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## Going It Alone: Political Ethics and the Rights of Unaccompanied Migrant Children

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### Recommended Citation

Haker, Hille. Going It Alone: Political Ethics and the Rights of Unaccompanied Migrant Children. *Unaccompanied Migrant Children: Social, Legal, and Ethical Responses to the Plight of Child Migration*, , : 201-226, 2018. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works,

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*Part I*

**GOING IT ALONE: EXPERIENCES  
AND SOCIAL RESPONSES**



## Chapter 1

# Unaccompanied

Javier Zamora

May 8, 2018

I write this after going to the USCIS field office in San Francisco. I'm trying to return to my country to interview for my already approved EB-1 Visa. If I leave the country with my current status, I forfeit it. An Advance Parole permit was what I was asking for. The regional person there could not understand my request and it was not granted.

I was really hoping to obtain my green card on June 4, 2018; almost exactly nineteen years before I first entered this country in June 10, 1999. When the events depicted in *June 10, 1999* happened. I like this title because as you can tell, even nineteen years after, I have to try to jump through immigration's bureaucratic hoops in order to say, "I exist, I matter. Look at all I've done. Aren't I extraordinary?"

The poem, I think, is pretty self-explanatory. The metaphor is the repetition. Again and again I'm reminded of my status. Of my trauma. Of my second-class citizenship or lack of citizenship in this country, or anywhere else. I hope my situation gets resolved in time to obtain my visa.

I hope my humanity is fully recognized soon. Oh so very soon. Rest assured, I'll keep trying.

June 10, 1999<sup>1</sup>

i.

first day inside a plane I sat by the window  
 like when I ride the bus  
 correction when I rode buses  
 below the border I sat by the window attention  
 to dogs under a mango  
 trash under parked cars  
 drunks passed out

I sat by plane window  
 same afternoon I crossed  
 desert the third time  
 was not nervous at white  
 people at terminal all those questions  
 did not cry did not stop  
 looking out the window  
 for Statue of Liberty Golden  
 Gate Disneyland Miami

i.

we were lost and didn't know which star  
 was north what was east west we all  
 dropped out of the van too soon to remember  
 someone said the sun rose east we circled  
 so much we had no maps and the guide we paid  
 twisted his ankle was slowing us down

we couldn't leave him *why*  
 asked the ones who walked ahead  
 whispered they'd heard coyotes fake they're hurt  
 circle and circle so much they make it seem they tried  
 but all they did was steal money

I don't know  
 his ankle *was* swollen he *was* feverish  
 it's true  
 the sun's heat *was* a reptile but I know  
 if we hadn't left him we'd still be  
 run-over toads

## i.

I didn't recognize Dad  
different from pictures

he remembers the smell  
shit piss dust in your hair  
he says now  
crying

Mom had a bag with Nikes  
Levi's *Star Wars*  
*Episode One* shirt

I left my ripped clothes  
inside a Ross fitting room

I'm tired of writing *the fence the desert*  
*the van picked us up*  
*took me to parents*  
I'm tired it's always that

even now outside United Airlines 18F  
I see clouds first like quilt  
then like cheese  
melting in a plastic bag  
under *creosotes*  
next to those *empty*  
*gallons of water*

## i.

Mom didn't know  
Dad didn't know  
even if they'd run across fences before  
they didn't see my knees  
crashing into cactus needles  
that night one shoe slipped off

she says Coyote said  
*I'll carry him to your front door myself Pati*

she didn't know 110 degrees  
 when like Colorado River toads  
 we slid under bushes

officers yelled  
*on your fucking knees*

you couldn't have known this could happen  
 Mom  
 you couldn't have  
 no es su culpa  
 no lo es

**i.**

javier here you go  
 about same shit  
 when will your status change

when will you stop  
 not being that June 10  
 let it go man

you're not inside that Tucson fitting room  
 this is not Abuelita  
 who you couldn't call  
 those eight weeks she lit a candle every night  
 to light your path

Abuelita who you can't call  
 every two weeks  
 you can't even tell her la quiero  
 la quiero mucho  
 only here in a language  
 she don't speak

**i.**

I left Grandpa in Guatemala  
 for eight weeks no one heard my voice  
 for eight weeks  
 no one slept

twice parents packed the car said  
*I'm going to the border*

then at 1 a.m.  
 someone called said  
 you the parent of javier nine years old  
 from El Salvador  
*yes*

órale  
 it's gone be fifteen hundred  
 cash  
 can you get to Tucson  
 tomorrow  
*yes*

órale  
 near Phoenix  
 call this number

i.

to write I look for words in books  
 little ants Abuelita calls words

right now it's *bonsai*  
 that makes me think *father*

he made the one in a black pot in the first living-room I saw  
 in this country

correction first *furnished* living-room in this country  
 my first dawn here I spent it dreaming  
 about what furniture should be where  
 on that living-room carpet used as coyote warehouse  
 in some Tucson suburb

the smell of all fifty of us who waited for family  
 to pay so we could take different vans  
 to different states

in that ceiling's white bumpy surface  
 I imagined a movie I wanted to see  
*Mi Vida Gringa*



I was ready to be gringo  
 speak English  
 own a pool  
 Jeep convertible

**i.**

Abuelita won't leave the house  
 hasn't left in years  
 hasn't will not  
 leave  
 no bullshit  
 no metaphor

she won't shower  
 won't walk to the market  
 pero they'll talk  
 what will they say  
 she says

who is they  
 and who cares  
 we say through the phone  
 on the table  
 by her door  
 we've all walked out of

her hair knots a dread  
 in the back of her short hair

like a microphone head  
 cousin says

my little microphone head  
 won't shower  
 won't sit on a chair  
 watching people walk by  
 like she did  
 when we were there

i.

I wasn't born here  
I've always known this country wanted me dead

do you believe me when I say more than once  
a white man wanted me dead

a white man passed a bill that wants me deported  
wants my family deported

a white man a white man a white man  
not the song I wanted to hear

driving to the airport today  
the road the trees the signs the sky the cars the walls the lights

told me we want you  
out out out

i.

a few hours ago I boarded a plane  
tried to cut ahead with Group A  
usually I'm not caught I was stopped  
the flight attendant told me wait  
it's not your turn I started sweating  
I wore white the worst  
color for sweat my back drenched  
until she let me through I was  
in the gate in the plane 18F

when I got to SFO  
I took Marin Airporter to San Rafael  
same bus I took when I first saw  
the Golden Gate  
I'd never dreamed of it then  
waiting in that line at the US embassy  
when I tried and tried for a visa  
like Mom like Dad like aunts  
and we all got denied

## i.

in public again writing at the corner  
 so people can't see line breaks  
 so they think I'm essayist

maybe I'm ashamed  
 maybe I don't want them reading this  
 that was not part of *Mi Vida Gringa*

*Mi Vida Gringa* not the movie I paid to see then  
 on that ceiling  
 but I still haven't exited in protest  
 haven't been kicked out  
 for not having a valid ticket  
 I sneaked in bought the popcorn drank the Coke  
*bonsai* the word stuck in my brain  
 Dad a landscaper Mom a babysitter

I was supposed to be lawyer  
 businessman soccer player  
 Mom and Dad said  
 someone of value

## i.

javier can you think of that date  
 without almost pissing yourself in La Migra's backseat  
 and in front of you people running  
 fast as we could

now I walk toward dawn  
 only when I'm fucked up  
 and if I'm blacked out  
 I want to shut the fuck up  
 those brown strangers  
 who didn't listen and ran  
 from Migra guns

but now in San Francisco  
 I'm half-drunk at 8 a.m.  
 stuffing shirts pants socks  
 into my carry-on

as if I had a flight today

I've carried this since that day  
 I'm talking about the flor de izote in our fence  
 the one Abuelita plucked  
 mixed with eggs that dawn she was crying  
 I didn't know why  
 come out come out of the house Abuelita  
 please

I'm soft I'm soft Grandpa says  
 who to this day goes out with his bad knee  
 to the fields and scrapes the grass  
 hunching down raking to blast the leaves on fire

and what do I do  
 I sit her type it's Monday  
 it's Tuesday it's Friday  
 type *first day inside a plane I sat by the window*

everyone's working  
 Mom Dad Tía Lupe Tía Mali  
 working under different names  
 I sit here writing our names

The TV is on  
 coffee is on  
 the couch is soft  
 my throat is dry  
 and sick and still  
 nothing has changed

## NOTE

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## Chapter 2

# Childhood, Violence, and Displacement

## *Experiences of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children from the Perspective of Human and Legal Service Providers in North and Central America*

Maria Vidal de Haymes, Adam Avrushin,  
and Celeste Sánchez

### UNACCOMPANIED IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

The migration of unaccompanied children in the United States is not a new phenomenon, although the circumstances in which they migrated have varied over time. During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, children from Africa and Europe were kidnapped and brought to North America as enslaved persons and indentured servants, respectively.<sup>1</sup> During and after World War II, thousands of unaccompanied children were admitted to the United States through various refugee resettlement programs, including 5,000 British children evacuated during the German Air attacks under Operation Pied Piper;<sup>2</sup> 14,000 Cuban children evacuated under Operation Peter Pan following the 1959 revolution;<sup>3</sup> and 2,500 Vietnamese children evacuated under Operation Babylift during the Vietnam War.<sup>4</sup>

In more recent years, unaccompanied children have continued to come to the United States, although in an irregular fashion, entering the United States through the Southern border. These children come primarily from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, making the difficult journey to the United States for multifaceted and complex reasons. Among the most

common reasons given are these: to escape the high rates of violent crime in their home countries, family reunification, and limited economic opportunity.<sup>5</sup> The peak of this flow occurred in 2014, with a record number of 68,500 unaccompanied minors apprehended by US Border Patrol on the Southwest border of the United States.<sup>6</sup>

While most unaccompanied immigrant children (UIC) are apprehended at the Southern border or are identified at US ports of entry, a smaller number are apprehended in the interior and deemed to be unaccompanied minors.<sup>7</sup> The number of apprehensions have decreased since the 2014 peak, yet significant numbers of UIC continue to arrive, with 39,970 apprehended in 2015 and 59,697 in 2016.<sup>8</sup>

### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CONTEMPORARY UNACCOMPANIED CHILD MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

A report authored by Elizabeth Kennedy (2014) of the US Immigration Council during the peak of unaccompanied minor arrival at the US southern border, and another by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR (2014) focused on why Mexican and Central American unaccompanied minors were migrating in such high numbers. She comes to the conclusion that “crime, gang threats, or violence appear to be the strongest determinants for children’s decision to emigrate.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the UNHCR report found that 58 percent of the children interviewed “suffered, [had] been threatened or feared serious harm of a nature that raises international protection concerns.”<sup>10</sup> The conclusions drawn in these reports based on nonscientific samples of unaccompanied migrant children are supported by the well-documented high rates of violent crime, homicide, and organized crime and transnational gang presence in the region.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately for many youth, violence is also present in the home and is reflected in the reported incidence of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment, also a motivating factor for some to migrate.<sup>12</sup>

General insecurity and direct violence in Mexico and the Northern Triangle region have become the predominant factor pushing youth to look for safety in the United States. Yet, situations of structural violence that contribute to this direct and widespread violence, such as poverty and state failure to provide needed protections and support, continue to be significant factors in motivating youth emigration. Furthermore, social problems associated with structural violence, such as abandonment and family separation are also significant factors propelling migration.

For children in Mexico and Central America, the separation from one or both parents due to migration for significant time periods is a common phenomenon with unfavorable psychosocial implications.<sup>13</sup> For example, irrespective of the rising rates of nonmarital births and divorce, the rising migration rates since the mid-1970s have moved migration from the least common to the most common cause for father household absence.<sup>14</sup> So significant is this trend that by the age of fifteen more than one in five Mexican children experience the absence of their father due to migration.<sup>15</sup> This trend toward transnational families and associated separations has been expanded and elaborated with growing rates of female migration (feminization of migration) and the migration of mothers that leave their children with caregivers in communities of origin (transnational motherhood) in recent decades, movements resulting in a “care deficit” in the global south.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, Kennedy found that more than 90 percent of the 322 unaccompanied immigrant children she interviewed had a family member in the United States and a little over 50 percent had one or both parents in the United States, yet only one in three of the children interviewed identified family reunification as their primary reason for leaving.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Donato and Sisk found that parental migration increases the likelihood of youth migrations.<sup>18</sup>

For many youth, particularly those from rural areas, extreme poverty and a desire to work contributed to their decision to migrate.<sup>19</sup> Limited opportunities for employment, high rates of poverty, and minimal state support and services leave many with few options outside of migration to provide for the material needs of their family.<sup>20</sup>

## CHILDHOOD AS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

### Childhood

Childhood is socially constructed and is understood according to various intertwined contextual factors including race, gender, culture, ethnicity, class and at different periods throughout history.<sup>21</sup> The traditional view of children is that they are incomplete adults with presumed deficits of maturity, competence, and significance. The more current and contrasting view is that children are social “beings” in their own right with their own status, agency, capacities, set of needs, and rights that evolve over time.<sup>22</sup>

Mayall argues that childhood is a politically determined category that is often derived from adult perspectives that view children as inherently, inferior to adults because they lack competence, maturity and the necessary capacity to make decisions in their own best interest. Views that purport that



only adults know what is best for children place them in a subordinate position and impede any consideration of taking children's views seriously.<sup>23</sup>

A progressive view of childhood promotes children's status within society as equal to adults. Unlike the traditional view, children are viewed as contributing members of society, with agency and the ability to change their environment. The views of adults are not exclusive in determining children's needs and wishes. Children's own expressed views and beliefs are also relevant, if not critical, to the construction and implementation of social policies and practices.

