon. You find a way to relate, you find a way to find strength, you know to continue...

Beyond the soothing effects that prayer seemed to elicit, the speaking with and reaching out to God, crossed over into a direct form of self-soothing too. It seemed that through learning to speak to God, participants had also learned to speak with themselves, and to calm themselves. I considered Hanna's description above of how speaking to God came to feel like she was speaking with a friend, as well the way that Edith and Faye's descriptions of prayer commingled with soothing self-talk:

Edith: It's something, it's something you tell yourself. You tell yourself that everything will be fine. And you say it every single day, when you wake up in the morning, before you go to bed, you tell yourself, I'll be fine, and everything will be alright. You tell yourself, because you need to. My mom, my pastor, always remind me, you have to let your inner inside be your spirit, to be the one telling your flesh what to do. If you let your flesh control your spirit and your soul, you're not going to make it in life. So you must let your soul and your spirit be the one to tell you what to do. Tell yourself everyday: 'I'll be fine'. I'm going to make it through this situation. you will make it.

Faye: I do it mostly at home because it's very sacred to me, you know. And if let's say sometimes it did get really hectic, you know, I'll go to the bathroom, talk to myself, remember, like, 'calm down'. You know, I just, I say a really short prayer, you know? Like, 'you know people always be like this'. Then I'll calm down, you know, make sure that when I go out there again I have my composure.

Here it was apparent again, that the women participants described these soothing prayer practices with more frequency than the men. In my interactions with participants, perhaps the men were more reticent to share 'softer' aspects of themselves with an unfamiliar man (Robb, 2004). However, as some of the participants (like Daniel) were forthcoming about their struggles, and vulnerabilities, it did seem that it was perhaps just not as utilised by them.

At times religious orientated trust and hope extended to an almost metaphysical protective belief. It seemed like one way to deal with the situation and difficulties was to have faith that one was impervious to them.

Caleb: For us, we always used to pray. We always pray for protection. You always pray for angels to be with us wherever we go. We've never had any situations. Because we know we are protected by God, we're protected. You know? So, yeah, they're also one thing that always kept us going was the prayer and the religion and God. So yeah.

This also moved past the territory of acceptance, into *resignation*. With little recourse to justice or change, participants at times evinced a kind of fatigue with the system, putting little stock in change, and instead holding on only to some sort of distant and disconnected hope that seemed a last recourse, where there was nothing else to be done in any case.

Becca: I mean, when I got a little older. Yeah, like during xenophobic times, it became something you would think about more... A lot of people, not just myself. I believe a lot of people, especially our parents were worried. But, who you gonna go to at that point? You know, you, you go to the police, they will hear you. But not gonna do much. You know? So it was kind of like that. Like you just pray. You just hope for things to get better.

I felt in this kind of prayer and 'hope' an exasperation. A sense that all one could do was just grit one's teeth and bear it, to hope and pray, or as Aaron termed it: 'to enjoy it'. This seemed to extend to the little that participants could change, in otherwise unchangeable circumstances: their attitude towards the unchangeable. This reminded me of Frankl's (1946) theorisation, refined in the unchanging terrors of the concentration camp, of a person's ability to find meaning in the most dire of circumstances, and for this to produce drive and purpose. When circumstances remain unyielding one has at least some capacity to alter one's relationship to these experiences.. I heard both resigned acceptance and stoic dignity in Aaron's description:

Aaron: Sometimes you go home with broken shoes and we haven't eaten for a few days so it's not like you don't eat for day or two you know, you don't eat for long. You don't even know when you will eat again.

Researcher: How did you get through those kinds of periods? When you were hungry or other things were going on?

Aaron: It's a tough one. Yeah, because remember there were no options. Because remember, if you don't have an option, and we didn't have an option, I mean, we came to South Africa for the first time we didn't have that many people here, you just have to enjoy it. ... just have to enjoy and hope.

Aaron: I think prayer was a part because we pray and hope that things will get better and there's just a matter of our surviving to get to that.. what's the other option? What you gonna do? And there really aren't much options. It's not like you can go home because there's not, there's no one at home... There's nothing at home. So, you just

have to, you know, put the strong face out and just go through with it and hope, pray, for better days. Not hope for.. pray for better days, yeah.

Of all the difficulties participants faced, xenophobia was perhaps the most difficult to make sense of and a fatigued resignation to the injustice of it was apparent. After many a long exodus across the continent, having escaped brutal regimes, violence, and extreme poverty: to arrive in a country, and be unwelcome and resented, must have been hard to reconcile. This reminded me of the biblical exodus story where a series of trials and suffering culminates in an arrival to a land of ‘milk and honey’, yet, for participants this was not such a sweet arrival to a ‘promised land’. Instead they continued to grapple with multiple forms of *discrimination* from people, to policies, and implementations.

Researcher: What did you do with those feelings? Did you have a way of coping with those feelings when they came out?

Becca: I don't know. Like I said, majority of the time you it was almost like a norm. The way we were made to live, I was like... that fear becomes a normal thing... There was nothing that that could be done, so you learn to live in it.

Caleb: When, it's regarding xenophobia or anything you just run with it. Because first of all, you're not home. You know you're not home. So you live here. You are a visitor here. It's not your home, so whatever happens, you just have to roll with it.

Daniel, who had relied especially on his social skills and language abilities to integrate into communities, still exemplified a complicated situation with receiving help from South Africans. Even as he was ‘protected’ by them, they were still undeniably the source of danger.

Daniel: ...So I became like their favourite. I remember also in 2008 there was xenophobia, and I was actually protected by the citizens...

Angu (2023) notes that African migrants have been elevated to the status of ‘special blacks’ within racially divided South Africa, and much like Fanon (1967) proposes this hierarchy of whiteness, he theorises that they are compelled to maintain their status through identification with and valuation of whiteness. While this was explored earlier, a parallel process seemed to be indicated by Daniel in his accounts of being a ‘favourite’ among the local black South African community.

Daniel’s affinity for South Africans was entwined with a fear and mistrust of fellow Burundians, whom he described as possibly hostile and dangerous depending on tribal distinctions. I

wondered whether his integration into South African society might be partly fuelled by an alienation from his own cultural background:

Daniel: They're killing Tutsis. So with everyone, I won't say just Burundi, I was not safe because if we not the same tribe, you're going to kill me. And they also felt the same way so I avoided them. But because I could speak Swahili, I was able to meet Tanzanians, Congolese and any other person who could speak the language.

While Daniel 'integrated' he described himself as keeping apart from migrants, and not only those from Burundi. He had very positive things to say of South Africans, and of how South Africa was his home. Daniel had arrived on his own as a young child, learned local African languages, and was able to 'pass' as a South African. Yet, this is a precarious position.

Daniel: I have no issues with xenophobia. I have no issues even with this 'Operation Dudula' that is trending at this moment of migrants being caught and they should be deported. I don't feel affected in any way.

Daniel evinced a kind of *disidentification* with other migrants, and his words reminded me of Freire (1970) description of the harshness of co-opted 'middle-men' who adopt an attitude of 'adhesion' to the oppressor: not because Daniel was harsh to others, he had made his life about caring for others as a social worker, and supporting his family after all. He was also intimately experienced with traumas and difficulty, and in his own descriptions, xenophobia had impacted him (from having to hide during riot periods, to job losses due to visa difficulties). There was an insistence in his statement above that seemed to foreclose a too close inspection, to create a distance between himself and the 'othered'. Picas (2022) cites Derks et al. (2011) to argue that black people may project narratives that they perceive to be expected for their context *in order to preserve and protect their privileged positions* where there is only space for a few exceptions, and I wondered if Daniel's disavowal and distancing, was an overcompensation, a way to prove fealty and legitimacy in the midst of an otherwise hostile environment.

Theme 4: We Bring What We've Learned

Dieu s'appuie sur toi-même pour t'aider

God leans on you to help you

A French Burundian Proverb.

This area was chosen to represent the complex nature and interplay of the effects that trauma seemed to produce among participants, often this was not explicitly stated, but inferred from the latent content, including *how* participants related these effects. While adversity can appropriately challenge, and its 'effects' as responses are contained in resiliencies, trauma connotes overwhelm, and is associated with PTSD symptomology. Here this is organised into the general categories of hypervigilance, persistent avoidance, and re-experiencing. However, adversity and trauma are not simple disentangle either, as this is subjective and adversities can compound over time. Rather than clearly divided costs and benefits, effects appeared to be irrevocably entwined: suffering relieved brought gratitude; emotional overwhelm enabled sensitivity to others; and intrusive memories might connect to a later concern and interest in healing and caring for the self and others. Yet, even as growth was expressed, it was not always clear whether this was a palliative coping strategy, or whether a true positive effect.

When the Past Invades the Present

Hypervigilance

I could not help but notice a sustained and ongoing fear and mistrust among these migrant participants. This is unsurprising, considering Straker's (2013) as well as Eagle and Kaminar's (2013) reflections as to the pragmatic and understandable necessity for such reactions in environments that continue to hold potential trauma and danger. In contexts of xenophobia, where violence, and potential danger lurk, continued vigilance is sensible. Hermann (1992) places an important scrutiny on the attribution of these effects, such as hypervigilance, to some internal pathological or personality aspect. Instead, she carefully traces the environmental influences, and in so doing, much like Straker's (1982) proposal of CTS, uses cPTSD, to shift this pathologisation from individual to environment.

Xenophobia is ongoing in South Africa, it re-emerges regularly into periods of outright violence, and remains ever present in communities, spaces, and systems. It is very difficult to disentangle whether such responses are pathological or adaptive, and it was exactly this quagmire that had pulled me towards this topic in the first place. I wanted (and still want) to understand these distinctions between the so-called 'pathological' and 'healthy'. I wondered especially what it means to speak of 'symptoms' when they once held such important and adaptive functions to external circumstances and contexts.

Becca: I would say the fear will always be there. Do not dwell on the fear, but I'm not going to lie. It's not going to be over.

