



**University
of Dundee**

Between Shadow and Solace

The Spiritual Lives of Street Children in Bukavu,
the Democratic Republic of Congo

Eva Francisca Maria Krah

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University of Dundee

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IN MEMORIAM

Patrick Shanahan

Who dedicated his life to street children. He has left a legacy.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of spirituality in the everyday lives of street children and youth (aged 14-20) in Bukavu, The Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite growing scholarly attention to street children's everyday lives and lived experiences, the topic of spirituality has remained underexplored. This study's focus on spirituality - religion and witchcraft - is inspired by the findings of longitudinal, comparative research across Africa (van Blerk, Shand, and Shanahan 2017), revealing the prominence of spirituality in street children's everyday lives (Krah et al. 2016). To access and interpret children's inner (spiritual) lives, this study has complemented ethnographic fieldwork with creative, participatory methods including pictorial interviews, theatre and drawings, designed to facilitate reflexivity and dialogue.

To theoretically assess street children's spiritual beliefs and practices, this thesis draws on Bourdieusian practice theory, whilst moving beyond it by recognizing reflexivity, intentionality and subjectivity.

Research findings indicate spirituality is employed in the context of children's quest for everyday survival on the streets. In particular, this study analyses a 'spiritual practice of survival', which should be seen as twofold: the spiritual practice of *material* survival and the spiritual practice of *moral* survival. For understanding this dual spiritual practice of survival, the importance of the sociocultural environment - 'the field' - for shaping opportunities and limitations for conduct is crucial.

In conclusion, this thesis exposes and explains the centrality of spirituality for children's survival on the streets, enabling children to experience power and create meaning. Ultimately, a focus on lived spirituality allows the unravelling of vulnerable children's agency and the assessment of the interplay between agency and structure. With these insights this study contributes theoretically to ongoing debates in the Sociology of Childhood as well as in the wider fields of Human Geography and Social Anthropology about structure and agency in constrained settings. Taking a person-centred approach, it defines agency as the subjective 'experience and pursuit of possibilities', recognizing the existential complexity of (vulnerable) children, taking full account of intentionality, aspirations and the pursuit of life projects that are constituted in time and place.

Abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GUOTS	Growing Up On The Streets
PEDER	<i>Program d'Encadrements des Enfants de la Rue</i> (Program Supporting Street Children)
MONUSCO	<i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo</i> (United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC Congo)
UNGC	United Nations General Comment (No. 21, on children in street situations, 2017).
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Note – Throughout the thesis I use double quotation marks (“ ”) for direct quotations, either from literature or from research participants. I use single quotation (‘ ’) marks for quotations within quotations but also for expressions that are unusual, folksy, metaphoric, or jargon.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

“It is you the Father, it is you who holds the power of everything,

All I need I will get it through you.

In this world I have searched everywhere but

I have not found a thing of such intelligence but you.

And I know nobody can serve me but you...”

(Nuru, *bile*,¹ interview 31-03-2016).

Nuru² recited the words of his Satanic prayer as we sat together on a brick wall at the fish market of Ludja, overlooking the wide Lake Kivu in the far east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (the DRC). It was around five o’clock in the afternoon and dusk fell over the lake’s shores. The otherwise bustling market activities were coming to an end. Women selling *sambaza* (lake sardines) were filling their baskets with the unsold fish of the day, hoping to vend the last ones on their way home. Soon, we would see the *peke peke* (narrow wooden canoes) setting off from the various shores around us. The young fishermen use lights to attract the *sambaza* and nets spanned between the canoes to catch them. Wearing warm coats to shield against the chilly nights, they will only return by daybreak to sell their catch to the female vendors. While we sat and watched the women raising their baskets on their heads, Nuru narrated his venture into what he called the ‘Second World’.³ He pointed to the place where his journey began:

“You see that place there...not where those fishermen are, but behind that place, where the *motare* [motorcycle taxi drivers] wash their bikes. It was around midnight when we approached that place...they had told me to bring candles of different colours: red and blue. He who accompanied me showed me the position I had to take; with my thumbs and forefingers touching like this [making an

¹ Street child. See section 1.8 for a detailed discussion on the term *bile*.