John Tobin distinguishes the historical development of childhood through a legal lens and identifies three primary models of childhood: proprietary, welfare, and rights-based models. Through this approach, he demonstrates the interrelationship between the evolving notion of childhood, children's rights, and the obligation of families and the State.<sup>24</sup>

### *Proprietary Model of Childhood*

Prior to the late nineteenth century, a proprietary model of childhood considered children the property of their parent and the family preeminent in all matters involving the child. Parents had the right of possession over their child until they reached adulthood, which for boys was, approximately, the age of fourteen and girls, the age of sixteen. The right of possession provided parents with full control over all aspects of a child's life without government or other nonfamilial interference. Government interference risked disrupting the family structure and, hence, society. In the English Common Law case, *Re Egar Ellis* (1883), Lord Justice Bowen declared that the court must not "interfere with the natural order and course of family life, the very basis of which is the authority of the father, except it be in those very special cases. . . . To neglect the natural jurisdiction of the father over the child would be to "set aside the whole course and order of nature, and . . . would disturb the very foundation of family life." Parents, or if absent, the child's family, ultimately decided what was best for the child.

### *Welfare Notion of Childhood*

Beginning in the late nineteenth and into the mid-twentieth century, increased knowledge about children and their development resulted in the alternative welfare model of childhood. They are not property/chattel but, rather, vulnerable, incompetent, and immature human beings in need of protection and support from competent adults. The previous proprietary model failed to ensure the protection and welfare of children who risked being left in the care of potentially harmful adult family members. Adults and institutions created by the State (including courts) had an obligation to protect children against harm and to intervene to secure the child's best interest.

Although the notion of children as human beings resulted in increased protections, the general period view maintained that children lacked the maturity, capacity, and agency to protect themselves against harm or make decisions in their own best interest. This, consequently, not only impacted their private lives, but also their participation in political and civil society where they have little if any voice.

### *Rights-based Model of Childhood*

Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, a rights-based model promoted a more developed understanding about children and their development. It supported the view that children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and maltreatment but, because they continue to grow and evolve, they have a right to determination in their own well-being, subject to their individual capacity and maturity. Children are human beings but, because of their vulnerable and evolving development, need special protections and rights that place added responsibilities on primary caregivers and the state to support their healthy development.

Internationally, this rights-based model is apparent in the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which is ratified by every nation in the world except for the United States. This human rights treaty defines the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children and, notably, promotes the best interest of the child in all State actions concerning children (Article 3). It recognizes a child's right to express their views in all matters affecting them (Articles 12, 13, 14, and 15) thus, theoretically, guaranteeing a child's participation in political and civil society.

Children both affect and are affected by social structures and by the constructions of childhood.<sup>25</sup> Notable examples include the laws and related child-serving systems that address child labor and child welfare.<sup>26</sup> In their examination of applied notions of childhood, Somers, Herrera, and Rodriguez argue that child-serving laws and systems may disagree and result in alternative approaches to engaging and supporting young people.<sup>27</sup> In their historical analysis of legal systems for unaccompanied immigrant children, the authors highlight five constructions of childhood that are embedded in their structures and impact these children's experiences and perceptions: developmental, dependency, privacy, autonomous, and threatening.

- *Developmental Construction*—Children are in constant progression cognitively and social emotionally;
- *Dependency Construction*—Children need other adults, and adult-led organizations, to make necessary decisions to survive (food, shelter, healthcare, education). Children are the target for intervention but intervention goes through adults.

- *Privacy Construction*—Children do not have voice/agency within their environment. Children do not have input/voice into their needs and/or the interventions designed to support them.
- *Autonomous Construction*—Children are independent actors with voice and autonomy. Children have their own knowledge, experience, belief, and understanding about the world that is different, not inferior to adults. Children’s views and ideas are valued and can inform and improve adult’s understanding about the world. Children are viewed as active political, social, and economic partners in the world.
- *Threatening Construction*—Children are menacing, problematic, and a drain on society. Children are not valued contributors but rather negative influences on their environment.

In their historical examination of the US immigration system, immigration courts, and the US Office of Refugee and Resettlement social service organizations, Somers, Herrera, and Rodriguez conclude that child-serving laws and systems have over time presented all of these constructions of childhood, resulting in varied, and at times contradictory, approaches to unaccompanied immigrant children.<sup>28</sup> While all constructions of childhood are expressed throughout the custodial and legal immigration systems, the dependency and developmental constructions are more relevant for the custodial system because of the “historical marginalization of children in the immigration system.”<sup>29</sup>

## CURRENT STUDY

The current study is guided by an interest in understanding the varied perspectives regarding childhood and violence in the processes of social exclusion or integration of vulnerable Central American youth and UICs in the United States from the standpoint of a diverse sample of professionals working in systems that these youth encounter. The systems of interest broadly include family, economy, education, health, and security institutions, as well as immigration. The guiding questions for the secondary analysis were

1. What forms of violence did the study participants indicate the youth experienced in communities of origin, and destination? What impact do these forms of violence have on the integration or exclusion of these youth?
2. What were the perspectives regarding childhood reflected by the study participants?
3. How did the participants’ views regarding childhood and violence inform their vision regarding desired social responses to address the situation of these youth?

## Design and Procedures

The current study consists of a secondary analysis of two primary qualitative data sets that entailed transcripts from forty-six interviews conducted by the authors for two separate projects: one based in Chicago, Illinois, with a focus on the unaccompanied immigrant children in Chicago; and the second based in Guatemala City, Guatemala, and Tegucigalpa, Honduras, with a focus on marginalized youth in situations of high vulnerability and violence.

Such a design is appropriate given the fit between the primary data sets and the secondary research questions which apply a new conceptual focus to the original research issues presented in the primary studies.<sup>30</sup> The decision to conduct a secondary analysis is supported by several factors: 1) the research questions for the secondary analysis are sufficiently close to those of the primary research; 2) the data collection techniques and time frame for both primary studies were the same; and 3) the thematic analytic techniques in the primary study are similar to those applied in the secondary analysis; and furthermore, the ideas explored in this secondary analysis were identified during the analytic interpretation associated with the primary studies.<sup>31</sup>

## Data Sources and Sample

As previously stated, this chapter draws on interviews from two separate primary studies. The Chicago study focused on the experiences and outcomes of unaccompanied immigrant children released to family/sponsors in the Chicago metropolitan area from an Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) facility and those who entered the United States undetected and did not engage with ORR. For this study, “Unaccompanied Immigrant Child” refers to children/youth, under the age of eighteen, who entered the United States without a legal primary caregiver and without lawful immigration status in the United States. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with local human service, education, health, and legal advocacy professionals attending to unaccompanied immigrant children and the families reunited in Illinois with the purpose of gathering their perspective on: 1) the unique experiences and service needs of these UIC, 2) what formal services and supports were available to them, and 3) how state and local public policies and agency practices facilitate access to services and support that enhance the well-being and integration of this population?

The focus of the Tegucigalpa/Guatemala City primary study was to better understand: 1) the experience and context of youth in situations of violence in Honduras and Guatemala who have been displaced or are at risk for displacement; 2) the nature of the violence and displacement they experience and

how it influences critical dimensions of their life, including family/household structure and relationships, education, employment, housing, health and mental health, migration, and the formation of their own families; and 3) what has been the humanitarian response to the precarious situation of these youth? In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with local human service, education, health, and legal advocacy organizations attending to this youth population.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed for each study. The interviews were conducted by the authors in the office/facility of the research participant. The Chicago interviews were conducted in English and the Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City interviews were all conducted in Spanish. Prior to initiating the interview, the participants were provided a verbal overview and written consent form detailing the purpose of the study, any risk or benefits and issues of confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately one hour in length. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for analysis. The Chicago interviews were conducted July through November of 2017, and the Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa interviews were conducted in July of 2017.

Chicago was selected as a project site for the UIC study because it is home to a large and diverse immigrant community, with a long tradition of immigrant reception, sanctuary, and integration, as well as vibrant immigrant organizations and residential enclaves.<sup>32</sup> Chicago is located in the state of Illinois, which ranks among the top six receiving states for new immigrants and sixth among states with undocumented residents.<sup>33</sup> More than 60 percent of the state's foreign-born live in the Chicago metropolitan area, a figure which includes 1,818 UIC who have been released by the Office of Refugee Resettlement to live with sponsors in Illinois since October 2013,<sup>34</sup> with the vast majority of whom (866) were placed in Cook County, the county housing the city of Chicago.<sup>35</sup> These youth join thousands more UIC who entered without detection and also live in the area.

Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City were selected because of their high rate of violence, gang-controlled neighborhoods, and forced displacement due to organized crime and transnational gangs, factors that impel the migration of youth from these countries. The informal communities on the periphery of these cities, as well as marginalized sectors in the interior are particularly targeted, as are the youth. Because of the indiscriminate, targeted violence and gang control of communities, the UNHCR estimates that over 215,000 people fled Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador primarily to the United States and Canada in the first half of 2017.<sup>36</sup> While both of these cities suffer tremendous violence, they were also selected because of the remarkable organizations and agencies that have emerged in response.

## Sample

The sample included forty-six professionals drawn from diverse education, legal, and human service professions and roles in the public and private sector: twenty based in Chicago, nine from Guatemala City, and seventeen from Tegucigalpa. The participants were recruited for the primary studies because of their personal knowledge, experience, and insights regarding the unique service needs of vulnerable youth in Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa, and the UIC population settling in Chicago, Illinois, US metropolitan regions. Table 2.1 provides a summary of the Chicago study sample and Table 2.2 of the Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa study sample.

**Table 2.1 Chicago Study Sample**

<i>Professional Role</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Former teacher in ORR facility	1
Case manager in ORR facility	1
Post release services administrator in ORR facility	1
Administrator of shelter for UIC that have aged out of ORR facility and have a pending asylum case	1
Case manager at shelter for UIC that have aged out of ORR facility and have a pending asylum case	1
Religious that provides pastoral accompaniment to UIC in ORR facilities	1
Administrator/program director in community-based human service organization that provides services to UIC	1
Former state human service director for immigrant services/current administrator in community-based service organization that provides services to UIC	1
Director of immigrant advocacy and resource organization	1
Attorney in Office of the Public Guardian	1
Attorney in clinic that provides pro bono representation of UIC	1
Social worker in legal clinic that provides pro bono counsel to UIC	1
Public school system administrator for Language and Cultural Services	1
Public school system administrator for college and career planning	1
Public school system administrator for Community Relations and Refugee Services	1
City colleges advisor and transitional language services program administrator	1
Former charter school network administrator/current director of education policy and parent advocacy organization	1
Social worker in public high school with immigrant welcoming center	1
Social worker in grade school with large immigrant population/ Former social worker in public high school with large immigrant population	1
Attorney with Guardian Ad Litem Office for minors	1

**Table 2.2 Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa Study Sample**

<i>Professional Role</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Principal and religious sister of elementary school and community center in Guatemala City	1
Program coordinator in community organization focused on educational and occupational opportunities for marginalized youth in Guatemala City	1
Academic coordinator and teacher in community organization focused on educational and occupational opportunities for marginalized youth in Guatemala City	1
Director of nonprofit that provides legal and psychological services for youth and women survivors of violence in Guatemala	1
Executive coordinator of association of private and state organizations working toward migrant rights in Guatemala	1
Education director of nonprofit focused on education and life skills training for children and adults of communities surrounding Guatemala City garbage dump	1
Volunteer/tour guide of nonprofit focused on education and life skills training for children and adults of communities surrounding Guatemala City garbage dump	1
Youth advocate of Human Rights Headquarters in Guatemala City	1
Lawyer in nonprofit focused on youth survivors of sexual violence, exploitation and human trafficking in Guatemala	1
Missionary in youth outreach center in community of Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
Coordinator of youth outreach center in community of Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
Youth group coordinator of community church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
Priest of community church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
Researcher in Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
Researcher and youth shelter worker in Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
Communications director of organization comprised of volunteer youth focused on reducing violence in Honduras	1
Volunteer and member of organization comprised of volunteer youth focused on reducing violence in Honduras	2
Missionary of a Christian order focused on accompanying youth and families in community of Tegucigalpa, Honduras	2
Program director of shelter for youth experiencing homelessness and trafficked youth in Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
National director of shelter for youth experiencing homelessness and trafficked youth in Tegucigalpa, Honduras	1
Social worker and former youth of residential care home for at-risk children in Honduras	1
Doctor and former youth of residential care home for at-risk children in Honduras	1
Human rights worker in UNHCR office in Honduras	1
NGO human rights advocate that works with youth experiencing homelessness in Honduras	1



## **Analysis**

The authors conducted an inductive transcript-based analysis using open and axial coding with the interview transcripts to identify themes related to violence, notions of childhood and their interrelationships.<sup>37</sup> Dedoose, a web-based application for the coding and analysis of qualitative data, aided this process. Several strategies were employed to enhance rigor and quality, including an iterative transcript review process, independent coding of each transcript by two of the researchers and discussion until agreement was reached, documentation of coding development through memoing, rechecking coding against the data, and identification of direct quotes to support themes for transparency.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Perspectives on Child Vulnerability and Migration**

In the Central and North American region, the number of youth that have experienced displacement due to structural and direct violence resulting from profound inequality, a legacy of war, devastating natural disasters, and transnational gangs and organized crime has escalated dramatically in the last decade. The displacement that youth experience can be internal or transnational, or have dimensions of both. This study gathered the perspectives of individuals who work(ed) in organizations that attend to youth who have been displaced or are at risk of displacement due to the structural and direct violence they experience. In Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa, the individuals interviewed worked with youth from highly marginalized communities who were at high risk of displacement, or had already been displaced, or had emigrated but had been deported. In Chicago, the individuals interviewed worked with unaccompanied immigrant children post release from an ORR detention facility or who had entered the United States undetected.