Caleb and Hanna spoke of both fear, and continued alienation:

Caleb: You're not these people and if you don't know what you doing or something then you get sent back. You can get deported. If you do something, you just don't, they're just so... you know our heads was like we had to study, and just be good children and just be good people around others. Behave.

Hannah: God has given us an opportunity to at least, try something better for ourselves... just avoid that and at least stay focused on their life. They must remember that they are not South Africans. They are not South Africans, it doesn't matter what is brought them here. I don't know the reason, but they must know that they have to create something for themselves. They have to act differently. They have to show that they are not South Africans. They don't belong here. This is not their home and they should at least try to sharpen their lives and make it better for their future kids or future families. That's what I can only tell them. That's all. Nothing else.

Even in apparent drastic changes of context, such as Becca's move to America, it was doubtful whether her continued fear was not justified, and whether it didn't continue to be adaptive:

Becca: One point whenever something's gonna happen to you, just expect it. It may not be today. May not be tomorrow. It'll be one day. And so you just take that fear, push it under. Under the carpet or put it behind you and just...

Becca: ...in America, it's that feeling of fear, I would say it's almost the same as, you know, a foreigner in in South Africa because you don't know when you're gonna get attacked. You don't know when you're gonna get killed. I feel like every time I watched the news like a black man was gunned down. A black man was stabbed. A black man was wrongfully arrested, you know?

An argument can be made that once a context changes, a formerly adaptive response that continues without sensitivity to this change in context (Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2020), thereby producing distress and impairment should be considered pathological. In other words, it is the

inflexibility of the strategy, when it is no longer working, that deems it pathological. But what of contexts where changes may come and go, or where prior experience has demonstrated that *apparently* safe contexts may shift irrevocably? Surely, remaining prepared, vigilant, careful, and avoidant are all highly adaptive and sensible. Yet, they simultaneously bring distress, limitation, and decreases in connection and experience. We thus encounter, even on a conceptual level, an irrevocable inseparability of these reactions that both contribute to and corrode health.

Daniel: So I had fear of soldiers and police because in Burundi you see that uniform that the police used in South Africa. That's the uniform which the rebels were using and those are the people who were killing us. So only therapy helped me to realize that I'm in a different context and this uniform is for peacemakers. But in my country it was the uniform for serial killers.

However, a pathological wound in converse, is always in some disjuncture to the context, it is inappropriate to the present. Freud's repetition compulsion (1914), the past being brought into the present — relived, re-experienced, projected — are the hallmarks of pathology precisely because they are out of place with a change in context. Ungar (2011) reflects:

Long term, one would hope that changes to the environment would help children use other, more socially acceptable, ways of coping. However, such choices will likely depend more on the condition of the environment than individual traits. (p. 8).

Strategies could be helpful in some contexts at certain times (increasing resilience), yet become maladaptive later. This was most strongly associated with the avoidance strategies that participants successfully used at one time. Learned ways of coping however are not a simple adaptive/maladaptive proposition. Brooks (2018) notes that findings in the wider trauma literature have thrown into question this divide, and concludes that the effectiveness of coping strategies varies across time, and does not remain static. Thus, strategies, have variable utility according to time and context; and no person is perfectly adaptive and resilient all the time, 'under all imaginable circumstance, or in perpetuity' (Masten & Powell, 2003).

Persistent Avoidance

Avoidance was a behavioural manifestation of hypervigilance, of fear and mistrust, and related to place, person, and even *content*. In my interviews, I noticed that certain topics seemed to be avoided by participants, and this was fair considering that I was a relative stranger. As a white

South African male, I may have seemed incapable of understanding certain migrant experiences, or perhaps there was just a discomfort in sharing such things, at that time, in that way. Certainly, participants were given the choice whether to speak of their own xenophobic experiences, and difficulties. I was explicit about this from the outset, and emphasised that they did not need to speak on any area or topic, that they did not feel comfortable sharing. The avoidance I noticed however, was not simply a deflection of topic or preference to not speak of an area.

What I noticed instead, was that participants often would willingly bring up some aspect of their experience and their journey, but that some other aspect, less conscious, would enter the space. Participants sometimes sped up, like Daniel and Hannah, who *raced* through aspects of their accounts, and it felt when speaking with them, that it was too painful to stay with the details, to explore them slowly. With others like Becca, I noticed a visible stiffening around certain topics, followed by a more obvious deflection. With Gabriel I felt a sense of annoyance at the mention of xenophobia, at the difficulties he faced, and his sometimes short responses seemed to foreclose some areas of discussion. Of course, there can be many reasons for such things, but these patterns of moving away from painful content was understandable, and mirrored the many accounts and descriptions of outright avoidance. As much as avoidance coping was effective for participants, it has also been found to have a negative relationships with later PTG (Kumar, 2016). The avoidance, while working presents less opportunity for growth through direct confrontation with the difficult experiential content: a necessary precursor to integration.

Edith, a housewife, wanted to work but she described how this area of her life was often constricted by her cautiousness. She explained that she did not want to work too far from home as she felt unsafe travelling, but when she did find a job nearby, she described how she decided to leave it:

Edith: I've been pinned down searching for a job... but when I got a job that was near my home, I will say I left it because... I could not say if the people were going to fight me, if they were going to fight because they were asking 'Why am I working if I'm not one (a South African). And they started attacking the owner of the shop... asking him. So when I remember that thing (the xenophobic incidents from earlier in her life), I did not tell myself that I got the guts to go there... What if they follow me? I remember no, I did not stay, I left then...

Here Edith described how she had given up a job because she had heard someone ‘attacking’ the shop owner, by asking why she was working there instead of a South African. Her use of the word ‘attacking’ for what had been a verbal question (xenophobic and hostile as it may have been) belied her sensitivity to danger. When Edith had first moved to South Africa, during a xenophobic riot, she had witnessed her neighbour pulled from his home and murdered. She described how it had taken her years to get past it, to not being crying every night, or terrified all the time, yet clearly it had left an indelible mark.

The severity of just such an incident strikes me as important to these responses. A true traumatic experience (one where helplessness and terror of annihilation are present) brings about intense responses, ‘symptoms’; further, chronic and repeated traumas compound and complicate these (Herman, 1992). Yet, even as contexts change and the likelihood of danger becomes very small, or even negligible, no matter how small the odds: if only one incident could produce permanent annihilation persistent defence is sensible. The severity of the potential outcome, connotes the response, and brings with it ways of keeping safe physical and psychical: even as these may be experienced as distressing.

Re-experiencing

With Edith and Faye, there were salient moments of emotionality, trembling, and tears in their accounts. Daniel too, was moved to tears, and I felt, in that racing described earlier of himself and Hannah, which I attributed to a manifestation of an avoidance, an intensity of experience that returned. The loss of present focus, the drifting into a kind of malaise, a dissociation, seemed to enter their retellings. At moments, of crucial details, which Daniel had no doubt repeated many times before, an almost confusion came into his retelling — he began to muddle figures and numbers, dates and years.

While Daniel and Hannah both chose to go far more in depth into these aspects than I had enquired, I had the sense that in this runaway aspect to their retellings: that they were suddenly taken up by the story, the feelings and experience arising and the attempt to outrun it. Daniel explicitly referred to the intrusive return of memories in the form of flashbacks.

Daniel: I felt like I wanted to forget about Burundi. I wanted to erase every memory that I have. So I tried so hard to fit in, to integrate into South Africa's hoping it would

help me to create more beautiful memories and shut down everything else that had happened in my home country and also the journey to South Africa. But then, yeah, the mind is quite strong. Those memories do pop out every now and again...

Daniel: And I'm not saying they don't, that those flashback memories don't come. They still come. But now I think I'm equipped enough. I have coping strategies that I've been taught through therapy and I'm able to manage them.

While there was talk of overcoming difficulties, ‘moving on’, and ‘getting past’ earlier adversity and trauma, they simultaneously would refer back to them in a highly emotional or dissociated manner. Pat-Horenczyk and Brom (2007) have suggested that PTSD symptoms may be compartmentalised, so that while negative effects occur they do not interfere with subsequent psychological development. It is possible that the ‘negative’ effects of trauma and adversity experienced by participants, did not limit or impede their growth in other areas. However, disentangling whether so-called ‘positive’ changed and growth is *real* also presents challenges.

Real or Illusionary?

It has been found that PTG does increase precisely due to PTSD: Pat-Horenczyk and Brom (2007) theorise that as PTSD symptoms introduce overwhelm, a corresponding behavioural activation for coping mechanisms is engendered. The more one is suffering, the more one needs to find ways to cope. The connection between these wounding and incapacitating effects on participants thus can be entwined with a necessary growth in surplus of what would have occurred without them

PTG as described by Tadeschi and Colhoun (2018) described growth in terms of five domains: personal strength, closer relationships, greater appreciation for life, new possibilities, and spiritual development. Although I used this framework to inform my consideration of the idea of growth and development, my own coding of excerpts, and subsequent development of themes in this area, did not give me this same neatness of category. Instead several areas were identified among participants: resolve / self-belief, altruism, and gratitude primary among them.

Maercker and Zoellner’s (2004) Janus-face model of PTG, further describes how illusory or ‘perceived’ growth can coexist alongside ‘real’ growth. The first they associate with avoidance and denial, whereas the second they locate as consequence of engagement, and subsequent

integration. These are not straightforward however, as in their model, ‘real’ growth often proceeds following a period of ‘perceived’ growth. It thus acts first as a palliative strategy: it calms, soothes, and makes sense of something incomprehensible. In time, even if this strategy is not effective a real engagement with the pain is theorised to occur, world assumptions may shatter (Tadeschi and Colhoun, 2018), and ‘real’ growth may emerge.

The Real?

All of the participants evinced a strong resolve and determination in some form, and it is difficult to say whether it was this resolve and determination that had allowed them to get through their adversities, or whether they had developed just such resolve and determination as a consequence of having survived these adversities. Aaron describes this resolve in relation to pain and difficulty, situating it as an inevitable part of growth.