² Both proper names as well as names referring to specific places within the city of Bukavu itself, including neighbourhoods and markets, have been anonymised for the sake of safeguarding the identity of my informants.

³ This term will be explained in detail in chapter 4, section 4.1.2.

inverted triangle with his hands]. After speaking those words [the prayer], I was told to throw two eggs in the water and write down my name in red ink on a piece of paper. All of a sudden, the water gave way and I found myself in front of a big stair descending into the darkness... They had warned me to never look back and to not be afraid of everything I was going to see...so I resisted my fear and descended. Downstairs there was so much chaos...children were crying, the place was filled with screams. I saw people carrying heavy loads on their backs. I saw men without heads but voices were talking from their mutilated bodies. I continued and along the path there were four girls who were half woman and half fish and they laughed at me. There was lots of light, it took time before my eyes were used to it. I saw many three- and four storey buildings and big cars too. There were snakes everywhere and people with hundreds of eyes staring at me. I saw the kitchen where they prepare human flesh and the place where they shave people's heads... there were human beings being used as chairs with other men sitting on them. Then I was approached by a kind of King. He asked me what I was looking for. Before I could answer, he who had accompanied me suddenly approached out of a dark corner and responded in my name. He told the King I wanted to become a member. While he was talking, he was sipping from a glass of wine, which I then saw was actually blood...it was changing colour when he drank it. This is when I started to become really afraid. Also because there was so much noise...children were crying and, really; I realised I was in a different world. I knew I had to be strong but I started to hyperventilate out of fear. I was still in front of the King and He asked me what I wanted from them. He explained there were different kinds of richness to choose from: richness of money, cars, or you could choose to become a professional football player, or singer... they could give you work, you could become a 'big boss' or you could get all the wisdom from the world. I responded I would come back with my friend and that we would reflect on the options but in my heart I already knew I would choose for richness of money" (Nuru, *bile*, interview 31-03-2016).

Nuru's journey into the Second World, or *kuzimu*⁴ in Swahili, is indicative of what I, in this thesis, explore as the 'spiritual practice' of street children in the Congolese city of Bukavu. Such journeys to the Second World and negotiations with its creatures should be understood as part of a broad and eclectic spiritual repertoire shaping thoughts and practices related to (interactions with) the 'supernatural'. It thus shows the prominence of the supernatural in survival strategies of individuals whose daily lives are defined by existential insecurities and a chronic lack of prospects. Specifically, Nuru's story illustrates what I will explore as the 'spiritual practice of survival': a highly diverse and extraordinarily creative set of tactics and strategies for survival that revolves around the supernatural and its mundane institutions and representatives, such as churches, witchdoctors and pastors. I use the term 'practice' in this thesis to account for both pre-reflexive and strategic behaviour as well as reflexive contemplation. 'Practice' thus

⁴ Hell.

conceptually reconciles bodily and mental practices, including thoughts and aspirations. I choose to use ‘practice’ rather than ‘experiences’ for instance because the term practice implies purposefulness. Subsequently, with ‘spiritual practice’ I mean ‘everyday thoughts and practices related to (interactions with) the ‘supernatural’ and its mundane institutions and representatives’ (see chapter 2, section 2.6.1 for a definition of spirituality). In its totality, this spiritual practice of survival is twofold: I differentiate between the spiritual practice of *material* survival (chapter 5) and the spiritual practice of *moral* survival (chapter 6). The first enables children’s engagements in relations of exchange with (unconventional) spiritual others, spiritual experts and beings. In these relations children negotiate over direct material benefits such as cash and food or magical instrumental objects such as charms that are bought or exchanged in return for denominational loyalty. In contrast, the spiritual practice of moral survival concerns children’s struggle with a certain moral discomfort that is the result of their experiences of getting by as marginal and excluded beings. Through enabling reflexivity and contemplation of the moral self, spirituality offers the realisation of a state of normality the children deeply desire, both in the eyes of God and in the eyes of other people.