In both the US and Central American contexts, these youth were recognized as a particularly vulnerable population. The individuals interviewed saw these young people as vulnerable for numerous reasons related to their predicament. They understood that many migrated out of necessity to escape high rates of violence and extreme poverty, only to experience additional insecurity and harm along their journey. An increase in violence, extortions, kidnappings, and physical injuries, mutilations, and even deaths due to assaults and accidents add to the already physically and emotionally exhausting experience of traveling in a clandestine manner. Moreover, they understand these young people to be particularly vulnerable because they do not have a parent or primary caregiver to help make critical life decisions



and someone who is able to protect them from the harms and mistreatment of other adults in their country of origin. The statement made by a post-release services administrator in ORR facility reflects this view of childhood as a social category that merits protection by adults:

I think that, at the end of the day these are just kids. They really are. When you give them an opportunity to be just kids, you realize that they are no different than yours or mine, or your nephews, or your nieces. They are just kids, you know. Not some sort of political thing, not something that is here to drain the economy. . . . They are just kids that deserve protection. That deserve basic rights as children and first and foremost that is to be alive and not feel threatened, to have that sense of security. . . . We protect children. That is what we do. You wouldn't see a poor child walking down the street and cold and not say—Oh my God where is this kid's parents? These are kids, you know. I don't know how [to] describe that feeling; that need to really change the way we look at unaccompanied children. . . . They are children who come from horrific things that none of us could possibly understand.

Many of the participants in Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa believed that their organizations addressed governmental and institutional failures that left these youth unprotected and socially excluded, a condition that often was seen as leading to displacement from their communities of origin and for many the necessity to emigrate. After noting that Honduras, unlike other Central American countries plagued by violence, had invited the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR-ACNUR in Latin America) to have a presence in Honduras due to the alarming level of internal displacement, a UNHCR human rights advocate described the multifaceted nature of violence experienced by youth in Honduras:

I am going to give you an example of a child from any complicated neighborhood in Honduras. He has left the country and you ask him in the first interview why did you abandon your country? "I left because I needed money and I needed a job." Then one would think that it was for economic reasons. Later you ask why the United States and not another place? Because my parents live in the United States. So now the motives are familial and not violence. Finally in the third interview, you ask why did you leave, what did work have to do with it? "Well they told my mother that she had to pay her debts and then the extortion occurred." And that is the path that the violence continues. I conclude that the violence is multicausal.

Similarly, the individuals interviewed in Chicago, believed that the US government failed to protect these youth from additional harms after they arrived and integrated them into the local communities where they now live.

They believed that their organization, in some cases, needed to protect these young people from governmental abuses and harms that include not providing an attorney or guardian *ad litem* to advocate for them and/or represent their best interests in asylum interviews and/or removal proceedings, detaining the unaccompanied youth in inappropriate conditions, and repatriating them to their home nation without proper vetting. An attorney in the Office of the Cook County Public Guardian in Chicago summarized this concern regarding the vulnerability of children, the failure of the state to protect them, and the need for adults or adult-led institutions to intervene on their behalf to advance their best interest.

It's horrible. It's absolutely horrible. How can you ship a kid back on a plane to nobody? How is that in the child's best interest? How you can put a kid in immigration court without a lawyer? The fact that we don't give them counsel is appalling; it's just down right appalling. I can understand you not wanting to use the best interest standard for anyone 18 or older, but anyone who is a child? You have to use the best interest equation even if that does open the floodgates. Even if the answer is well it's always in their best interest to get status. Ok so be it. Give them all status. I mean, where are you sending them back to? Like when did we turn into monsters? You know, and I understand we don't have enough resources for our own, you know, kids born here, but we gotta do better.

Unlike the US Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement government agencies, the study interviews reflected that these human, educational, and legal service professionals did not consider these young people, generally, to be a threat to the community or a drain on society. Rather, they viewed these young people as not only particularly vulnerable and in need of their care and protection, but also having capacity to be either involved with or making decisions in their own best interest. They viewed them as possessing their own beliefs, ideas, and values that should guide and/or inform any decision made on their behalf.

Their view of these youth, and the manner in which the state and social institutions that youth encounter should offer them safety, stability, and an environment that promotes the development of their capabilities and well-being, included many elements of the constructions youth found in the Somers, Herrera and Rodriguez typology. More specifically, their understanding of the youth, while varied, presented elements of *developmental*, *dependency*, and *autonomous* constructions of youth. These constructions emphasize the importance of supporting adults and social institutions in promoting and guiding the progression of social and emotional development of children and youth, while recognizing the importance of the child/youth's perspective, desires, and autonomy.

In contrast, the interview transcripts indicated a view that the state and key social institutions in the lives of youth reflected indifference, at best, to sources of direct and structural violence in their lives. One study participant, an attorney who primarily attends to youth in the child welfare system but also to unaccompanied minors offered a hypothetical case of an unaccompanied minor released to a relative to contrast the dissimilar treatment of children in child welfare and immigration systems:

The kids [unaccompanied minors] released, who are undocumented who are released from the [ORR] shelter to relative—Jenny in Alabama. There is no social worker for Jenny to call to get a list of service providers who can help, you know, little Abe who needs help. And there is no social worker who is going to follow up with Jenny and Abe to make sure that Abe is getting his services. So they are just released into the ether. And do they come to the next court date, that by the way is in Chicago? They have to get everything transferred to Alabama. Do they get a legal service provider? Well there is nobody in Alabama. Do they know who to call? . . . How can we better serve this population once they are spider webbed out around the country to their sponsors.

From their standpoint, their governments and key social institutions reflected elements of *privacy* and *threatening* constructions of youth, perspectives that disregard the voice, agency, and contributions of youth and rather view them as a threat and drain on society. In the context of Guatemala and Honduras, youth advocates and service providers often commented on governments that lacked a vision of youth as engaged citizens active in public life. As one youth advocate of a human right center in Guatemala City commented,

There is no space for expression, there is no space for participation, there are no courts, there are no youth groups, they do not have health centers, etc. What we have is a non-growing state so the state has left us adrift. And, finally, the response that it gives is a repressive one. It isn't until there is an extreme act of violence, that there is an invasive situation,[that] authorities come into these places. But there is no preventative action, it is completely reactive in general terms.

We explore these constructions of youth through the perspectives of the study participants as reflected in the transcripts analyzed. In particular, we focus on several key institutions that children and youth encounter: family, school, economy, health/mental health and security institutions.

## Family

The interviews revealed a number of troubling family dynamics that emerged from situations of extreme poverty and direct, generalized and structural violence. Study participants noted the common inability of parents in this context to provide for the material needs and safety of their children, despite their noble efforts. Sometimes these efforts included familial separation as adults went north to secure better paying jobs. Others noted the violence that was present in the home, as well as the street, with no reprieve for the children. In general, they described a home situation in which many children and youth commonly experience instability, fear, and abuse. These children and youth must accept these circumstances or look for other circumstances, which can also lead to additional risk exposure and danger, as they search for the support and attention that is absent in their home. Others noted what they viewed as early initiation into caretaking roles for these young individuals that received little care and protection themselves, thwarting their childhood and their long-term efforts to develop their capabilities, which adds to the cycle. The following quotes reflect some of these insights offered by the study participants.

The topic of inclusion of the youth, boys, adolescents and girls, in gangs. . . . They see a support, they see them as family. For them, it is what has been missing on the other side. We have a lot to work on with family to create those affective bonds between children and parents.

—Lawyer in nonprofit focused on youth survivors of sexual violence, exploitation, and human trafficking in Guatemala

Violence starts in the home through abuse, physical abuse, psychological, emotional. That is how the expulsion of boys and girls to the street begins. And in that context, we fall into the phenomenon of children experiencing homelessness.

—Human rights worker in Honduras

Children of 13, 14 years of age that are taking care of children that are 2 years old or they are on their second pregnancy. It is difficult that a person be able to teach values that are needed to keep a society stable when the person is an adolescent [parent].

—Physician and former resident of care facility for at-risk children in Honduras

Others noted the tremendous efforts that parents and youth made to reunify following long separations. In some cases they observed the great difficulty

and fragility of these bonds. The director of a human service organization in Chicago that serves unaccompanied immigrant children and their family sponsors illustrates this difficulty and frustration experienced by the youth and parents in different ways.

But you know we paid so much money [to bring him to the United States] and he wants to go back. And I say, “Why do you want to go back? You have nothing there. You are not going to be able to come back here.” And they say, “Yes, I rather die there, better than being lonely [here].” . . . So we are talking about the teenagers to age 18, right, that moment that you haven’t been with your parents and your mother here, or your father here, because they are separated; Nobody will wait for that many years. . . . Ok, that’s my husband I will come back to him after 15 years of not having seen you, that doesn’t work. So a lot of the parents here already have a new family, already built new relationships. . . . So when you bring your teenage son who has been separated when they go to school or start to go to college, or the university they are still with that loneliness, they miss their friends, they miss the culture, but also they don’t fit in this new family. They see themselves as an outsider, but the parents don’t see it that way. You are my child, equal like everybody else, you have the same, this is your room, this is your house but they feel emptiness internally. How can they build that relationship back? And of course rebellions are happening, to the new husband or the new wife . . . but parents don’t understand that, after you bring [the youth] here and this person [new partner] helped me to pay for you to come here, and you are not appreciative and you want to go to college and but you still don’t want to do it, you are in a rebellious situation.

An ORR-funded post-release services administrator for unaccompanied children offered a similar observation regarding the difficulty of reunification. He highlighted some of the underlying feelings of abandonment and resentment that may surface upon reunification, while the youth is simultaneously trying to adjust to a wholly new context.

There is always an adjustment period for almost everyone. I think that if you think about any child placed in out of home care, when they return to home there is always like this period of like, this is weird, we haven’t lived together for a while and now we have to get used to each other again. I think it’s slightly a little more intensified for unaccompanied children because we are not just talking about out of home placement, we are talking out of life placement. We are talking about children who have not been with potentially a mother or a father for an extended period of time and we are not just re-introducing them to their parents, we are also introducing them to a new neighborhood, a new community a new world, a new political climate, a new . . . there is all these things that happening at the same time. So there is an adjustment period. It starts out easy, like “this is the greatest thing ever. I love this place. I missed you.” And then

there is the period of “You left me. I hate you. Why did you leave me. I don’t like it here I want to go back.” There is a whole lot of emotions that come with experiencing the trauma, just the trauma of separation. Needless to discuss the trauma that comes with traveling to get here, having to take these huge risks to be able to be with your mother again. So it’s complicated. . . . A parent took a huge risk to be able to provide for their family, now that they are together maybe the child kind of needs to process the information to understand. Sometimes, its successful sometimes it’s not.

## School

All of the study participants emphasized the importance of education in the development of children and youth along cognitive, social, and civic dimensions, as well as providing practical knowledge and skills that could help advance them in further studies or employment. They saw schools as institutions with tremendous formative possibilities and responsibilities in the development of the youth’s capacities, yet study participants in Tegucigalpa, Guatemala City, and Chicago invariably commented on the difficulty many of the youth experienced in accessing appropriate education in their communities of origin and in destination communities for migrating youth.

They highlighted the early departure from schooling for many of the youth, a common occurrence in the primary years of formal study. The need to work to help support themselves or assist with household chores and caretaking were common reason for this early departure. Similarly, several school-based service providers in Chicago noted how familial responsibilities continued in the US context for unaccompanied minors who were reunited with family or other sponsors.