Aaron: Stay focused and enjoy the pain because you have to go through the pain to get to the other side.. But I look back and I’m like... oh, that feels like just like a small niggle in life that happened because life has turned around so much and so this pain you feeling now, will feel like nothing but only if you get through it, only if you stay focussed and get through the pain to better places.

Again I heard in Edith, Becca, and Caleb’s accounts the importance of not giving up, of continuing, and of perseverance, precisely because there was no other option. Adversity had engendered resilience, and perhaps it continued to engender subsequent growth.

Edith: You can never give up because giving up is not an option. If we give up only one thing results, hatred and suffering.. Just go through what you need, work, and work harder every day. Try better yourself, and I swear to God, things will get better and you wouldn't even realise it until something happens. Like me at the school thinking back over where I was.

Becca: That resilience that even though you're uncertain of what's going to come but you continue anyway, you continue pushing. You continue living. You continue hustling outside that... no matter what you are going through and how hard it is, no matter how hard this strikes you... you just gotta persevere and you just gotta be resilient. That's it. That was just my motivation.

Caleb: There’s days where you just like you're why am I doing this? God? But then when you think long term, you like your what they can bring what it can. Help you with what? How we can build your life, your future

These participants had faced many challenges — and they had indeed persevered and come through them. Knowledge that one has overcome adversity, facilitates the development of self-belief and character strengths that enhance resilience in the face of subsequent adversity (Calhoun et al., 2010). While participants described their determination, it seemed too that through having overcome and persevered through difficulties that they had developed a strong sense of their own capabilities.

Becca: And my story, even moving to South Africa, was not a pretty fairy tale, movie or story. It was, it was really rough. I'm not gonna lie, being a young child and experiencing all that I did. It was rough. But having gone through that.. And what I was facing is that. You've already been through all this. You can move through or you can get through this.

Becca clearly links how having through something so difficult, had altered her perspective of what she was capable of. Aaron similarly related the following:

Aaron: Now, whatever happens happens, but I know I'm very fortunate because whatever happens now, I will try a million times.... so things don't bother me. So and that's the one thing that like depression stress, they don't bother me.

Altruism was also identified as a strong motivating factor for participants in persevering through their own difficulties. However, it additionally seemed to play a role in sensitising participants to the experiences of such adversities. In a way, it might be said that suffering conscientised participants to the potential suffering of others: as they understood themselves to be located in a broader system, and could identify their own potential roles in terms of contribution (Freire, 1968). In a meta-synthesis of studies that explored the relationships between mother's with ACE's and their subsequent parenting practices, Herbal and Bloom (2020) identified common themes of 'breaking the cycle' and protecting children from the ACE's they themselves had been exposed to. Edith certainly demonstrated how as a mother, she was determined to give her children the childhood that she had not been able to have.

Edith: It's like this, spending time with my children is really the most important thing for me, because I wish I had that time with my parents. So I want to give my children what my parents could not give me. I try to be around my children every day.

Edith: I tell them you must talk if something is inside you, and is giving you sleepless nights, you must tell others there's always someone there. But the main thing of all is love. You must give love to others. And you will get love back because I will say this has helped me to be where I am today.

Edith's valuation of love was firmly rooted in her religious tradition. Positive religious coping (a secure relationship to a higher power, seeking religious support, benevolent religious reappraisal, and religious forgiveness) have all been reliably linked to PTG (Tedeschi et al., 2018), and Kumar (2016) identified religious coping as the most consistent influence on PTG across different cultural and religious groups. Edith, like all of the participants had indeed relied extensively on prayer, and then later she began opening up to others in her community, and became more committed to church. Later, she expanded her care to others too:

Edith: I always go when I have time, I go to orphanage houses to talk to kids. Those kids who don't have parents, I do when I have time, especially around December when some orphanage need people. I always tell the kids to believe in their self first, before anything else... no child chooses to lose his or her parents.

Arguably, 'real' growth entail some change of some kind, beyond just what is professed. Learned efficacy, personal beliefs, and values were found by Lai et al (2014) to be related to personal adjustment following adverse experiences, and their translation to action is important. In Edith's account her *sensitisation* from not having had her parents with her, seemed to connect to a subsequent finding of meaning in helping others, and this appeared to be a 'real' change as it was directly connected to actions that she took in line with her values. For Daniel, he similarly expressed how his own experiences with both adversity and help from others, had led him to want to do the same for those in need. Social workers had assisted him, and so he had chosen to study and work as a social worker.

Daniel: I managed to get some donations from the schools and my journey began. I was linked to social workers, my therapy sessions began and that's when I fell in love with social work because I felt like I also want to be there for others.

Illusory?

Of all the positive adaptations that were seemingly related to adversity, Gratitude stood out as the strongest. It was clearly and understandably tied to the changes in their circumstances. I could understand this in multiple ways: as a comparison to the present in how awful things had once been, as such bringing about relief and gratitude, or as things not having gone as terribly as they could have. I wondered whether this was PTG, or just a natural reaction to having escaped the alternative.

Aaron: So I think.. the first thing I'm very grateful because I know only God could have taken me for me out of that... I teach kids boxing twice a week. And so I see these kids. And I see myself in them, because, like the one guy tried bribing me! He tried to bribe me with a sandwich! I think when you go through these thing, you just remember how bad life was and become very grateful... I remember at one point, a sandwich was everything for me, you know, ten rand was a lot of money for me. I'm just like God thank you, you know? I'm grateful, you don't forget how life had been like on the other side.

Hanna: I can say that. Well, I can, first of all, I would say being here. I know it was not my will, but at the same time, it was an opportunity. It was an opportunity because when I look at my background, I'll see that a lot of people. They haven't finished high school, that I have finished here, so I can say it's God's plan. Maybe he wanted to make me different and make me experience different stuff. I couldn't do it if I was with my grandma, I guess because maybe I was gonna drop out because of financial issues and stuff like that, but I was so blessed that I could finish.

This perspective, of gratitude for things that been hard, and the opportunities that had come that would not have been available otherwise was common for participants. However, while Daniel expressed both of these sentiments, I still felt that there was something more complicated in his account.

Daniel: Just two weeks ago, I was telling my colleague that I'm actually grateful for the civil war that happened. I'm so thankful that it happened because I was a mama's boy, like I was mama's boy. I think my mom up to this time, she still says you still my favourite child in all eight kids that I have, I haven't seen you for 16, 17 years, but in my heart, you still my favourite.

So I feel like if I grew up in her presence, if she raised me, I would have been more dependent on her. I don't think I would have managed to spread my wings and grow and try new things and think out of the box and become what I am today. So I'm actually grateful that all these things happen because I'm actually able to look after my siblings. I'm actually able to look after them. I'm able to look after my niece and my sister so I feel like if I was under her wings and being always under my parents, we could have been suffering up to today together and I wouldn't have managed to think of other ways of surviving, so I'm actually grateful for everything that happened. They made me strong and more resilient than ever.

I hear in Daniel's account, how his adversities and challenged made him stronger, but I also hear in them some sense of managing the pain by closing off to it: the civil war, the separation from his parents. I wonder about how he speeds though his accounts, about his description of flashbacks and overwhelm, and of what 'gratitude' and recognising the positive outcomes exclude from his accounts. There has been criticism of PTG for precisely this, that it may

merely obfuscate otherwise meaningless pain and suffering. Maercker and Zoellner's (2004) account of denial underpinning 'perceived' growth seemed to apply: Daniel's account seemed not to include how it affected, and continued to affect him negatively.

Hannah: God has given us an opportunity to at least, try something better for ourselves... To continue because I couldn't do it if I was with my grandma...

Here Hannah had been talking of how she has been 'lucky' to have finished high school, and no doubt it has been a remarkable achievement considering her background. However, I felt such a pain come through her accounts and descriptions of the grandmother she had been kidnapped from as a child, and could not help but feel that she was making the most meaning that she could from an otherwise terribly sad series of events. Her attributions seemed more in line with assimilation, incorporating her experiences into a 'good' world which is able to be maintained (Brooks, 2018). This is not simply 'real' or 'illusory', when terrible senseless things have happened, making sense, even if only to cope, remains adaptive.

In closing our interview, Hannah shared some thoughts on what it was that she would like to tell migrant children on how to get through difficulties. Her message contained the importance of focus and determination, of having goals and values, but at the same time it evinced a heavy burden of her history:

Hannah: ...stay focused on their life. They must remember that they are not South Africans. They are not South Africans, doesn't matter what it is that brought them here. The reason, I don't know the reason, but they must know that they have to create something for themselves. They have to act differently. They have to show that they are not South Africans. They don't belong here. This is not their home and they should at least try to sharpen their lives and make it better for their future kids or future families. That's what I can only tell them. That's all. Nothing else.

Chapter Review

This chapter introduced the themes in this chapter followed by a fuller discussion of each including its sub-themes and descriptors. Themes 1 and 2, explored the surrounding influences, under two subthemes relating to how adversity and socio-cultural factors engendered responses. This included a discussion and historic placement of xenophobia in the South African context. Theme 3 explored utilised strategies organised according to three sub-themes related to how participants orientated to future and present difficulties, avoiding them when necessary, and

making sense of their experiences. The continued effects were explored in Theme 4, the first subtheme interrogated some of the difficulties with identifying pathology in light of continuing and unpredictable context, including the efficacy of heightened caution and other PTSD like symptoms. The second sub-themes considered difficulties with separating ‘real’ from ‘illusory’ effects. The simultaneity and inseparability of these were considered.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Chapter Overview

This chapter will conclude this thesis by first presenting an overview of the main findings as well as their contributions to the literature. The chapter begins by restating the key aims and objectives of the study, along with a summation of their findings as related to the research questions. The findings are then explored in respect of their potential contribution to theory and application. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, recommendations and directions for future research are outlined, and a final comment is used to conclude the report.