Nuru’s journey into *kuzimu* presented above is thus an illustration of the spiritual practice of material survival. It indicates both a child’s fascinating ability to manage and manipulate an incredibly challenging reality *and* the way in which this ability is shaped by the socio-cultural setting and conditions in which he operates. In the light of these observations and with this thesis I aim to contribute to a better understanding of street children’s lived experiences through an ethnographic exploration of their spiritual beliefs and practices, filling the gap of research pointed out by Thomas de Benítez (2011a, 33) on the nexus between religious contexts and street children’s experiences. This focus on the overlooked theme of spirituality will allow me to contribute to the interdisciplinary field of street children studies in particular and the wider Sociology of Childhood in general. Expanding on the emphasis on children’s agency and rights which has for some time been advocated in the Sociology of Childhood (see James and Prout 1990; James, Jenks, and Prout 1998), I furthermore aim to demonstrate and analyse the implications of a focus on lived spirituality for how we understand children’s agency in highly constrained settings. As such, this study connects to one of the crucial ontological dilemma’s that fuel and have fuelled debates in social sciences: the relationship between structure and agency. In line with a common orientation towards this dilemma of structure and agency in anthropology and human geography, the disciplines in which I was trained,

this thesis contributes to knowledge about (culturally mediated) agency at the margins of power.

In this opening chapter, I sketch the background and rationale of my study. In section 1.2, I will outline my proposed contribution to scholarly debates, situating my study within the wider Sociology of Childhood and in the interdisciplinary field of street children studies in particular. In section 1.3, I will present my research question and objectives. In section 1.4 I will then relate my study to the larger *Growing Up On The Streets* research project and explain my choice for the fieldwork location. In section 1.5 I will describe my methodology. Then in section 1.6 I will introduce the field site in more detail. In section 1.7 I will shed light on the profound existential insecurities that characterise street life in Bukavu and which, to a large extent, determine how spirituality is lived by the city's street children. Then in section 1.8 I will introduce my research participants. Finally, in section 1.9 I will provide an outline for the rest of the thesis.

1.2 Towards a better understanding of street children's lived experiences

Academic studies of street children and youth have seen a change of perspective, referred to as a 'paradigm shift', with the turn of the 21st century (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003; Panter-Brick 2002). Inspired by the Sociology of Childhood, the attention has shifted from considering individual street children as 'sites of problems' - as either victims or delinquents - to seeing them as interacting with a variety of environments in which they are capable social agents (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003, Holloway and Valentine 2000; van Blerk 2005; van Blerk 2006; Beazley 2003). Whereas older work on street children mainly identified characteristics of a street lifestyle - mapping these 'sites of problems' - more recent contributions tend to focus on the way children are active in the construction of their own lives (see for example Hecht 1998; Márquez 1999; Young 2003; Van Blerk 2005; Conticini and Hulme 2007; Herrera, Jones and Thomas de Benítez 2009; Conticini 2005; Evans 2006; Butler 2009; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010; Bordonaro 2012; Drybread 2013). Central to this endeavour we find the emphasis on recognizing children's agency and rights. The notion of agency in particular should be seen as the most defining yet not uncontested concept of the 'new' paradigm (van Blerk 2005; Gigengack 2008; Bordonaro 2012).