A lot of them do have jobs, if they are the oldest male in the house the expectation is for them to work and help support the family. And I know that in those cases it’s very, very difficult for them to be involved in school activities.

—Chicago School social worker who attends to unaccompanied minors and refugee children

The parents, you know. The parents may prefer them to come home and cook or help with . . . which is also about education, you know, family support. But some of the parents don’t see the critical age when the child needs to be in most engaged, especially if they are missing . . . if they are not at grade level. . . . Some swim or sink.

—Public school system administrator for Community Relations and Refugee Services

Others spoke of lengthy disruptions to education to avoid school, which has become a site for gang recruitment, or due to internal displacement related to violence or to emigration. Yet others noted the disinvestment of government in education, the barriers that schools place on enrollment, and the irrelevance of education in a context that does not allow youth to realize their full potential or provide them with meaningful opportunities.

There is nothing extra. They paint the school but there aren't any books, there is no other teaching system. It's the same orthodox system where the students sit at a desk and listen to the teacher. So I do not necessarily consider it a crime in its definition, but a sickness. It seems like there is no cure for poverty and there is very little interest on behalf of the people that govern to be able to give a better opportunity to this new population.

—Physician attending to at-risk youth in residential facility in Honduras

An example would be a 14–15-year-old minor who if you grew up in the U.S. you are required to go school. You know, there are truancy officers, people that force . . . make sure parents, make sure they enroll the kids in school. If you are talking a young man or woman in Guatemala where you have to have money to take them to school, they might have stopped going to school in second or third grade. So you take that 7–8-year-old, fast forward 10 years, they are 17 and they have to go to school. Enroll in school but they haven't had any formal education for that huge 10 year gap. Schools have difficulty with that, they don't understand. . . . What do you mean you weren't going to school? . . . The challenge there is for some of the older kids, it's hard to get some schools to accept those children and we have to remind them that, you know, the law says they are eligible and they can be enrolled there. Immigration status is irrelevant.

—Post ORR release services administrator

However, several noted that when given the opportunity to study, paired with some sense of safety and support, kids became engaged and active learners eager to continue. A former teacher in an ORR facility shared one such example.

We also started getting kids from Mexico who worked as polleros or coyotes [smugglers] and so those kids it was very hard for them to see how education was relevant to their lives. I had one kid, I think he was from Mexico who had a 4th grade education and he had been working as a pollero and he could hardly read and write and he just said “I am not good at this.” He would say “Yo no soy hecho para esto [I'm not made for this].” It's not part of their world. He didn't feel he could be successful or he could see how this was relevant to his life, I guess. . . . But I saw over time with him that he started gaining confidence



and then started seeing that it was interesting and he could connect and engage with school. And so he started studying and working really hard and ended up deciding that he didn't want to go back to Mexico.

## **Health/Mental Health**

An examination of data from both US and Central American study sites finds that despite great need among the youth populations, communities and organizations often lacked the resources necessary to provide needed mental health services. In the Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City contexts such services were practically nonexistent. In the US context, culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, mental health services in the young person's primary language were not uniformly available. According to participants in the Chicago study, although a great desire exists within the community and among service providers to offer these necessary services, they often struggle to find the resources to provide them. Many lack funding to offer these services to all who need them and they often are challenged to find individuals who possess the skills and training to provide the necessary care.

In Chicago, public schools and private community organizations provide much of the mental healthcare for school-aged children. In schools, the availability and quality of mental health services varies greatly between schools, as does the student population. Some schools are demographically diverse and have students from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, while student populations at other schools are relatively homogenous. Schools make considerable efforts to address the diverse social-emotional needs of these and other vulnerable students, but the quality and availability of services depends on the school. Generally, however, mental health services are lacking for these and other vulnerable immigrant children. As a Chicago Public Schools (CPS) administrator states, with the exception of a few schools with substantial need, mental health services across the district are "widely inadequate." As a CPS Support Staff explains, "each school has a trained counselor. . . . It is better than nothing . . . but, if you figure that some schools serve 100 children and there is one counselor and if they do other stuff too, . . . it is a challenge."

For young people with greater mental health needs and/or whom cannot/will not be served at their public school, community-based organizations are often tasked with providing necessary services. Unfortunately, community-based mental health services for many UIC and other vulnerable migrant children are not a viable option. Few community-based mental health providers offer free care or accept a medical card to cover the costs of services and, those providers who do, often have waiting lists that extend weeks or months and may not have staff that can provide care in a child's primary language.



An administrator of an ORR-funded post-release service program summarized the situation in the following manner:

The need for mental health services is the number one need. Basic human rights: so access to healthcare, education, ensuring that they have access to any kinds of benefits. So even if it's nutrition, pregnant teens might need access to prenatal care as well OBGYN for delivery. But top priority would be mental health services. There is a lot of these children who are coming with a significant history of trauma.

The lack of mental health services can impact the youth's ability to focus on their studies and engage in school. For others it can impact their asylum case. The following quotes from social workers that work with unaccompanied minors in Chicago in school and legal service settings, respectively, describe the impact of unaddressed mental health needs in the lives of these youth.

A lot of those students that do have work because they have to support the family they end up acting out in school. But that is where I come in, and I work with them and I talk to them, you know, about their challenges and why they work. A lot of them they tell me, yeah I work for my family, but also work because I don't want to think about the things that happened in my country. Because when I work I don't have to think about those things.

—School social worker

So one thing I would say is that some kids very quickly, very easily can tell their story to an attorney and it's easy for that attorney to clearly say yes you are qualified for a form of relief. Some kids cannot, and I think trauma plays a huge role in that, so we sometimes need time to really go through that with a child and help them understand that coming to this country means they can have some form of protection and sometimes things happen in their home country that allows them to be protected. But I think since in some of these communities the violence is so normalized they do not realize that their story that can open this window [of protection] for them. So for kids who usually tell their story and can express themselves very clearly, it's not a barrier but if we think about highly traumatized children or very young children or pre-verbal children or children who have developmental delays or any type of special needs—that attorney needs a chronological story and to get that child to that point can be a long road. So what we have done in some cases is we will reach out to find a pro bono mental health evaluator to do an evaluation. Either a trauma-informed, intellectual capacity or competence issue, developmental needs [assessment], to help contextualize some of this, to help look at what are the impacts of trauma on memory. For that attorney to understand that there is in fact a credible story. Cause I mean the attorneys are faced with meeting all the legal arguments and

immigration law and we have to find, create a way to help that child, help that attorney.

—Social worker in legal clinic

A director of a community-based agency that serves unaccompanied immigrant minors in Chicago lamented that the critical need for mental health services for these children and youth is because “they have seen so much more than what they should. They should know less than what they know in real life.” A coordinator of a youth outreach program in Tegucigalpa, Honduras described the heightened state of arousal and fear experienced by the youth as a result of the violence they have witnessed or experienced directly. She states, “the instability, feeling fear, being in a state of alert . . . so many kids that are growing up so close to violence, not only because of what they see or what they feel or what they are suffering personally but because many families . . . they have many close family members who were murdered.” Unfortunately, youth have few options for mental health or health services in their communities of origin.

For many it is difficult in a country where, for example, 17% of the population does not have access to healthcare even though there is a public system. That is big and we have a population of 8.5 million people. So not having access to healthcare [means] not only that there isn’t a [hospital] building close to you, it’s also that the building does not have anything inside. It doesn’t have medicine. It’s that people do not have money to even take the bus to go there or that people have to walk two or three hours to be able to get a bus.

—Physician working in medical clinic serving at-risk youth in Honduras

## Economy

The study participants described how children and youth, despite their tender age, have had to make tough choices in order to help support themselves and their family’s basic economic needs. One human rights advocate in Honduras expressed the motives for such tough choices as, “wanting to see your family be in a different situation or because at 15 years he is a dad and he does not have anything to feed his children.” Often their options and support systems were so limited that they sometimes turn to informal and at times illegal, options that offer them financial solutions to their immediate needs. Unfortunately, many times youth have to take one of the very few available employment options that also come with many limitations and end up trapping the youth in vulnerable circumstances with very little opportunities and

support for mobility. A director of a nonprofit agency that provides legal and psychological services for youth and women survivors of violence in Guatemala summarized the situation of youth in marginalized communities as one in which:

There is no state—drug trafficking is the authority. No one enters [these communities] and so the most vulnerable groups will always be women, children, and adolescents. Young adults have no choice and, because of a lack of expectations, because they see that they will take 30 years to possibly have their own house [working a formal job], when drug trafficking offers them all of that in five years.

## Security

All noted the level of violence present in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America. Some blamed the state for a lack of will or inability to protect the safety of youth. In the words of one Honduran human rights advocate, “The violence is so generalized, so generalized that we have a failed state. A completely failed state because there is not a governmental response.” A missionary at a youth outreach center in the community of Tegucigalpa offers another criticism of the government, stating that “there should be a presence of the security authority instead of the violence [that is present]. There should at least be laws that do not favor violence. I feel that the laws do favor it and that there is a lot of corruption in favor of violence. Corruption fuels violence the most.”

The view of youth, particularly male youth, as a threat was commonly heard in the interviews conducted in Guatemala City and Tegucigalpa. Study participants frequently noted the mistreatment and misrepresentation of youth by the media and police, and society in general. Many felt that these institutions, rather than considering them as children or youth who should be protected and supported in their development as valuable members of society, positioned them as a social problem to be controlled. Interviewee participants frequently reported that the government approach to generalized crime and violence has been to criminalize youth, labeling them as delinquents and parasites, rather than social assets and contributing actors. A missionary in a Tegucigalpa youth outreach center described this social perception of youth in the following manner, “The stigma is that a young man that is here and not doing anything productive, or in other words, is moving from one street to another, is a young threat. He has a tattoo, so the notion is that he is a threat. I think the government sees that in the youth. And it’s seen more in communities on the outskirts. They are a threat.”

A human rights advocate in Honduras went further to suggest that the police are often involved with organized crime, stating that, “we enter a very difficult state of organized crime with gangs that, because of territory, begin to kill each other, but in collusion with the auxiliary system of justice of the country—the police.” A Fulbright researcher studying the experiences of unaccompanied youth in the Northern Triangle drew parallels between the marking of youth as a delinquent by the police and the false labeling of peasants as guerrillas in the Salvadoran civil war as a pretext to repression and the use of force against youth:

The number of homicides among children has increased, both boys and girls and when you read the news articles on the report that they get, it’s almost always attached to they were alleged gang members or collaborator of gangs. So there is this same marking that was done during civil war [in El Salvador] quite frankly, because every young person that was killed then they said oh it’s a collaborator of the guerrillas and now they are doing the same thing with adolescent kids from the wrong neighborhoods. Dark skin, like . . . but according to them that is not happening.

This researcher posited another view that was supported by the human service professionals. She indicated that rather than being gang members, they were actually migrating to avoid forced gang recruitment. A similar observation was made by the director of a Guatemalan NGO that provides legal and psychological services for youth and women survivors of violence. As she indicated, “These same groups harm other youth that do not want to integrate [into gangs]. So what happens? There enters the theme of migration. Many are living in surroundings where there is a lot of conflict. What they do is flee that conflict. They go to USA looking for . . . better security conditions and also a way to help their family.” For some there is no other option, as many observed that the violence and reach of the gangs has grown exponentially, as has their recruitment of younger and younger children.

This whole thing of the presence of gangs and it’s all because they have also had an evolution because there has always been gangs but they weren’t as violent as they are now. They also recruit children now. You wouldn’t see that before in the communities and now you do. So we also see a lot of deaths of children because some of the children maybe do not want to be part of the gang so for them it is easy to kill them. So the negative social aspects have had an evolution and with that everything that the government or the state cannot provide the citizens.

—Member of a voluntary organization comprised of youth focused on reducing violence in Honduras

A director of a community-based human service agency that provides services and support to unaccompanied youth and their sponsors discussed how the US government continued the criminalization of these youth. She tried to place herself in the experience of the youth when facing immigration officials and how a child might interpret and internalize the experience.

I mean it's a traumatic situation for a child to be handcuffed. I [have] never been handcuffed in my life, but I think I would just be afraid. I would be vulnerable, and that impacts your life. You are a bad person because that is what it means for children. That's why you have handcuffs, because you are a bad person and [they] didn't know that until they told us.

A former ORR facility teacher commented on the limited autonomy of the youth while in ORR custody. She indicated that while the facility staff tried to make the situation more welcoming for the children and youth, in the end it was still detention, leaving the youth without a voice or say in decisions that impacted them.

It was very hard because it is so structured and it's a detention center. They don't have very much autonomy and like staff are pretty tied . . . like your hands are tied in a lot of ways. Like you have to enforce certain rules and policies and stuff like that. You kind of had to meet them where they are at and tell them, like "hey I know you are not used to being in this type of a situation and I get that." You know, kind of recognize and affirming their life experience too. And that they have a lot of things that they can bring to a classroom that other people couldn't because of their life experience.