Overview of the Findings

This study focussed on the navigation of childhood adversity by Francophone African migrant youth. In particular, it looked at the strategies employed by these youth as they navigated transitions and challenges in their childhood and adolescence as they were growing up in South Africa, and how these were enabled by context. The surrounding influences that led to these strategies, as well as later effects related to adversity and trauma were considered. Interpretations were informed by Resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth Theories and Models, through a decolonial psychology lens that took stock of local realities, was informed by local research and theory, and considered the role of history and discourse. Reflexivity was applied to my own positions and roles, as well as the influence on the intersubjective nature of interactions with participants, as well as meaning making. A description of these findings are organised below under the headings of each research question, beginning with that which pertained to the surrounds, before looking at the strategies themselves, and finally the effects.

R2: What brought about, facilitated, and engendered participants responses?

The first two themes related to this question of what it was that had facilitated participants responses to adversity. The first theme related to adversity itself, and this was not tautological, adversity and its characteristics necessitated response. The second theme related to all levels of the ecology, and while organised under two sub-themes of the Macrosystem and Microsystem, various levels including the Chronosystem are considered.

Theme 1: If Not Me, Then Who?

The primary finding of this theme was that adversity and the lack of support necessitate some response: and this among participants self-reliance commonly emerged. This spoke further to how social support *reduces* adversity, and thus this important protective factor (or environmental contributor to resilience) is sometimes at odds with apparent agency. This lends credence to the inverted U-shaped curve whereby *a middle-ground of adversity* is theorised to be better than none, as shown by Naicker et al. (2021). This finding thus presents a potential explanation to account for how it is that adversity and supports interact to enhance resilience.

This inseparable connection of resilience to adversity was explored in light of van Breda theorisation (2018) as was agency using Wu and Ou's (2021) model, and *atypicality* as presented by Ungar (2011) was found to be present in some unexpected resiliencies of participants, such as the selling of apparent illicit substances, or in being motivated by aggression and revenge. Turning points, as explored by Leung et al. (2022) were found among participants, as distress reached a point that motivated them to make a change. Altruistic motivations were found to extend to participants families *when those families had a lack of other support*, and masculinity and gender roles potentially mediate this as men reported more financial motivation. The interaction of this in-context of the interviewed, myself as a male, may have influenced the expressed vulnerability among males.

Adversities, as expected, were found to differ among participants. However, it was found that this was subjective, and that mediational roles such as *externalisation* likely play a role. Self-reliant strategies were found to 'fill the gaps', in the places that participants had no other support. Finally, the effects of migration on social networks along with alienation from local communities was theorised to account for the lack of 'flocking' (Ebersöhn, 2019) expressed by participants.

Theme 2: We Become Through Others

The major findings of the second theme related to the critical role of *relationships* and *community practices* in transmitting culture, and modelling for participants how to react to adversity. Various levels of the ecology were found to interact with participants, through

people, and they lay the foundation for the myriad of strategies that participants later made use of. Language was found to be a crucial mediator of community access, and xenophobia was found to mimic racism in various ways, although an interrogation of underlying narrative revealed that attributing xenophobia to black South Africans and narratives of equivalence, may perpetuate division. A decolonial lens explicates that this is not accidental.

In the surrounding Macrosystem, policies (such as the Children's Act, Isseri et al., 2018) were found to extend their influence through institutional and other actors: schools, hospitals, children's homes, and other institutions provide for a variety of roles: teachers, social workers, doctors, therapists, were found to play important roles for migrant children. Leung et al. (2022) located these as offering important support and guidance. Religious and cultural influences extended to other NGO's and similar organisations, and played in out in similar ways: with caretakers, and nuns for instance; and were found to be rooted in the familial and community realms.

Xenophobia was considered in terms of its similarities to Apartheid racism, using a number of local and decolonial theorists and researchers to establish the argument. Findings indicated similar exclusions and fears were experienced by participants, and an interrogation of underlying narrative showed that there are issues of defensive positioning (Straker, 2004), and distancing of white culpability from xenophobia (Steyn & Foster, 2018).

Language was found to be the most important mediator of access to community: both with locals, as well with other migrants. It was found to include and exclude, and a myriad of strategies that are often related to racism proper (the superstructure of white superiority) were found to be mimicked by migrants here and were more explored more in a later theme. Differential effects between languages was found: French included and excluded in more obvious ways with locals, while English was found to facilitate interaction with white South Africans, this was explored in terms of history and hierarchy, and its effects on further alienation from black South Africans was discussed. Local languages were found to be ambivalently treated, with accents and fears of exposure soiling participants experiences. One participant was found to have successfully integrated, but his *disidentification* with other migrants spoke to the surrounding xenophobic milieu.

In terms of the Microsystemic, it has been theorised that as familial supports decreased, the importance of community support increased and this was found to be the case among participants. Family, church, sports, or other social environments were found to inculcate values and learnings, facilitating later adaptive processes. Early familial support was found to provide particularly strong motivational effects, this in line with findings on the importance of early caregivers (Straker, 1982; Leung et al., 2022). The importance of a place of safety, even if internal, was explored in terms of Winnicott (1957) and Herman's (1992) formulations.

Strict parenting practices were expressed by participants as being particularly important protective factors, which again spoke to Ungar's (2011) principles of *cultural relativism* and *atypicality*, where more autocratic and less democratic households seemed to be *more* effective in the South African context that included many dangers. *Representation* and *role-modelling* were found to be particularly important to participants, especially as they moved through adolescence (Erickson, 1968): Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, along with Ray's (2006) emphasis on identification in this process highlighted the importance of successful others to which these children could relate.

R1: How did Francophone African migrant children navigate childhood adversity given xenophobia in South Africa?

A myriad of strategies were made use of by participants, which altered with context. In addressing the research question, the third theme was created which categorised these strategies into three areas: orientating, avoiding, and sense making. Help seeking, potential aspects of flocking, and reliance on others had been found and discussed in earlier themes, as were the reasons for their relative lack of expression by participants: simply those other strategies and support were so effective as to reduce adversity entirely, and resilience instead emerges in the areas where there is no such support.

Theme 3: We Do What We Can

Major findings related to the embedded nature of strategies in context, their connections to earlier influences, as well as suggested later effects. Necessity was once again described as a

major driving force, while strategies employed to deal with xenophobia again mimicked those commonly employed by people of colour in navigating systemic racism.

Participants were found have held tightly to long-term plans, to staying focussed on their goals, and keeping orientated to the future. These were found to be most clearly tied to early parental influences. Agency was positioned in light of these ecological factors, and Wu and Ou's (2021) modified model (in this thesis) was found to be useful in locating these interactions. The uncertainty of one's position as a foreign migrant was expressed as motivating, and careful planning, thinking through difficulties, and readying oneself were found to be connected to modelling and necessity. Solution finding was used in the context of difficulties, and confidence relating to this seemed to be connected to past success: in line with Fontana and Rosenheck (1998), this active coping and enhancement of ability, likely contributes to later self-belief.

In the domain of avoidance, hypervigilance was found amongst participants, and this was similar to that described by Clark et al. (2006) in how black youth become hypervigilant in light of racism, suggesting that xenophobia produced a similar effect. Hypervigilance however is tiring, and a number of strategies that involved 'turning off' and 'waiting out' were used: sleep, suppression, outright avoidance, and even dissociation for the most extreme forms of experience were reported to be utilised. These were associated with survival, though avoidant coping likely inhibits growth (Tadeschi & Calhoun, 2018), though this is explored further in the next theme. Finding ways to escape difficult situations and find respite was extensively utilised and took the form of places, activities, and internal refuge. Physical activity was found to be more prevalent among men, which could indicate gender role differences, differences in environmental availabilities (male sports teams), or constrictions imposed by the environment such as increased dangers for women. These were concerning as exercises and physical movement is an effective and easily accessible resource.

Sense making was strongly tied to religion, and in line with Tolfree (1996) who notes that traditional and religious cultures facilitate meaning making, it was found that participants were able to make sense of their experiences through this. Tadeschi et al. (2018) further note that Christianity in particular included suffering as meaningful, and this may have allowed for an additional protective coherence for participants. The attribution of adversities and traumas were explored in an earlier theme, but here it was found to apply to xenophobia too, suggesting that difficulties could be further externalised, and not introjected as failings of the self. This also

suggested a difference between xenophobia and racism in terms of an introjection of denigrating standards: although *cultural racism* as described by Tafira (2011) others and blames, it's denigration did not seem to extend to one's *blackness*, an important distinction.

Soothing, regulating emotions, and calming were again found to be strongly aligned to religious coping (Hensen et al., 2021 showed same). The importance of prayer extended to biblical texts, sermons, speaking to God, and eventuated in self-talk. This suggested that participants may learn to calm and soothe themselves, through practice in relationship with God. Trust, hope, acceptance, and resignation were also found to be entwined with these religious orientations, although it was apparent that xenophobia was more difficult to make sense of and was often responded to with resignation. When participants could not change their circumstances, they thus did focus on changing their perspectives and attributions of meanings, which supported Frankl's (1946) focus on meaning making in otherwise relentless environments. Finally, parallels were again noticed in adapting to xenophobia: 'passing', code-switching, identity confusion, and *disidentifications* as described by Fanon (1967) and Freire (1968) were found.

R3: How have these childhood experiences and responses affected participants as adults?

The final research question was addressed by the fourth and final theme. The highly contextualised nature of responses, and then their later effects comes to the fore here. Findings support the inapplicability of the adaptive/maladaptive divide, as well as a recognition of the efficacy and sensibility of behaviour in its' inextricable link to context. SERT (Ungar, 2011) principles are found to still apply: *atypicality* and *complexity* especially. The difficulty with disentangling 'real' from 'illusory' effects is also considered, finding that some situations may be less amenable to producing growth.

Theme 4: We Bring What We've Learned

This theme grouped findings by symptomology, before assessing 'real' versus 'perceived' / illusory growth effects. Hypervigilance, persistent avoidance, and re-experiencing were found to continue as later effects, while determination, self-belief, and altruism indicated growth. Interpretation of expressed gratitude indicated more palliative like coping strategies.