By looking for 'evidence' of agency, researchers have indeed paid increasing attention to street children's actions in "everyday life" (Thomas de Benítez 2011a, 20)

yet the question remains to what extent they have truly succeeded in putting children's voices at the centre of analysis (as pleaded for by James and Prout 1990). Specifically, there has been increasing critique on the uncritical use of a "celebratory" notion of agency: an unreflexively positive understanding of street children's agency in which societal constraints as well as children's vulnerability, self-destruction and indifference are not sufficiently acknowledged (Gigengack 2014b; Gigengack 2008; Durham 2008a; Jones, Herrera, and Thomas de Benítez 2007). In response, many scholars have tried to construct a more nuanced and contextualized perspective on agency (including Honwana 2005; Klocker 2007; Robson and Ansell 2006; Gigengack 2008; Bordonaro 2012; Payne 2012; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2013; van Blerk 2012). I position my own work in agreement with these scholars who, despite general recognition of the importance of the Sociology of Childhood's core assumption that children are capable social agents - encourage critical standpoints as to how agency is demonstrated and interpreted in empirical accounts. In doing so, I argue, we can and should shift the current focus further: from contemplating street children's *lives* (how their lives are) to their *lived experiences* (how *they* see and value their lives). This requires studying street children with "ethnographic depth and vision" as Gigengack (2008, 1) pleads for, looking at "how these young people themselves see the world, what *they* do, and how *they* feel" (2008, 7).

My exploration of spirituality can be considered an attempt to explore these lived experiences of Congolese street children. It employs an ethnographic and person-centred approach that allows me to (a) unravel the diversity of individual spiritual practices, and (b) unearth children's inner lives by means of facilitating reflexivity and dialogue. Studying spirituality illustrates the complexity of children's agency in constrained settings. In particular, it reveals possibilities and limitations that relate to children's place and position.

To assess theoretically lived spirituality and these implications for agentive (im)possibilities in my study, a strong theorization of 'practice' was needed. I have therefore looked at the way social theorists have conceptualized agency and structure beyond childhood studies. Ultimately, I chose to work with practice theory because it suits my project best, being a broad and capacious theoretical framework that aims to overcome the structure-agency opposition in social sciences. Specifically, my approach is rooted in Bourdieusian theory (Bourdieu 1971; 1977; 1986; 1990; 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) whilst moving beyond it by recognizing reflexivity, intentionality and subjectivity. My conceptual repertoire thus consists of Bourdieusian concepts of field,

doxa and capital complemented with the notion of subjectivity for which I draw on Ortner (2006), a contemporary practice theorist. Ultimately this conceptual framework allows me to problematize children's agency and assess the complexity of its manifestation on the streets of Bukavu.

1.3 Research question and objectives

My central research question is:

“What is the role of spirituality in street children's everyday lives growing up in a context of grave existential insecurity in Bukavu, the Democratic Republic of Congo?”

In answering this research question, this study has the objectives to:

- 1) Gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of spirituality in street children's lived experiences.
- 2) Re-conceptualise (structure and) agency of street children through an empirical assessment of spirituality.
- 3) Provide methodological insights on how to study (street) children and/or spirituality.
- 4) Inform (inter)national policy and practice concerning the role of spirituality in the lives of African street children and youth.

1.4 Relation of the thesis to the *Growing Up on the Streets* research project

Although an autonomous piece of academic research in itself, my study is embedded within the *Growing Up On The Streets* research project (hereafter GUOTS). GUOTS is a longitudinal participatory research project following 198 street children and youth (aged 14-20) in Accra (Ghana), Harare (Zimbabwe) and Bukavu (the DRC) for three years (Shand, van Blerk and Hunter 2017).⁵ This research project aims to highlight the complex lives and difficult choices experienced by young people living on the streets in African cities. It was locally hosted by NGO partners in Accra (Catholic Action for Street

⁵ GUOTS has been developed and delivered as a collaborate project by Dr. Wayne Shand (research director) as an independent consultant, Prof. Lorraine van Blerk (research director) from the University of Dundee, Patrick Shanahan (research director) as the co-founder of the UK-based charity StreetInvest and Janine Hunter from the University of Dundee, as the researcher coding and analysing the data.