## CONCLUSION

In our exploration of the perceptions of human and legal service professionals that work with marginalized youth in Guatemala and Honduras, primary sending countries for unaccompanied immigrant children, and UICs in the United States through the analytical lens of childhood, we found that the lives of children are deeply impacted by the systems that they encounter. These systems are multiple and diverse, ranging from the family, economy, education, health, and security institutions, and for a growing number of children, the immigration system as well.

We also found that the political, cultural, social, and economic forces and constraints shape these systems encountered by youth in which the professionals interviewed work are simultaneously informed by images of childhood. The analytical framework of childhood provided insight into how these various systems advance inclusion or exclusion of these youth in the

context of countries of origin and destination. In both sending and destination contexts we found that the human service professionals and legal and human rights advocates who were interviewed presented their governments and key social institutions as reflecting constructions of youth that diminished their agency and viewed them as social problems to be controlled, often in contrast to the official rhetoric of the state which positioned itself as the guardian of youth.

They gave numerous examples of how the state policies and officials disregard the voice, agency, and contributions of youth, and ignore their safety and well-being. Rather, they indicated that the state responded to them as a menace to society and a drain on its resources. Many of the individual interview transcripts suggested a belief that nongovernmental organizations such as theirs addressed governmental and institutional failures that left these youth unprotected and socially excluded, a circumstance that frequently lead to internal displacement, and for many the necessity to emigrate. In many ways they presented a view of civil society as the protectors of childhood, a critical moment in life that should be marked by supportive adults and institutions that promote security, well-being, development, and a flourishing of youth as active political, social, and economic partners in the world.

## NOTES

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## Chapter 3

# Trauma, Detachment, and Non-Belonging

## *The Plight of Migrant and Refugee Children*

Stephanie N. Arel

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in 2017, 258 million people were migrants.<sup>1</sup> This number equates to 3.4 percent of the world's population. Half of the world's refugees are children,<sup>2</sup> who in greater numbers, and with greater frequency, are travelling alone. In an effort to escape violence, war, torture, forced marriages, and recruitment as child soldiers, to name but a few root causes, children flee. Defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as unaccompanied persons under the age of eighteen, separated from both parents and not cared for by "an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so,"<sup>3</sup> the millions of unescorted children on the run suffer compounded trauma and grief, before, during, and after their flight. Traumatically uprooted and detached from culture, family, and what they knew of home, vulnerable, unaccompanied minors confront further trauma and detachment as they face innumerable dangers in order to seek a better life, often doing so to reunite with family and caregivers who have also escaped violent environments at home. Simone Weil's pronouncement that "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul"<sup>4</sup> presses both the admission of the grave mental, physical, and spiritual risks that minors travelling alone encounter and a societal response.

In his memoir, *The Lightless Sky*, Afghani refugee Gulwalāy Passarlay recounts his experience being smuggled at the age of twelve to England. Passarlay recounts being present when a gunfight with American soldiers killed his father and grandfather—believed to be Taliban sympathizers during the war in Afghanistan who harbored weapons that killed other Americans. His torturous, migratory route included seven countries, imprisonment, a

near drowning, and being trapped in a chicken coop for days. Despite the dangers and the endured trauma, Passarlay made it to England. Although he was eventually granted asylum, members of the Kent Social Services in England assessed his age as sixteen and a half, instead of thirteen (age assessment is a problem for children seeking asylum as governments can more easily deport adults and so benefit from determining that children are older than they are).<sup>5</sup> Although by all accounts Passarlay was lucky, he found himself depressed and desperately lonely in England, craving his old life and familial connections. He experienced a sense of estrangement and non-belonging, and he endured this alone. In deep isolation in England, Passarlay attempted to kill himself from a pill overdose. His experiences echo Rosemarie Perez Foster's findings that "the sense of isolation and absence of familial support serves as yet another strike against the already stressed newcomer,"<sup>6</sup> emphasizing the desperate conditions of a child migrating and seeking asylum alone.<sup>7</sup>

Passarlay's experience reflects the types of trauma minors encounter before and after they flee home countries. Perez Foster classifies the traumas sustained by migrant children into four categories organized by stages: traumatogenic experiences that occur prior to migration, traumatic events during transit, continuing trauma in efforts of asylum seeking, and conditions in the host country that lead to inadequate care.<sup>8</sup> The fact that so many children are in transit alone without parents or other family members compounds such traumas. Minors that have lost caregivers through death or separation after leaving home countries, or who have experienced their caregivers' own psychological impairment, must survive without interpersonal attachments which offer safety and security. The absence of caregivers and supportive adults is a severe blow to minors on the run.

Children at every stage of development need to have secure relationships to navigate the world. Others, especially those who serve as secure attachment figures, help children build basic trust, establish a sense of safety (internally and environmentally), secure a sense of self and self-worth, and sustain emotional relationships into adulthood. Furthermore, secure and reliable attachment figures provide a crucial defense against stress and trauma. A child who travels alone, with no access to a primary caregiver at all, whether temporarily or permanently, faces the greatest challenges. With the lack of supportive loved ones who mitigate the negative effects of traumatogenic experiences endured before, during, and after migration, minors suffer impairment to healthy development, which perpetuates problems with intimacy, attenuates the feeling of security in relationships, and disrupts their general sense of well-being in the world.<sup>9</sup> Travelling alone, minors must survive with little to no assistance, navigating external threats and managing internal states. What may be most debilitating is that the disruption of attachment constitutes what

Marco Mazzetti calls a “vulnerability factor” which inhibits the development of resilience in migrants and, subsequently, impedes their ability to confront the challenges of adaptation in a host country.<sup>10</sup>

Without social or familial support, minors often struggle against isolation that engenders a deep sense of alienation, bereft of the sense of belonging afforded to them in home countries and within their own families. Without this fundamental base, the need to be rooted, as Simone Weil asserts, goes unmet. For Weil, having roots consists of having an “active and natural participation in the life of a community” which evolves automatically in stable environments.<sup>11</sup> In the case of the unaccompanied minor, rootedness, along with its automatic evolution, is unattainable on the move and at best difficult after arrival in a host country. Acclimating to host countries’ cultures, languages, and social mores poses an additional set of challenges to the active and natural involvement in social life, challenges that are magnified in the face of traumatization and detachment.

In order to probe the effects of the traumatogenic experiences of migration magnified by the loss endured in the absence of a primary attachment figure, and the impact that this loss has in the long term, I will focus on psychological studies. The purpose is to illuminate why unaccompanied children need targeted support systems to cope with the multiple traumas that they have suffered—*independent of how necessary or reasonable it is for them to leave their countries and families.* In the following sections, an exploration of emotional attachment alongside trauma theory will ground a consideration of how attachment forms in infancy and early childhood. Early attachment is critical to human well-being and secures connections with others who are foundational to personality development.<sup>12</sup> Understanding that minors travelling alone are distanced from such connections and often sustain severe trauma leads, in the second section, to the examination of the lasting effects of being deprived of positive and nurturing bonds with parents and/or other consistent caregivers when minors are most in need.

Elucidating the impact of losing parents or close family ties at particular stages of development reinforces an appreciation of the residual effects of detachment from family members, communities, and home, pressing on communities of care to address this gap. The loss of the primary attachment figure establishes a state of disconnection and non-belonging that persists into adulthood. The risks of detachment in adulthood include impairment of basic interactional skills, lowered ability to regulate emotionally, and weakened resilience. The deprivation of core relationships that provide love and nurturing also perpetuates an internal, and often external, state of isolation and makes children especially vulnerable to groups or individuals who exploit their need to belong. The importance of providing unaccompanied migrant children with attachment figures is crucial because what is at stake is

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not only their future mental and physical health, but the overall health of the community in which they reside.

## OVERVIEW OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

Attachment theory, established through research on primates by John Bowlby, and the “Strange Situation Protocol” developed by Mary Ainsworth, offers a lens through which to view early trauma and the magnified effects of trauma on minors who travel alone. Formed through the early child-caregiver relationship, attachment defines the nature of the exchange between a child and a primary caregiver or attachment figure, considered critical by attachment theorists.<sup>13</sup> When the caregiver is physically and mentally attentive to the child, secure, attuned attachment develops. Secure attachment enables the child to feel safe, to trust in the primary attachment figure, to regulate affect, and to have the support to develop autonomy and a sense of self-worth. In contrast, when the caregiver is mentally or physically absent, unable for whatever reason to attune to the child, the secure base that typically forms from that relationship falters. In this case, the attachment becomes insecure. Insecure attachment relationships fall into three categories: avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized.<sup>14</sup> The negative effects of a deficit or disturbance in primary attachment reflected in these styles and subsequent relationships are shown to persist trans-culturally.<sup>15</sup>

Psychologist Jean Mercer emphasizes that attachment theory speaks to a specific set of developmental stages itself based on infant attachment. Her work highlights cognitive and emotional development and attachment addressing significant age periods which theorists have correlated with predictable attachment events for minors: (1) birth to six to eight months; (2) eight months to two and a half years of age; (3) the preschool period—two and a half to five years; (4) the elementary school years; and (5) adolescence.<sup>16</sup> Migrant children of all age ranges travel alone and so remain vulnerable at all stages of development. This is the case even for infants, often born to mothers en route, but who lose parents to death or mothers to sexual violence; therefore, the infants rely on the care of strangers or services of aide in host countries.<sup>17</sup> A high percentage of these children travelling alone also undergo trauma. Trauma may occur at home; for instance, 77 percent of Palestine refugee children from Syria aged one to fourteen experience at least one source of violent discipline.<sup>18</sup> Children in the first five years of life are found to be the most vulnerable to violence during travel and the most underserved by social services in host countries.<sup>19</sup> Further, younger children are the most susceptible to early attachment trauma suffered when they are victims of violence in the home or isolated from a primary caregiver.



Relationships, especially with caregivers and family members, mitigate negative affects, such as fear and shame generated by trauma, serving as powerful forces in nature and constituting deep, genuine connections. From this place of resonance, persons are aware of and responsive to one another. Such connection provides the essential means for the mastery of negative emotional experiences, such as those faced by all, but in greater numbers and severity by refugees, and forms a child's capacity to adapt to external stresses or to recover from trauma. The ability to express positive emotion to others, develop and communicate compassion, tolerate vulnerability, and to both sustain and enjoy the intimacy of interpersonal relationships are foregrounded by having healthy relationships with caregivers and family; migrant children travelling alone are deprived from these nurturing bonds.<sup>20</sup> While some of these children are often reunified with caregivers, those who are not are even more vulnerable. In the absence of a caregiver, family members, or a community to call home, refugee and migrant children face not only uncertain futures but also the fear and apprehension of not having a support network.

Attachment relationships enable a general sense of trust that ensures that susceptibility to negative emotional experiences does not result in such damage to the self or others. In fact, the ability to tolerate negative affect leads to trust of the other and of the self. Stable, secure relationships foster confidence in the constructive responses of others and instill the assurance that negative affective states can be integrated into the self; therefore, these are not denied or repressed.<sup>21</sup> Without someone to whom children of any age can attach, children in general have more painful or frustrating experiences regarding the responses of others and are at an increased risk for repressed affect and defensiveness.<sup>22</sup>

Further, damage to or severing of emotional attachment bonds, as in the lives of minors travelling alone, magnifies the impact of trauma. Susan M. Johnson addresses this phenomenon in her work on strengthening attachment bonds when she discusses how trauma disturbs life, perpetuates suffering, and effects how interpersonal attachments offer relief from trauma's symptoms.<sup>23</sup> In addition, she categorizes isolation and the lack of secure attachments—categories of existence for migrant children—as undermining to resiliency.<sup>24</sup> In an essay surveying longitudinal studies on resilience, Emmy E. Werner surmises that the ability to adapt at forty reflects the nature of primary attachment and can be explained by earlier predictors of resilience primarily in the first decade of life.<sup>25</sup> She groups these predictors into four categories corresponding with greater adaptation, autonomy, less stress, and the ability to attract more sources of emotional support throughout development. It includes the mother's positive interactions with her child at one and two, various sources of emotional support from immediate and extended family between ages two and ten, academic competence at age ten, and the child's



physical health, between birth and two years for girls and between birth and ten years for boys.<sup>26</sup>

The absence of attachment figures, thus, impedes the development of resistance, intensifying and perpetuating the consequences of trauma. Traumatic aftermath includes the victim's being flooded with fear, a vision of the world as dangerous, a state of overwhelming emotional chaos, threats to a cohesive sense of self, interference in the ability to have self-control, and the muddling of a person's ability to engage in the present.<sup>27</sup> Secure attachment relationships answer such trauma by providing comfort and safe space while providing affect regulation, opportunities for personal integration, self-confidence, new learning and risk taking.<sup>28</sup> Thus, without a safe and loving person to whom they can turn, minors of any age suffer serious deficits and live in a world where human contact represents a threat and not a comfort.