Hypervigilance, sustained fear, and persistent avoidance, were found to occur among participants. However, interpretation in light of theory (Straker, 2013; Kaminar & Eagle, 2010; Herman 1992; Straker, 1982) casts into serious doubt whether we can attribute pathology onto the individual when environments continue to be xenophobic. Even as participants relocated, racism in new contexts justified continued vigilance. Findings conclude that as xenophobia and racism are ongoing, with possibility of deadly effect, that fear and vigilance are highly adaptive.

Persistent avoidance was noted in how participants responded to content: racing through it, changing the subject, stiffening, or foreclosing. These avoidant behaviours are theorised to reduce PTG Tadeschi et al. (2018), however this is explored further in light of Brooks (2018) and Maercker and Zoellner's (2004) model which suggests that these strategies while preventing PTG do not foreclose it, and may be interim coping strategies which allow for time to integrate experience, or for distress to reach a turning point as explored by Leung et al. (2022) in the first theme. Re-experiencing was found in participant reports, but also in the way that they spoke, their body language, and affect in the interpersonal space: dissociation, malaise, and confusion were evidenced.

In consideration of 'real' versus 'illusory' effects, the five domains suggested by Tadeschi and Calhoun (2018) were considered, but findings did not cohere with these categories. Resolve, determination, self-belief, as well as sensitisation and possible *conscientisation* was found and connected to altruistic behaviour. This cohered with findings by Hegel and Bloom (2020) of 'breaking the cycle', and Calhoun et al. (2010) on self-belief through successful adaption. Again, the connection to religious coping (Kumar, 2016) on efficacy, beliefs, and values was confirmed. Finally, expressed gratitude was found to exhibit elements of denial of experience, likely indicative of 'illusory' growth as described by Maercker and Zoellner (2004). These expressions however, again indicated the utility of strategy employed: making sense of the senseless was adaptive.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

Key strengths of this study were related to its methodology. Qualitative interviews allowed in-depth exploration guided by the conversation, and areas of interest that would have been constrained by closed questions. RTA allowed for exploration of dynamics that were unsaid, and that related to myself and interviewers: although these were not always apparent during the interview, subsequent reflection, especially in light of video recordings, allowed for a consideration of how gender and race, or masculinities and whiteness, may have intersected into the interviews, influencing both myself and participants. Thus, although *unexamined* whiteness has its drawbacks and dangers (as explored in the introduction), in this study it allowed for the emergence and later noticing of narratives and discourse that might not have come to the fore in another context. The utilisation of multiple theoretical frameworks, allowed for a rich reading, especially as these applied on multiple levels, and were compatible with one another. The focus on the surrounding ecology is considered another strength that contributes to local, and Southern African situated knowledge.

Limitations

The research does also have limitations: English was not the first language of participants, and undoubtedly much nuance has been lost due to this. The nature of the research and small sample size limits generalisability, even as that has not been an explicit goal, it cannot be taken for granted that findings here necessarily speak to all other migrants experiences. However, establishing the validity of the general patterns and themes has been explored in the methodology section.

In the course of my readings and interpretations, I was challenged to consider that I have worked with a more ‘traditional’ idea of resilience as navigating, adapting, accommodating etc to adversity. This type of resilience in unjust systems does little to change the injustice (Hart et al., 2016). On reflection, the major weakness of this study is that the research process itself did little to advance social justice, or to directly challenge these systemic issues. It is hoped that findings can work towards this end, and this is explored in the recommendations ahead.

Recommendations

The findings of this study, suggest the following, in line with Wu and Ou (2021) recognition of an overemphasis with interventions targeting microsystems:

1. It is important to inform and educate South Africans and migrants of the history of xenophobia in South Africa, and it's role in divisionary practice. South Africans and others need to become aware of how these narratives maintain injustice, in order to resist them.
2. The influence of the surrounding ecology on resilience and growth is clear. Policy has clear implications, acting through multiple avenues, and trickles down through institutions, economics, and communities. It needs to be considered and recognised for the systemic injustice it engenders when used inappropriately.
3. Language and contact facilitate access to community. Local languages include and exclude. Programs that teach local languages and offer community involvement for migrants could increase their resilience/ecological support, but also as migrants themselves will add to communities (see RRR, 'flocking').

In addition to these macrosystemic interventions, in line with Hart et al. (2016), future resilience research should take cognisance of a social justice imperative: how can the mediating processes within resilience begin to include *challenging the adversities themselves*, rather than only accommodating to them?

There is a need for conceptual clarity around the concepts of resilience and growth, in a way that the two are able to connect. A modified model of Wu and Ou's (2021) Multisystemic Resilience Framework for Migrant Youth was used in conceptualising the interactions of multiple levels of the ecology, with agency, in terms of processes and outcomes. It may be useful for other researchers to modify further.

Finally, both Resilience and PTG continue to speak in terms of the individual. There is as yet no conception of resilience and growth *of the ecology*. By only measuring personal changes, we may be keeping our lens on the wrong unit of analysis. This may be an interesting avenue for further exploration.

Final Comment

This study was conducted for the explicit purpose that such an exploration may serve to identify avenues that facilitate successful navigation of childhood adversities in the South African context. Including, the contextual influences and resources that contributed to the development of these strategies, as well as eventual outcomes.

While the findings have been in line with these original aims, it is hoped that this report may serve to expand our understandings of injustice and how it is maintained, and further the sometimes complex task of disentangling its enactments.

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Appendices

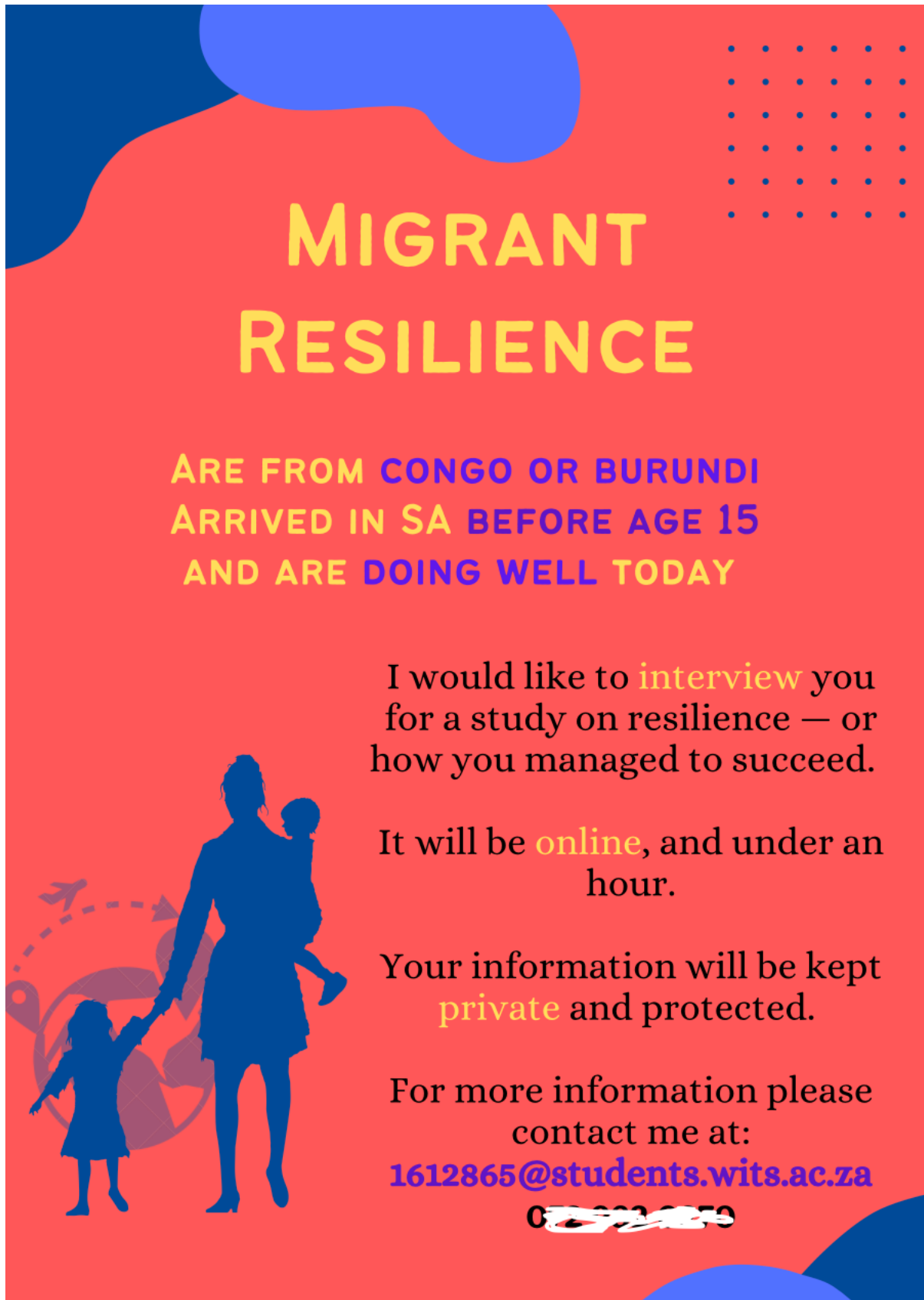
Appendix A – Interview Schedule

Sean Friedman
Preliminary Interview questions

Navigating Childhood Adversity: An Exploration of Psychological Strategies that Enhance Resilience among Congolese & Burundian Migrant Youth

Aims	Research Questions	Interview Questions
Setting the frame of the interview; gathering background and contextual information; setting the scene for further questions.	Demographics; general background information; specifying the adversity faced.	Age, gender, country of origin, arrival in South Africa, family in South Africa, religion, involvement in church or other organisations growing up? Difficulties faced: Xenophobia, alienation, language, economic, family? Supports: friends, family, religion, community, social systems, school, sports, other?
Study Aims: Explore the psychological strategies and skills that were helpful in navigating adversity among Congolese and Burundian migrant youth	How did children of migrants and refugees who had faced considerably adversity navigate this adversity in ways that contributed to their eventual success and growth?	Thinking back to a difficult time — how did you get through it? How do you make sense of how you got to where you are today?
With Sub-aims: Explore how they responded to adversity	How did participants respond to and make sense of adverse experiences — as well as the resulting difficulties (including symptoms like difficult thoughts and feelings)?	How did you think at such times? What did you do with difficult feelings or thoughts? When things were hard, what would you try? What worked for you?
Explore how they may have learned to respond successfully	Who or what were the influences that contributed to learning these different responses?	Did you have any influences that were helpful for you? Did you have any role models? What were they like?
Consider alternative influences and resources related to resilience and PTG		
Consider responses and strategies that may have been unhelpful	What worked for participants, what didn't work, what did they learn and how was it helpful?	Looking back, what skills do you think you used? Did you have things that you learned that were helpful? What did you try that didn't work?
Consider these response in context of nested systems	How were these responses embedded in particular contexts or situations, what supported or diminished them?	Were there places where what you did worked better? Where were they? Did you use different strategies in school, compared to at home, or in your community? What were the differences? What effect do you think SA / School / Church / Community had on you?

Appendix B – Recruitment Poster



**MIGRANT
RESILIENCE**

**ARE FROM CONGO OR BURUNDI
ARRIVED IN SA BEFORE AGE 15
AND ARE DOING WELL TODAY**

I would like to **interview** you
for a study on resilience — or
how you managed to succeed.

It will be **online**, and under an
hour.

Your information will be kept
private and protected.

For more information please
contact me at:
1612865@students.wits.ac.za
072 222 2070

Appendix C – Information & Consent Forms

Consent Form

Title of project: *Navigating Childhood Adversity: An Exploration of Psychological Strategies that Enhance Resilience among Congolese & Burundian Migrant Youth*

Name of researcher: Sean Friedman

I,, agree to participate in this research project. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about. I understand that I may be asked about difficult topics — and that I am free to not answer questions, or end the interview at any point.	YES	NO
I understand that I can choose to volunteer in this study, and I can also choose not to volunteer if I don't want to without negative consequences.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview can be recorded — with video or audio (and only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to these).	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain confidential (my name and identifying details will not be used in the report).	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview, that the interview data will remain available, and a report will be published to the Wits library. This will not include my name or other identifying details.	YES	NO

..... (signature)

..... (name of participant)

..... (date)

..... (signature)

..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

..... (date)

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Sean Friedman. I am a Masters student in Community-based Counseling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Prof. Langa. I am conducting a research study about the strategies that migrant and refugee youth use to enhance resilience — or in other words to find out more about what they did that helped them get through difficult times. The study title is *Navigating Childhood Adversity: An Exploration of Psychological Strategies that Enhance Resilience and Post-traumatic Growth among Congolese & Burundian Migrant Youth*.

I am inviting you to take part in an individual interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 1 hour. The interview will take place at the psychology building at the Wits, or online, at a time and day that will be convenient for you.

With your permission, I would like to audio or video record the interview. This data will be securely stored and password protected for period that it will take to transcribe, and will be deleted once approved by my supervisor. Typically this will take up to 6 months to finalise. Only the researcher and my supervisor will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including your background and childhood experiences. The interview and data from it will be kept confidential. I will take care to remove and obscure any identifying information that will be made available — for example I will change your name and details from your history. I may use direct quotes of what you have said, but again I will make sure to take out any details that would identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You may stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research

study. Your travel costs to attend the interview will be reimbursed to a maximum of R100.

Some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and we can continue another time if you feel comfortable to — although you do not have

to continue if you do not want to. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at the organisations with contact details listed below.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you — please allow at least six months after the interview, after which you can contact me via email, or phone.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee, telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, or email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Sean Friedman 1612865@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:
Prof. Langa malose.langa@wits.ac.za

Counseling Services that are Available:

(I can assist with organising a counsellor and appointment if needed)

Lifeline Johannesburg (immediate telephonic counselling, or in person sessions) 0861 322 322
011 728 1347

The Counseling Hub (online counselling sessions) 021 462 3902 (landline)
067 235 0019 (whatsapp)

Centre for Violence and Reconciliation 011 403 5650
info@csvr.org.za

Appendix D – Examples of Coding Process

The screenshot displays a text editor window titled "Navigating Childhood Adversity". The editor shows a transcript of a conversation with several lines of text. The text is annotated with various codes in the background. The sidebar on the right, titled "Aaron", lists the following codes: "Church, strict parent", "Long term football", "Mom worked hard, nurse", "Role model, and example what not to do", "Role-models", "PTG gratitude", "Resilience", "Enjoy, stay focussed,", "Resilience / ptg -- have to go through pain", "Hard work", "Have a dream", and "PTG Look back, grateful".

283 All right.

284 Sean Friedman - 3:39 PM:

285 usually when I'm ending of these I like to ask um, What advice you would give these kids who are in those situations. Who are struggling to get through difficulties.

286 Aaron K_____ - 3:39 PM:

287 the top one for me to say,

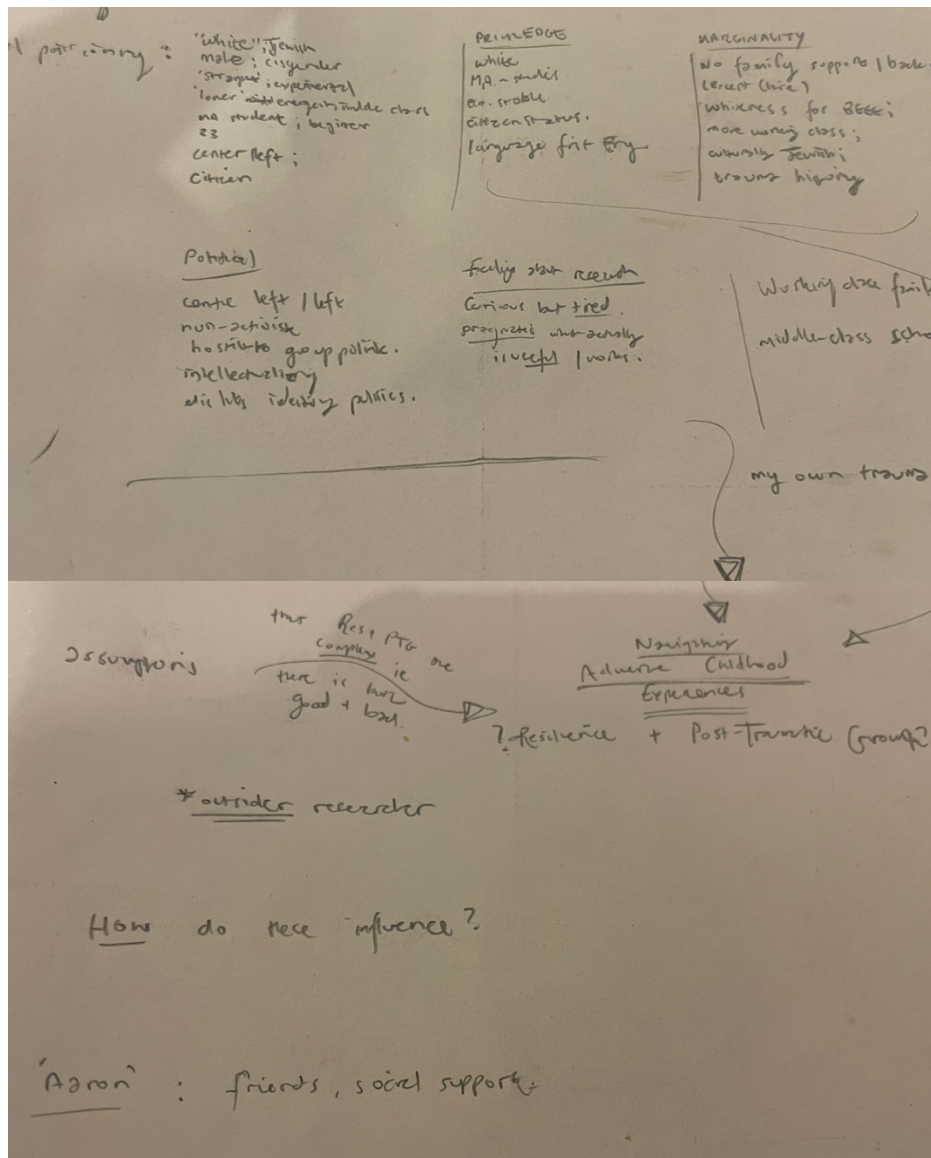
288 But and the greatest advice I can give it is. Just enjoy it. Stay focused and enjoy the pain because you have to go through the pain to get to the other side. And I think, sometimes they look for an easy way out. There's no easy way out whatever you're going through now stay focused stay working on, enjoy the pain. Go through that pain... I cannot tell you to give up because giving up is not an option. If we give up only one thing, hatred and suffering.. Just go through what you think, work work harder every day. Try better yourself and I swear to God, things will get better and you wouldn't even realize it getting better until something happens like me at the school thinking back over, where I was. And just just keep working on never lose sight of that dream. Because sometimes what happens is that dream is too big.. but touch you that dream in your mind? no matter what happens, physically in your mind that dream never leaves your mind ever. Never leave your mind ever. And just walk towards it, work work and enjoy the pain. It's gonna get better.