## SEVERED ATTACHMENT AND TRAUMA

A child who experiences trauma needs attachment figures in order to adjust to loss and integrate trauma. This figure can be a parent or another adult, who Bowlby calls a "substitute mother."<sup>29</sup> The need for the attachment figure is more critical than who functions in this role (mother, father, aunt, etc.). Without someone in the primary caregiver role, sustained traumas arrest development and leave permanent wounds in the child's psyche that have both mental and physical repercussions. Confirmation of this phenomenon can be found in the method for treating traumatized children: "what works best," as Perry and Szalavitz assert, "is anything that increases the quality and number of relationships in a child's life."<sup>30</sup>

From a developmental perspective, the longer a child has a secure attachment with a parent, regardless of a loss of that parent, the better. Children who never have secure attachment, or who live with trauma from an early age and then lose parents, are especially at risk.<sup>31</sup> Migrants travelling alone belong to this category. A 2012 study on trauma history of sixty war-affected refugee children in the United States shows that minors generally experience traumatic loss, bereavement, and separation; forced displacement; and community and domestic violence concomitantly.<sup>32</sup> Traumatic loss co-occurred with exposure to war or political violence at a rate of 60.0 percent but was also linked with experiences of domestic violence (35.0 percent), physical abuse (31.7 percent), emotional abuse (30.0 percent), or impairment in the child's caregiver due to depression, other illness, drug or alcohol abuse, or extreme poverty, inhibiting the effective role of the caregiver.<sup>33</sup>

A later 2017 report summarizing research on the traumatogenic experiences of migrant children that present risk factors to growth and flourishing

show similar trends and can be categorized according to Perez Foster's stages. Jennifer Teska and Megan Rabin detail the common traumatic events migrant minors travelling alone sustain prior to departing from home countries:

exposure to conflict, war, and/or persecution, being confined to their homes or forced to flee because of chaos and violence, being separated from families, witnessing the death or disappearance of family and/or community members, and being threatened, physically and/or sexually abused, held captive, tortured, and/or forced to participate in violence.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, these children may have also endured trauma that their respective cultures sanctioned such as female genital mutilation or child marriage prior to departure. During transit, unaccompanied children face harsh circumstances such as "starvation, mistreatment by smugglers, exploitation, and trafficking."<sup>35</sup> Their plight is often not lessened by arrival in host countries where continuing trauma emerges in the efforts of asylum seeking, as a result of conditions in a host country that lead to inadequate care, and in being confronted with different laws, customs, and language barriers.<sup>36</sup> Facing such obstacles alone constitutes a challenge for children of any age.

Further, a report by the UNHCR on the susceptibility of migrant children and caregivers to trauma recognizes that unaccompanied and separated children are "highly vulnerable," and at higher risk for either serious immediate or future harm if children have endured physical, sexual, or emotional abuse at home, neglect, or exploitation (being forced to work).<sup>37</sup> The reality of not having an attachment figure in such cases is severe. The lack of provision of secure attachment ensures that a child's exposure to trauma such as war constitutes a more severe problem than the impact of war on parents or even the physical and sexual abuse inflicted on a child by a parent.<sup>38</sup> The greatest loss amounts to the loss of someone who provides attachment, comfort, and support.

Having experienced oppression, torture, and other forms of organized violence along with suffering the trauma of war, the absence of a migratory plan (likely the case for children), poverty, loss, and stresses related to learning a new culture (not understanding the language of the host country and going from rural to urban environments), children face serious impediments in their ability to recover from trauma. Further, the permanent or temporary severing of familial bonds undermines the ability to trust others. The struggle to trust obstructs adaptation to environments in host countries as it accounts for trepidation in approaching adult relationships, difficulty in expressing emotions, and obstacles to forming shared communities in the new foreign home. The failure to develop basic levels of trust manifests in children who have suffered war-related experiences and psychosocial stress (separation

from a parent), as they are more likely to develop depression, anxiety, and aggression.<sup>39</sup> The result is fear and distance from others. These minors cannot with ease settle into a relationship and may, instead of adhering to rules and regulations, thwart authority figures that represent them. Alternatively, they may be easily persuaded by authority figures, as in the case of children recruited to be child soldiers. This persuasion, a current and increasing area of study, cajoles children who are isolated in refugee camps, and therefore economically exploited, to become part of a group that often both offers an adult leader and some promise of payment or moral reward.<sup>40</sup>

A failure to develop basic levels of trust also leads to the inability to feel secure and safe in the world, inhibiting self-regulation and the skills needed to modulate “physiological, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive experience.”<sup>41</sup> Marked by the ability to self-soothe and to control impulses, regulation includes the self’s ability to make corrective adjustments in behavior that originates from within.<sup>42</sup> Attachment to primary caregivers provides the context for understanding how to make such adjustments and safely connect to others.<sup>43</sup> Damage to the caregiving relationship results in an undermining of the ability to regulate leading to a dysregulated internal state, impeded decision making, and the inability to respond with flexible emotional reactions to external stimuli. Furthermore, in a state of dysregulation or alarm, a child cannot process verbal information or engage in learning, a serious impediment for migrant children adapting to a host country.<sup>44</sup> Instead, dysregulation impairs the ability to focus on future planning and so therefore disenables a child from being able to assess the repercussions of their behavior. Dysregulation can also happen with very little incitement, triggered by seemingly innocuous stimuli including eye contact and friendly touch.<sup>45</sup> This is due to impediments in the “regulating capacities of the cortex: the brainstem acts reflexively, impulsively and often aggressively to any perceived threat.”<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps one of the greatest and most insidious consequences of the inability to self-soothe and connect to others as a result of severed attachment is the inability to modulate shame. Shame, recognized as a primary affect underlying insecure attachment and symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder, interferes with a sense of self-worth. Shame also arrests the instinct to connect with other people. Physiologically, the affect literally motivates the body to withdraw—at the point of contact—with averted eyes or slumped shoulders—or after the point of contact—where any self-exposure becomes embarrassing, and the simple act of being vulnerable through eye contact is painful. Shame also motivates violence, a more obvious manifestation of the rejection of another person. Severed attachments therefore have the effect of disturbing a person’s sense of wholeness. As a result, pathologies centered on acquiring safety replace empathetic modes of being, and shame inhabits the body, truncating the possibility for further empathic connection.

For migrant and refugee children, this could manifest in depression and hopelessness, affective barriers to making the necessary human connection needed to acquire and establish safety which then supports empathic development. Non-belonging to a social group and language barriers also serve as obstacles for the exchange of empathy with people from the host country, as does political rhetoric of stigmatization, to these marginalized and therefore shamed groups.

When situations of trauma accompany severed attachment, the stakes increase. The default mode of reaction to stress becomes the flight/fight/freeze response, which takes place in the sympathetic nervous system communicating to the body a need to escape, exert violence, or feign death. Affectively, these urges can be articulated as a shame response in the form of withdrawal, attack, or avoidance. According to Babette Rothschild, shame renders individuals speechless in the flight/fight/freeze response, but shame also disables the ability to either refute or respond to intimacy often manifested in physical touching. In the case of abusive or intrusive contact, the trauma survivor interprets the experience of freezing, or “going dead,” as a failure to act; the experience of shame accompanies this perception of failure. This situation emerges in cases of rape, torture, and physical/sexual violence and abuse, where survivors fault themselves for somehow causing the attack and for being unable to respond to attackers in any form of defense.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in trauma, the proximity and sense of closeness that eases shame becomes inaccessible because that very closeness constitutes a threat. If safety is a prerequisite to human functioning, and safety is lacking, a pattern often experienced by unaccompanied migrant children who have endured compounded trauma, then the key to adjustment and acclimation—connection with others—cannot be fully accessed.

Shame also emerges when an individual feels stigmatized or perceives him/herself as existing outside of a group. For migrants and refugees, this status can nearly always be assumed. Stigmatization and ostracization evoke powerful feelings of non-belonging. This emotional state can be debilitating. In such cases, the stigmatized person might bear a posture of “false bravado,” or conversely, assume a posture of “defensive cowering” and the impetus to hide manifested in shame.<sup>48</sup> Most often, the stigmatized vacillate rapidly between these two poles. Postures of “toughness” or “bravado” constitute attempts of the person in shame to experience an affect perceived as less painful than shame. Patterns of defense include withdrawal (escape), avoidance (repression), attacking the self, and attacking the other.<sup>49</sup> Within each category, an entire behavioral repertoire persists consisting of an aggregate system of affect management or ways that an individual has adapted to manage the shame affect. The function and aim of the strategy is to transmute shame, “to make it feel different.”<sup>50</sup> Each defense serves as a means of burying shame

beneath some other affective experience to greater or lesser degrees. Relationships suffer, and instead of turning toward others to seek attunement, the shamed self falls deeper into a sense of isolation and affective humiliation. Passarlay recounts this in his own narrative—acknowledging that without his foster parents, his situation would have turned grave and isolation would have overcome him.

## NON-BELONGING AND THE DESIRE FOR THE GROUP

Simone Weil presents her concept of rootedness through the image of the tree, which needs roots in order to grow and bear fruit. Without roots, this tree will fall “at the first blow.”<sup>51</sup> Every human, in her estimation, like the tree, “needs to have multiple roots,”<sup>52</sup> otherwise the person experiences a state of “uprootedness,” which Weil likens to a disease provoked by at least two scenarios: money and war.<sup>53</sup> Her metaphors are apt. The toppled tree which can no longer grow replicates an illness that adversely affects a person’s physical and mental health. Children travelling alone suffer from the “disease” of uprootedness. On the move alone, children suffer multiple wounds, from the loss of attachment figures to the stigmatization of being an outlier in a new host country, which alters their self-perception, coping styles, psychological well-being, and the ability to integrate traumatic experiences. These minors experience a dramatic shift in the psyche that produces, in Mazzetti’s words, “an irreversible change in how they viewed themselves in the world”<sup>54</sup> which disrupts the ability to assimilate to a new culture or worse, to develop a sense of belonging in that society.

When minors reach a host country, the pain of migration might be ameliorated to some degree, but without familial or social ties sociocultural adjustment presents itself as an arduous, even seemingly insurmountable undertaking. These children are challenged to find a support network or develop a sense of belonging in their new environment. Without stable human connection and reciprocity, the status of “going alone” is amplified. “Human[s] have a deep psychological need to belong,”<sup>55</sup> and this need goes unmet. If, as Farhad Dalal asserts, “one’s psychological health depends enormously on the kinds of places one finds oneself belonging to,”<sup>56</sup> the isolated minor severed from family connections is left with a severe deficit.

Despite the risks related to the group to which one attaches, the desire to attach indicates that the motivational system of attachment has not been completely ruptured. The longing to attach evidences the presence of resilience. The search to find a group to which to belong is combined with the need to establish safety, attain emotional regulation, intimacy with others, and the ability to share emotional experiences. Research has shown that group

growth relies on interpersonal bonds.<sup>57</sup> Many different types of people, not solely family members, can fulfill attachment figures; for the refugee child, this can sometimes be a detriment. Refugee youth are often recruited to be child soldiers. Commanders sometimes become attachment figures for these children.<sup>58</sup> In many circumstances, children have been forced to commit atrocities against their families, with the purpose of breaking bonds and preventing them from returning to their communities. In addition to the suffering and abuse incurred by removal from the primary caregiver, children develop ambiguous loyalty as “insiders.”<sup>59</sup> Stigmatization as “rebels,” by both family and community, hinders children from developing normal social contacts and reintegrating into civilian society.<sup>60</sup>

Connections to any attachment figures are critical for recruitment and retention of minors. In the building of insurgent or deviant groups, attachment to group members is privileged over acceptance of ideology and also a prerequisite, so necessary for the initial formation of the group and for continued engagement.<sup>61</sup> Randy Blazak’s ethnographic research on hate group consolidation shows that men who identify as Nazi skinheads understand when youth experience themselves as anomalous or unusual, therefore outside of “normal” social groups, including boys of nonwhite ethnicity, and solicit them for group allegiance.<sup>62</sup> “These populations [are] targeted,” Blazak writes, “because of their desire for structure, a subcultural solution to their anomie, as well as their need for consistent models of authority and masculinity. They [are] easily manipulated and brought into the fray of right-wing hate groups.”<sup>63</sup> Without a connection to a secure attachment figure who helps a child build both self-worth and a sense of purpose in the world, such manipulation is made easier. Addressing this need in refugee children would help thwart this kind of manipulation.

Group leaders understand their positions as attachment figures, articulating their roles as “big brothers” or “friends in need.” In targeting boys who identify as abnormal, stigmatized, or isolated, they offer “a sympathetic ear, a critical explanation of the problem, and an action program that appears to (somewhat) resolve the problem.”<sup>64</sup> Successful recruiting to any group is based on the need to have a personal, nurturing connection. These relationships form the cornerstone of group growth and illustrate that emotional reciprocity and trust are key to building the group.

Passarlay records in his memoir how he himself was at risk for solicitation from a deviant group, reflecting the precarious lives of children who find themselves separated from primary attachment figures and angry about their situations.

Some of my friends got involved in extremist radical Islamist groups. These groups prey on the vulnerable and the lonely. They offer friendship and

brotherhood and are masters at seizing on and manipulating a person's trauma or unsolved issues. I was still angry inside and struggling to find my way in a new culture, so it wouldn't have been hard to brainwash me. I was invited to attend talks and certain mosques that had more radical agendas, but luckily for me I was too busy to go because I had all my other activities going on. Without that I might have gone down the extremist path myself.<sup>65</sup>

At least two things enabled Passarlay to refute solicitation. First, his separation from his mother or primary caregiver happened when he was twelve, so that his more formative years were shaped by her care. Second, as he articulates, he was busy, but also at this point in the narrative he was living with a foster family "which helped his depression fade away."<sup>66</sup> His connection to this family was crucial. He expresses concern for his friends not as fortunate as he was and who were drawn to radical preachers because "they were lonely, and had nothing to do, no money, no support."<sup>67</sup> Passarlay's words emphasize the importance of human to human connection, and how with it, children are healthier, resilient, and capable of thriving. For migrant minors then, reunification and education about trauma-related stress and response is useful, but also minors benefit from developing friend networks among other children who have travelled alone in order to develop resilience and engage in shared problem solving.<sup>68</sup>

In a report for the United Nation Children's Fund, An Michels emphasizes the need for connection among children, vulnerable to subsequent abuse and exploitation, who are subjected to the loss of an attachment figure. Michels points out that migrant children travelling alone have "often limited access to basic necessities such as shelter, education, and health" which has "important implications for their physical and psychosocial development."<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, and perhaps most egregiously, the absence of an attachment figure and a subsequent "social support system can make it more difficult for children to participate safely in transitional justice systems," set up to protect their human rights.<sup>70</sup> Thus, support systems that work toward security for these minors serve both as a means of protection and as a defense against the multiple traumas inherent in migration. Such systems which offer emotional connection, as well as social and legal assistance, must be established as expeditiously as possible for minors seeking refuge in host countries.

The importance of bonding and attachment has not gone unrecognized by the Catholic Church. In fact, the United States Conference of Bishops calls for the rapid identification of unaccompanied and separated children as refugees and as children in need of protection. They urge the State Department to take action by establishing comprehensive systems for unaccompanied and separated refugee minors which connect early identification with assessments of vulnerability, provisions for care, timely solutions, and adjustments to care



and long-term solutions for children “as circumstances change, or new opportunities or new risks emerge (durable solutions include resettlement, local integration, and voluntary repatriation).”<sup>71</sup> At the heart of the Bishops’ argument rests Catholic Social Teaching, namely that the human person is both sacred and *social*. At the root of the social character lies the family, where the person “learns how to interact with and engage the wider community.”<sup>72</sup> This assertion corresponds to a great degree with the psychological presupposition that relationality is the key to resilience, and that attachment to caregivers provides the framework from which to function in healthy human relationships. Accordingly, the bishops recognize the limitations of shelters, and the need for children to be reunited with family members or placed into community-based foster care as rapidly as possible. The initiatives pressed by the bishops correspond with research showing that migrant and refugee minors must be provided with a platform, whatever the method may be, of establishing safety and trust.<sup>73</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In facing the crisis of migrant minors travelling alone, understanding the cumulative trauma that these children experience is imperative. The effects of trauma of any kind increases and is made worse by severed attachment. Those who are at most risk are minors travelling alone who have experienced trauma prior to migration. Regardless of trauma endured before, during, and after migration, detachment from a primary caretaker remains a serious deficit to children of any age in their adjustment to host countries. Lack of a primary caregiver that promotes secure attachment is a major inhibitor of wellness, adaptation, and assimilation/ integration. This leaves children vulnerable and at risk for a variety of maladaptive responses to migration. Issues of non-belonging and desires to belong are compounded in this climate.

The challenge to researchers, ethicists, and community members is how to provide secure attachment to children who, having travelled alone, arrive in host countries without parents. Agencies, institutions, organizations, and individuals would be best to understand that attachment is critical for these children so that they begin to embrace self-worth and a sense of purpose, so that they are able to make meaning of their suffering. These capabilities do not occur in isolation after extensive trauma. It is worth repeating Perry and Szalavitz’s assertion that helping children who have endured trauma includes increasing the number of relationships they form. This sentiment is shared by other researchers and finds strong support in Catholic Social Teaching. In speaking about the plight of migrant minors, Jessica Stern responded to an audience member’s question related to what we can do: the most vulnerable



refugees, she asserted, are those who feel alienated.<sup>74</sup> “Any way that we address this alienation,” she posited, “is a step in the right direction.”<sup>75</sup>

## NOTES

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5. Gulwali Passarlay, *The Lightless Sky: A Twelve-Year-Old Refugee's Extraordinary Journey Across Half the World* (New York: Harper Collins: 2016).

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7. Passerlay's story is not an isolated one, and it raises issues of young people's perceptions of their own situations, their integration into society or not, and the governmental and policy impacts created by the number of minors travelling alone. These concerns and many more are outlined, discussed, and analyzed from various viewpoints through research conducted by Elain Chase, Nando Sigona, and their research team, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the United Kingdom. See especially the Becoming Adult Conference proceedings (2017) at “Becoming Adult: Researching Young Migrants' Uncertain Futures,” Economic and Social Research Council, University of Oxford, and University of Birmingham, Accessed July 13, 2018, <https://becomingadult.net>.

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## *Chapter 4*

# **Unaccompanied Refugee Children and Adolescents and Access to Vocational Training in Germany—with a Focus on Bavaria**

Philip M. Anderson

This chapter deals with the situation of young unaccompanied minors in Germany with specific reference to their access to vocational training. It is based on findings from a four-year research project the author completed in 2016 which was commissioned by the Schools Department of the City of Munich municipality. The chapter focuses on the situation in Bavaria, which was a main receptor of the hugely increased flow of refugees<sup>1</sup> in 2014–2016.

This chapter will not treat the mass immigration of refugees into Germany between 2014 and 2016, but it is the “game changing” background that puts the pedagogic-political strategies that this chapter examines into stark focus.

After a brief consideration of the role of intercultural skills, the broad educational situation of unaccompanied minors (henceforth UMs, the expression employed in German debate) is discussed, detailing the Vocational Integration Courses (VIC) which have been phased in and greatly expanded in the 2011–2017 period in Bavaria.

These classes have attained a role-model character across Germany as preparation and orientation of refugees on the path to vocational training. These are two-year courses for 16 to 21-year-olds (with exceptions up to 25 years) that convey language skills and a grounding in the German school system as well as a phase of vocational training orientation through internships. They culminate in a school certificate, which—ideally—result in an apprenticeship in a recognized trade.

With the huge rise in asylum seekers entering Germany in the period of 2014–2016 these classes have expanded enormously, from a few hundred



students in the principal cities of Munich and Nuremberg in 2011–2012 to a total of 1,150 classes with places for 22,000 pupils in the 2016–2017 school year.<sup>2</sup>

The article features the UMs' own view of their educational, job, and social situation. This was a central aspect of the author's findings, and discussions with practitioners showed these results to be of particular interest. The article concludes with an assessment of ongoing intercultural pedagogic and job-training challenges and some suggestions on how to address these at local level.

## CULTURALLY SENSITIVE WORK APPROACHES

In pedagogic or social work contexts it is always important to be aware of a tendency toward a Eurocentric view, or a more subtle potpourri of assumptions which are culturally determined. In the German context training courses on developing intercultural skills have increased enormously, corresponding in the last few years to a drastic increase in demand from a whole range of professions in the social, health, and educational sectors—from social pedagogues via child and adolescent psychiatrists to teachers in schools/classes of every type and grade.

Professionals working in particular with asylum seeker families or unaccompanied refugee children have to be aware of the dangers of “culturally tinted spectacles” as the German expression has it. Thus the ability to change one's culturally determined perspective (*What is the other person's take on this situation?*) is an essential element in developing culturally sensitive skills and minimizing potential sources of conflict.<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand, it is important not to ignore one's own values and concepts; on the other to display a readiness for culturally sensitive dialogue and exchange. This is all the more true when dealing with refugees who have entered Germany in recent years who—in contrast to the generation of those with a migration background who have grown up in Germany—have experienced social conditioning outside the European context. The great majority of those entering the country as asylum seekers experience a “steep learning curve” in the course of a process of forced migration. They encounter, and must come to grips with, people with differing cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds on a daily basis and in varied contexts.

Discussions on the need for a “guiding culture” (*Leitkultur*), which have been a staple of German intercultural and migration debate for over a decade, are of little help in professional, social, health, and educational practice. Taking on board a “dynamic” notion of culture is more appropriate, that is, one which does not pin down refugees to a specific ethnic-cultural-religious

context, but rather views them as actors in a framework of the multilayered process of mixed and forced migrations.<sup>4</sup>

Set against this background the statement of an Anglican pastor in a parish in East London (United Kingdom) in the course of a discussion with the author some years ago may be deemed appropriate. At that time, an African family facing deportation had been living for nearly three years in “sanctuary” on the grounds of the church.

His view regarding processes of long-term intercultural understanding was that “*Sex is a great leveler!*” What he meant was that in conditions of ever-increasing global mobility manifold encounters and relationships—including those of an erotic nature—lead to transnational connections of an increasingly varied and complex character. Rigid immigration regimes are per se inflexible and anachronistic in the face of this unprecedented dynamism in human reach and global mobility. It is the task of receiving societies in times such as these to meet this challenge as constructively as possible.

### UNACCOMPANIED MINORS ARRIVING IN GERMANY: THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL SITUATION

Unaccompanied minors under eighteen years of age are absorbed into the youth service system and after an initial *clearing phase* are allotted a place in a residential group for unaccompanied minors—assuming there are no adult relatives in the European Union with whom family reunion can be initiated.<sup>5</sup> The first goal of the newly arrived is to get their bearings, in the comprehensive sense to actually “arrive” in the here and now. In this context, the broad range of supportive networks for refugees which sprouted everywhere in Germany in the period 2014–2015 is very important. Voluntary helper groups in larger and medium-sized towns as well as in rural villages often provide sustained longer-term support both for refugee families and unaccompanied young people. This mobilization of local policy-makers, administration and professionals, especially in the educational, health, and social sectors—together with civil society engagement—has enabled absorption and day-to-day integration of refugees. It has also turned their reception into a “mainstream” topic in German public discourse and policy-making.

If we examine the lives of the newly arrived unaccompanied minors we get an idea of the range of challenges they face. The top priority is learning the language, but they have to cope with the challenges of strange cultural surroundings, homesickness, grief, and loss of their loved ones. Then there is the issue of trauma. Studies proceed from the assumption that at least 50 percent of unaccompanied minors suffer from some degree of traumatization.<sup>6</sup> One of the important tasks facing care and social workers, teachers and

other professionals is recognizing the symptoms: sudden outbreaks of fright, blackouts, aggressive outbursts—but also apathy, pronounced sensitivity to light or loud noises, insomnia, or acute withdrawal behavior. In the Bavarian context the special training courses and professional counseling offered by the *Refugio* organization, based in Munich, are of great value. This psychotherapeutic institute has specialized in the treatment of traumatized refugees and the victims of torture for over twenty years and has developed considerable expertise in therapeutic sessions conducted through specially trained interpreters.<sup>7</sup>

Practitioners emphasize the importance of getting access to language courses off the ground as soon as possible. The legal terrain is complex here, as access to courses is dependent on the intermeshing constellation of the individual asylum application, residential status, and availability of courses on the ground. In practice, local voluntary networks often work in tandem with residential unit care workers to enable participation in a language course as soon as possible. Over time—and especially with the drastic reduction of new entries from 2017—provision of language tuition has been made possible on a comprehensive basis.

## THE UNACCOMPANIED MINORS' VIEW

The author's interviews and research form the basis of the following observations on the situation of the unaccompanied minors in Germany.<sup>8</sup> Apart from young asylum seekers themselves, expert interviewees/interlocutors included teachers, social workers, therapists, administrative workers, local politicians, and others.

The group of refugees that has entered Germany in the last few years is extremely heterogeneous. This fact was emphasized repeatedly by expert interviewees, and herein reside the educational and vocational training challenges. Their social and educational backgrounds vary enormously and these factors intermesh with intellectual and experiential elements to determine levels of performance and achievement. Some unaccompanied minors will begin by wrestling with the basics of literacy in order to begin to learn the (German and native) language. At the other end of the spectrum there will be pupils who have had nine or ten years of schooling, speak good English, have a grounding for an academic course in the foreseeable future—and may well have thought ahead to save their certificates in their cell phones before taking flight.