289 Sean Friedman - 3:41 PM:

290 No, I really like that you say that

150% 8 075 words No Label No Status

Appendix E – Reflexivity Journal Excerpts

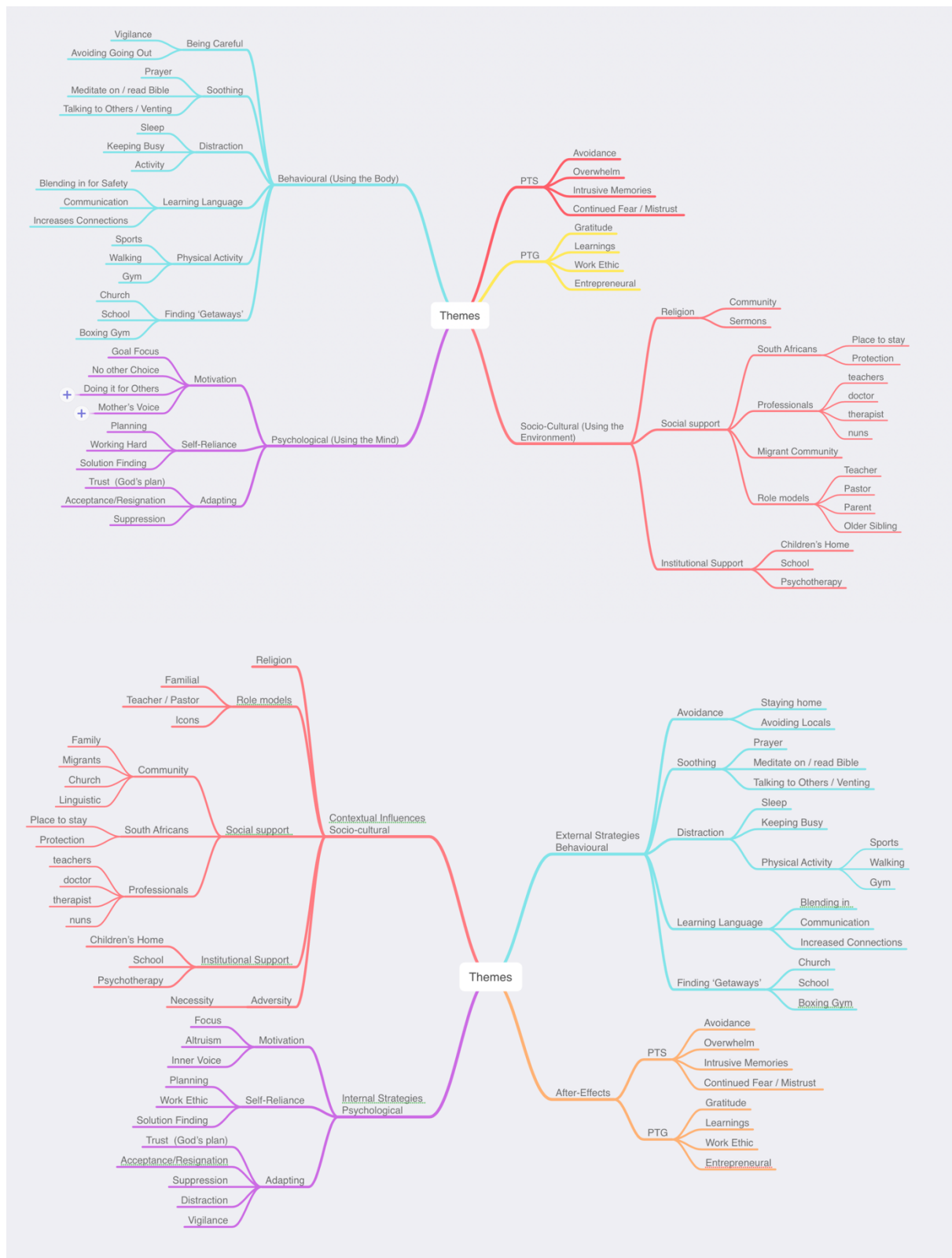


Aaron was very polite and gracious in our messages, and it was easy to arrange an interview with him. When we met online, I was surprised at his accent — it was very much a Johannesburg South accent, one I would have associated more with working class white South Africans. He had a way of talking — interspersed with 'bru', 'bro', 'champ', 'understand?' — that was quite masculine and informal. He was younger than me, but in some ways, he reminded me of my father's masculinity — a biker who mostly lived in the era of 70's masculinities. There was something of the 'outlaw' in Aaron: when he talked about how school had mostly been used as an opportunity to sell 'things', occasionally 'bad things', how he had started boxing because he had been 'jumped', or even in his friendly suggestive joke at the end of our interview — 'I hope you get top marks. If you don't, we can go and jump the professor'. I liked him and felt myself during the interview to lean a little into the masculine in the air between us. I felt a good sense of rapport from his side too.