Soft skills are an essential part of the picture in terms of social acceptance, especially by their central European peer group: the young Syrian from Aleppo who speaks good English, has varied contacts on Facebook

and Instagram, followed the latest Hollywood films and is conversant with hip-hop culture will establish contact much more easily than, say, the young Afghan from a mountainous region with very little schooling, possibly a long and stressful period of forced migration because of lack of funds—as well as little experience of young women of his age who do not wear the veil. The latter will feel much more inhibited by the notion of *do's and don'ts* in the German disco than will his Syrian counterpart.

In interviews emphasis was put upon how important it is for young people to feel free and autonomous. After a time of insecurity and the tribulations of the migration process these young people need a time to get acclimatized, to *just be*, in order to recover something of their lost childhood (as one therapist put it). The need for support and for role models is an essential element in this, and the social workers in residential units or teachers and social workers at school are often key figures who can assume this role.

From a (social) pedagogic point of view it should be borne in mind that these young men (more than 80 percent are men) have an “assignment” to fulfill: they have been chosen to have the chance to get a good qualification and find a job in order to earn a good income. This is why the family of origin “invested” a considerable sum in the form of payment to the human smuggler. In an age of virtual communication these familial expectations are much more ever-present (in the classroom, wherever the adolescent is living, in their contacts with other young people from their home area) than, say, twenty years ago. The social media, the tweets, or the mobile phone messages mean that family members are consistently in the picture—sometimes, so teachers report, almost to the extent of being invisible presences in the classroom.

The accommodation situation plays a vital role in success or failure at school or during an apprenticeship. In residential groups for unaccompanied minors the young people have as a rule a) the peace and quiet to do their school and homework, b) the resources to get extra tutoring if required, and c) most important, the professional guidance and support to enable them to navigate their way among the 550-odd trades and vocations available in the German system. Thus they can be in a position to make informed choices about a potential apprenticeship or other venues of qualification.

The situation is very different for those over eighteen years who are likely to be in a much more difficult position, because they may well be living in a hostel, maybe sharing a room with three to four other people, mostly adults and often with considerable burdens and stresses of their own. There will be little space and scarcely the requisite peace and quiet to do their homework, after-school tutoring may well not be available, advice on vocational training and apprenticeships will be at a premium. Moreover, there is the “social space” aspect: the young refugees will be acutely aware that they are in a social no-man’s land. The hostel (mostly located in less desirable parts of

town) is not the kind of place you invite your class friends to for a party or to impress your new European girlfriend. Young refugees have to learn to deal with feelings of embarrassment or shame in this context.

Searching for security and a sense of belonging, these young people are constantly undermined by a lack of secure residential status or recognition as a refugee in the narrower legal sense. Professionals pointed out in the interviews that even the fear of an impending deportation order can undermine their charges and render them incapable of concentration on their studies and everyday lives for weeks at a time.

As regards taking on an apprenticeship, the UMs are faced with different types of pressure. There is the economic burden of having to pay back the debt to the human smuggler—who may well be tightening the screw on the home family to receive his money. The relatives will in any event be expecting some kind of “payback” from their sponsored relatives soon, and they may find it hard to grasp why training over three or more years should even be necessary (“What do you mean sales training? You’ve been a salesman in our shop for years!”).

In addition to this certain types of professions may be regarded as less prestigious, for instance in some cultures, working in the building trade is looked down upon as “dirty work.” The issue of working with one’s hands in any context may well be problematic for a young man who has been told by relatives that he *must* attain a university qualification. This is in turn a challenge for the social workers or teachers who have established a trusting relationship with their charges: keeping them on course for an apprenticeship. For, as the latter come to realize how long and stony the path to well-paid work in a qualifications-oriented society like Germany can be, there is the danger they may simply give up in frustration or turn to apparently “easier” but more fraught, and possibly illegal, ways of making quick money.

It is important for the receiving society in general to realize that these processes take time. UMs are (or should be viewed as) candidates for life-long learning. Resources should be made available so that they can have a second (or third) attempt at learning a trade. Once they have learned how things function in Germany, have mastered the language to the extent of comprehending the nuances of specialist terms and have a broader awareness of the range of vocations that they might choose from, the playing field begins to become level. Under these circumstances stable and trusting relationships with experienced and caring professionals (as role models) will be the essential bricks and mortar to motivate the UMs to stay for the long haul into the world of work and not to succumb to a sense of resignation.<sup>9</sup>

Once students have completed their two-year course in the VIC, they hope to find a place for an apprenticeship. Experience has shown that, if possible, some form of *mentoring* is advisable during the initial phase of vocational

training. The linguistic and specialist challenges both at the workplace and at vocational school are considerable. Moreover, whereas the UMs have enjoyed intensive tuition in the (smaller) VIC classes to date, at “conventional” vocational school they are faced with the challenge of specialist language terms relating to their field as well as front-on classroom teaching with limited or no resources for support teaching in smaller groups. In rural areas the pupils may also have to wrestle with the additional difficulty of the strong regional (Bavarian) dialect the teachers may speak. Linguistically and socially, it may well be hard for them to meet the challenges of the different “life worlds” of small-scale business and vocational school.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, there has been over the last few years a coordinated development of supportive labor market integration instruments at the local level for this specific target group. For example, the local labor offices provide resources for measures like the assisted training program, whereby a young asylum seeker is given language and vocational guidance by a social worker on a one-to-one basis. Problems arising at the workplace can also be dealt with, the social worker acting as intermediary, if required. Training supervisors at work, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) are often grateful for culturally sensitive advice regarding their charges, such as information on aspects of Arab custom, culture, and Islam or advice on how to detect signs of trauma. Professional bodies such as the Chambers of Trade and of Industry and Commerce have supported integration at the workplace over the last few years by appointing refugee ombudsmen who advise and organize courses for the SMEs.<sup>11</sup>

## ONGOING CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL REMEDIES

One of the greatest challenges facing the adolescents is the lack of secure residential status and the uncertain perspective of remaining in Germany. This is particularly true if students come from “countries of safe origin,” such as Balkan states like Kosovo and Montenegro, but most controversially from Afghanistan. Policy has become much stricter regarding this group since 2016. The number of Afghani UMs has consistently been among the highest among all UMs. Many young people facing potential deportation have been in Germany for a number of years and are either in training or already have jobs. They dread the “yellow letter” from the Aliens’ Office, stating that they must leave the country voluntarily, failing which they face deportation.

Practitioners complain of a constant sense of underlying uncertainty, which undermines the students’ ability to concentrate on school, become adjusted to life in their new surroundings, and plan for the future. This is why employers have consistently called for a guarantee that asylum seekers who have not

attained recognition as a refugee or another form of secure residential status will be able to remain at least for three years' training plus an additional two years as qualified workers, the so-called *3+2 arrangement*. In practice, this principle has—after much criticism of restrictive policy on the part of the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior (responsible for issuing permits enabling UMs to begin apprenticeships via the Aliens Offices at local level)—been conceded.<sup>12</sup>

There is an ongoing need for access to good-quality language teaching from as early as possible after arrival in the country. Professionals argue that *learning German is the key to integration* and essential even for those asylum seekers whose prospects of remaining are uncertain. They need to lead their everyday lives in Germany; language skills are essential for this and even in the case of removal, knowledge of German may well be regarded as a recognized skill in the home region.

Social participation is a valuable dimension in developing a sense of belonging. Here the voluntary sector is of great importance. One of the striking facts about the influx of refugees from 2014 onward has been the degree of civil society engagement. Rural areas in particular, with the long-established tradition in Germany of people being involved in clubs (*Vereine*) of all kinds, have provided a basis for community involvement. Whether it is the local choir, music and sports clubs, or the local (voluntary) fire service, these spaces allow people to get to know each other and share activities and interests in this broader interactive context where good language skills are not necessarily a prerequisite. Particularly for young asylum seekers soccer is an ideal way to get to know one another and promote uncomplicated inclusive processes with one's peers.<sup>13</sup>

Good intermeshing cooperation on the part of local actors at the municipal level is of particular importance. Some cities have much more experience of development of intercultural policies to prevent conflict between communities and enhance the quality of life for minorities than others, for example, Munich or Nuremberg. Professionals in the social, educational, and health sectors in cities like Munich working in government offices, local government, grassroots initiatives, or campaigning groups have developed networks over the years and meet regularly in workshops and seminars. This has helped bridge ideological gaps, overcome conflicts, and promote a sense of a shared search for practicable, professional solutions to problems. Good, regular communication and mutual respect for differing institutional roles and interests are essential elements in this.

Structures of the youth service need to be flexible and needs-oriented. This means it is important to implement *transitional structures* for those eighteen-year-olds who have lived in residential units and have to move out into hostels or their own accommodation. They still require counseling on vocational



training and jobs as well as support in dealing with the demands of everyday life. The German youth service has good models for promoting independent living for young people who have lived in care. These can be amended for the needs of this target group.

Then there is the need for broad-based *psychotherapeutic support* (for traumatized clients) and training courses and supervision for professionals working with them. These courses should be made available for volunteers as well as the professionally trained. Beyond this there has been a steep rise in the need for supplementary training for child and adolescent psychiatrists as well as for outpatients departments of psychiatric clinics. The issue here for example is how do psychiatric professionals deal with asylum seekers who go into psychosis as a result of their experiences during forced migration? Equally important is the need to provide for qualified interpreters who can meet the challenge of therapeutic translation in a crisis-induced context.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, linguistic, social, and educational integration processes take time. Helping young people with a refugee background adapt to the needs of the vocational training and job market requires a targeted and well thought-out use of resources, and these should be employed on a sustainable basis. Quite apart from the humanitarian-moral dimension of this commitment, it is a long-term “investment” in societal and economic development that will prove to be well worth it.

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated, the term “refugee” will be used in the colloquial sense to describe people with a flight background, irrespective of their status in the asylum system. It will be used interchangeably with “asylum seeker” for easier readability.

2. “Kultusministerium/Bavarian Ministry of Education,” <https://www.km.bayer.n.de/lehrer/meldung/3755/junge-asylbewerber-und-fluechtlinge-koennen-in-ganz-bayern-berufintegrationsklassen-besuchen.html>.

3. See Astrid Erll, and Marion Gymnich, *Interkulturelle Kompetenz—erfolgreich kommunizieren zwischen den Kulturen* (Stuttgart: Klett, 2013).

4. See Georg Auernheimer, ed., *Interkulturelle Kompetenz und pädagogische Professionalität* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2013).

5. “Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft BAG Landesjugendämter: Handlungsempfehlungen zum Umgang mit unbegleiteten minderjährigen Flüchtlingen. Inobhutnahme, Clearingverfahren und Einleitung von Anschlussmaßnahmen,” [http://www.bagljae.de/downloads/118\\_handlungsempfehlungen-umf\\_2014.pdf](http://www.bagljae.de/downloads/118_handlungsempfehlungen-umf_2014.pdf).

6. On the social and therapeutic dimensions of traumatization through forced migration, see Sonja Bergler, *Unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge. Vom Aufbruch im Herkunftsland bis zur Ankunft in Deutschland* (Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2015), and Brigitte Hargasser, *Unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge. Sequentielle*



*Traumatisierungsprozesse und die Aufgabe der Jugendhilfe* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2014).

7. <http://www.refugio-muenchen.de>.

8. See Philip Anderson, “*Lass mich endlich machen!*” *Eine Strategie zur Förderung in der beruflichen Bildung für junge berufsschulpflichtige Asylbewerber und Flüchtlinge (BAF)*. Study for the City of Munich: Landeshauptstadt München, Referat für Bildung und Sport (RBS) 2016.

9. For a culturally sensitive view of the challenges faced by migrants in small and medium-sized enterprises, see Katharina Scharrer, Sybille Schneider, and Margit Stein, eds., *Übergänge von Schule in Ausbildung und Beruf bei Jugendlichen Migrantinnen und Migranten. Herausforderungen und Chancen* (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2012).

10. See documentation with practical tips on preparing young refugees for the challenges of an apprenticeship: ISB (Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung) Handreichung: *Berufsschulpflichtige Asylbewerber und Flüchtlinge*, München 2014, [https://www.isb.bayern.de/download/15501/handreichung\\_baf\\_be\\_schulung.pdf](https://www.isb.bayern.de/download/15501/handreichung_baf_be_schulung.pdf).

11. See “Chamber of Trade and support for vocational training for refugees,” Zentralverband des deutschen Handwerks, <https://www.zdh.de/fachbereiche/arbeitsmarkt-tarifpolitik/integration-von-fluechtlingen>.

12. See “Flyer on 3+2 issued by the local Chamber of Trades/ Bayerische Industrie und Handelskammer,” <https://www.ihk-muenchen.de/ihk/documents/F1%C3%BCchtlinge/BIHK-Flyer-3-2-Regelung.pdf>.

13. See “Street football league in Munich set up in the 1990s, specifically for asylum seekers who—at that time—were unable to access the local youth football clubs,” <http://buntkicktgut.de>.

14. See “Interpreters service in Bavaria specializing in translation in therapeutic and legal contexts for refugees,” <http://www.bayzent.de/dolmetscher-service/informationen>.

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