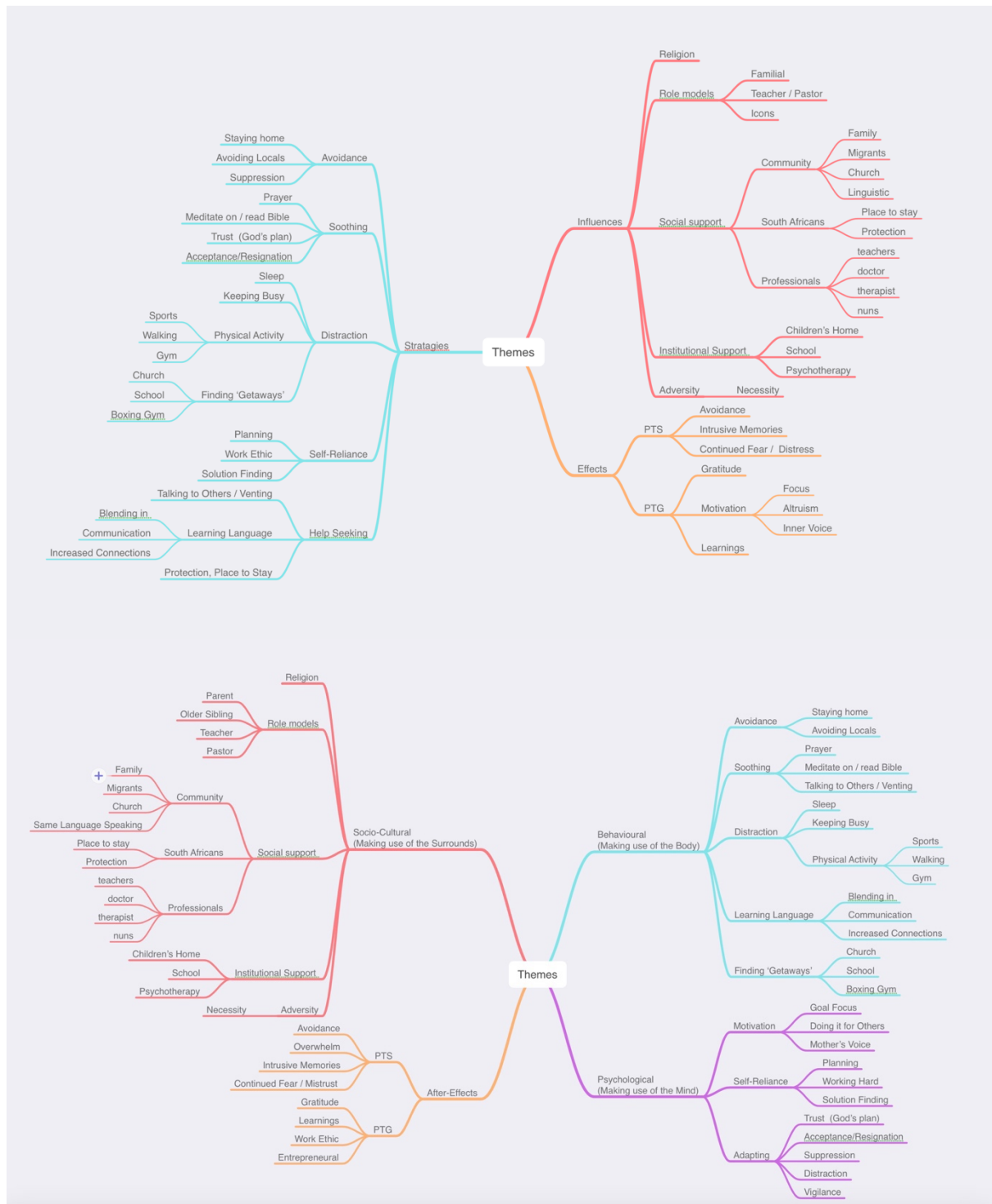
Appendix F – Initial Code Map



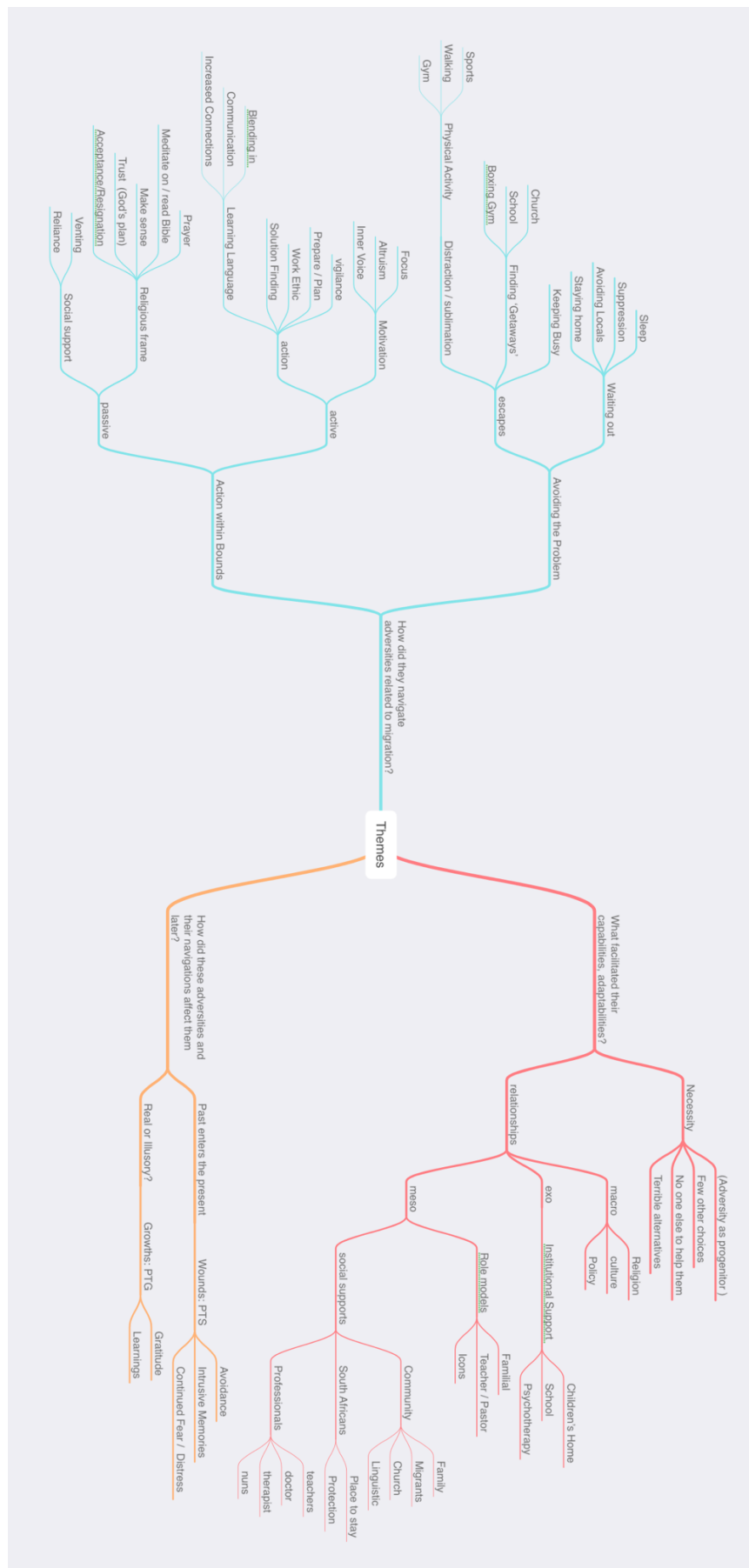
Appendix G – Thematic Maps in Progress



Navigating Childhood Adversity



Appendix H – Final Thematic Map



Navigating Childhood Adversity

Appendix I – Supervisor-Supervisee Agreement

Statement of principles for postgraduate supervision

In a context of academic freedom and within a framework of individual autonomy and the pursuit of knowledge, this statement is written in the belief that there is a reciprocal relationship and mutual accountability between supervisor and student

THE SUPERVISOR AND THE STUDENT: - Will establish agreed roles and clear processes to be maintained by both parties. In the case of joint supervision, the roles and responsibilities of each supervisor and the student need to be clarified. - Will meet regularly and as frequently as is reasonable to ensure steady progress towards the completion of the proposal, research report, dissertation or thesis. This time varies but the normal minimum requirement for face-to-face contact spread across each year of registration is: 10 contact hours for an Honours project, 15 contact hours for a Masters by coursework and research report and 24 contact hours for a Masters by dissertation and a PhD. - Will keep appointments, be punctual and respond timeously to messages. - Will keep one another informed of any planned vacations or absences as well as changes in his or her personal circumstances that might impact on the work schedule. Unplanned absences or delays should be discussed as soon as possible and arrangements should be made, to catch up lost time. - Will ensure that research on animal or human subjects is conducted with prior approval and according to the procedures and the requirements of the relevant Ethics committee. - Will both complete Progress Reports on the research project as required/requested by the relevant Faculty Graduate Studies Committee.		
THE SUPERVISOR: - Undertakes to provide guidance for the student's research project in relation to the design and scope of the project, the relevant literature and information sources, research methods and techniques and methods of data analysis. - Will provide guidance at the commensurate NQF level requirements for autonomy and accountability that the student is expected to demonstrate. - Has a responsibility to be reasonably accessible to the students. - Will be prepared for meetings with the student. This includes being up-to-date on the latest work in his/her area of expertise. - Will expect written work as jointly agreed, and will return that work with constructive criticism within a timeframe (a suggestion of 2-4 weeks) jointly agreed at the outset of the research. - Will provide advice that can help the student to improve his/her writing. This may include referrals for language training and academic writing. The supervisor will provide guidance on technical aspects of writing such as referencing as well as on discipline specific requirements. Detailed correction of drafts and instruction in aspects of language and style are not the responsibility of the supervisor. - Will guide the student in the production of a research report, dissertation or thesis. Provision should be allowed for adequate, mutually respectful, discussion around recommendations made. - Will assist with the construction of a written time schedule, which outlines the expected completion dates of successive stages of the work. - Will encourage the student to present work at postgraduate/ staff seminars/national/international conferences as appropriate. - Will assist with the publication of research articles as appropriate. - Will discuss the ownership of research conducted by the student in accordance with the University rules on intellectual property, copyright, guidelines on authorship/co-authorship, and policy on research integrity. - Will ensure that the student is aware of the University's Plagiarism Policy, knows what plagiarism is, and what the consequences are for academic dishonesty and violation of research integrity and intellectual property. - Will ensure that the student is made aware in writing of the inadequacy of progress and/or of any work where the standard is below par. Acceptability will be according to criteria previously supplied to the student. - Has a duty to refuse to allow the submission of sub-standard work for examination, regardless of the circumstances. If the student chooses to submit without the consent of the supervisor, then this should be clearly recorded and the appropriate procedures followed.	THE STUDENT: - Takes full responsibility for the research and its successful completion; including managing the process under the guidance of supervisor (s). - Will attend such courses and lectures that are compulsory for the degree, and undertakes to catch up fully on any work, lectures and/or assignments, that are missed. - Undertakes to work independently under the guidance of the supervisor(s). This includes reading widely and critically to ensure that the seminal and current literature pertinent to his/her chosen topic has been identified, consulted and critiqued. - Undertakes to work in accordance with the academic standards expected by the University for the commensurate NQF level of qualification. - Is obliged to make appointments to consult the supervisor(s) and arrange meeting times convenient to both parties well in advance. - Should submit written work for discussion with the supervisor(s) well in advance of a scheduled meeting. The kind and frequency of written work should be agreed with the supervisor(s) at the outset of the research. - Written work that is submitted to the supervisor, including final submissions to examiners, should be relatively free from basic spelling mistakes, incorrect punctuation and grammatical errors. Responsibility for the accuracy of language, the overall structure and coherence of the final research report, dissertation or thesis rests with the student. - Cannot expect the supervisor to be proof-reader and editor of his/her work or to approve work with any of the weaknesses spelt out in 7 above. - Undertakes to heed the advice given by the supervisor(s) and to engage in discussion around suggestions made. Ultimately the student has to take responsibility for the quality, integrity and presentation of the work. - Should strive to maintain a focus on his/her research area and to work diligently within the agreed time schedule. - Take responsibility to comply with all the requirements related to the ethical clearance of his/her research before the research begins. - Agrees to honour agreements about ownership of the research and in accordance with the University's guidelines and rules in relation to co-authorship, copyright and intellectual property. - Will ensure that the work contains no instances of plagiarism, violation of intellectual property and research integrity standards, that all citations are properly referenced, and that the list of references is accurate, complete and consistent. - Agrees to work in accordance with the criteria of acceptability as supplied by the supervisor(s). - Undertakes not to place the supervisor(s) under undue pressure to submit work for examination until the supervisor is satisfied that it has reached an acceptable, examinable* level of quality.	We confirm that we have read and understood this statement and agree to be guided by its principles for as long as we continue to work together. Name of student: <u>Sean Friedman</u> Student Number: <u>1612865</u> Student's signature: <u>[Signature]</u> Name of Supervisor: <u>Malose Langa</u> Supervisor's signature: _____ Name of Co-Supervisor: _____ Co-Supervisor's signature: _____ The broad area of study is: <u>Resilience enhancing strategies among refugee & migrant youth</u> Provisional submission date is: _____ Degree: <u>MA Community-Based Counseling</u> School: <u>Humanities</u> Faculty: <u>Psychology</u> Date: <u>25 March 2022</u> Specific agreements pertaining to: ownership, joint publication, funding, confidentiality and disclosures pertinent to the Certificate of Clearance and ETD Form which the student and/or supervisor are required to sign, must be attached to this agreement as and when appropriate and kept in the Faculty Office. In the event of disagreements between the supervisor(s) and student, the parties should act in accordance with the University Grievance Policy. *Note: Consent by supervisor(s) to submit work for examination does NOT guarantee that the work will pass. The appointed examiners assess and determine whether the work is of a passable standard.

2021/05/01

Appendix J – Ethics Approval



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MACC/22/02

PROJECT TITLE:

Navigating Childhood Adversity: An Exploration of Psychological Strategies that Enhance Resilience among Congolese & Burundian Migrant Youth

INVESTIGATOR

Friedman Sean (1612865)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

13 May 2022

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Low Risk

EXPIRY DATE

31 December 2024

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

23 May 2022

CHAIRPERSON


(Dr Viniitha Jithoo)

Cc: Prof. Malose Langa (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature



Date 16 August 2022

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix K – Turnitin Report

Word Count sans references, excerpts, and miscellaneous entries approx. 34,000 words.

Turn-it-in Report: 12%. 6% of which was the research proposal.

Friedman NCA Final.pdf

ORIGINALITY REPORT

12%	6%	5%	8%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	Submitted to University of Witwatersrand Student Paper	6%	
2	dokumen.pub Internet Source	1%	
3	link.springer.com Internet Source	<1%	
4	Charlotte Henson, Didier Truchot, Amy Canevello. "What promotes post traumatic growth? A systematic review", European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 2021 Publication	<1%	
5	www.tandfonline.com Internet Source	<1%	
6	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%	
7	Doris Y. L. Leung, Athena C. Y. Chan, Grace W. K. Ho. "Resilience of Emerging Adults After Adverse Childhood Experiences: A Qualitative Systematic Review", Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 2020	<1%	