Children and Street Girls Aid)⁶; Bukavu (PEDER)⁷; and Harare (Aids Counselling Trust and latterly Street Empowerment Trust)⁸. It pioneered a unique participatory approach for which six young people living on the streets in each city were trained in basic ethnographic methods to be researchers, reporting on their own lives and experiences on the street and engaging with a group of ten young people within their social network (Van Blerk, Shand and Shanahan 2017).

These cohorts of 66 young people in each city provided a regular narrative on their lives and contributed to thematic discussions structured around a set of ‘capability’ statements. Inspired by Sen’s (1999) and Nussbaum’s (2000) capability approach, ten capability statements were developed through a pilot study with street children and youth in Accra and Harare as reflecting the aspects of life most important to them (Shand 2014). Capability statements included for example: “I am able to move freely and be safe in my local area”, “I am able to earn enough money to meet my basic needs”, “I usually have enough to eat”, “I frequently receive the support of friends”, etc. In this pilot study, the theme of spirituality surfaced, but it seemed to be part of other capabilities that were more strongly represented and the researchers chose to not include it as a distinct capability statement (Shand and van Blerk 2018, personal correspondence).

The rationale for working with a refined capability approach framework was to be able to move beyond a focus on young people’s vulnerabilities on the streets to rather explore their capabilities and those aspects of life that the young people themselves have reason to value (Van Blerk, Shand and Shanahan 2017). The capability statements provided both the conceptual framework for understanding choices and constraints in the everyday life of African street youth and a methodological structure to collect and organise the participants’ narratives.

The six trained research assistants (RAs) in each city engaged in weekly informal interviews with a project manager from the local NGO partner, to narrate about their lives and that of the ten young people from within their social network. These interviews were complemented with quarterly focus groups, structured around the ten capability statements, in which the whole cohort of 66 young people participated. In addition, a baseline survey of all participating young people was conducted at the start and repeated every year (Van Blerk, Shand and Shanahan 2017).

⁶ <http://www.casghana.org/>.

⁷ <http://pederdc.org/>.

⁸ <http://www.actzimbabwe.org/>. and <https://sites.google.com/site/streetempowermenttrust/home>.

All data was analysed by the project team through a comprehensive process of coding, using the qualitative data analysis package NVivo, managed by the University of Dundee. Interviews and focus group discussions were coded for the capability statements, but also for other emerging themes that were coded as ‘free nodes’ in the data set. One such ‘free node’ that emerged consisted of references to spirituality. This theme of spirituality featured with such prominence and in relation to all ten capability statements throughout the data set that GUOTS researchers decided more in-depth research was needed to understand the complex manifestations and implications of spirituality in the lives of young people growing up on the streets in Africa. My PhD project is thus the outcome of this recognition of the importance of spirituality for street life as a whole.

Seen the prominence and urge with which spirituality featured in GUOTS data it is even more surprising that the topic has received very little attention in (other) street children studies, in particular because religion and witchcraft - as I will operationalise spirituality in chapter 2 (section 2.6.1) - are integral aspects of social life in the cultural contexts where most street children live, particularly in Africa, Latin America and Asia (see chapter 2, sections 2.6.1 – 2.6.3). An important reason that might explain the tendency to slight aspects of spirituality in earlier street children’s studies might be their focus on describing specific characteristics of a street lifestyle as outlined in section 1.2. In such a ‘top-down’ and prescriptive approach, listing street children’s characteristics, spirituality in general and children’s inner spiritual lives in particular are not aspects that are likely to surface. Secondly and related to this, considering the (sometimes tense) relation between academic and development or policy work on street children it has been argued that the ‘street children issue’ is a construct deftly manipulated to reflect the various agendas and interests of stakeholders such as the welfare agencies (Panter-Brick 2002). From a Western, ‘Maslowian’ (Maslow 1943) understanding of needs, spirituality is not easily envisioned as an important factor in street children’s daily quest for survival, and, crucially, not likely to attract (donor) support. Rather, studies from the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s focused on structural causes of the “large numbers of street children” (Thomas de Benítez 2011a) and physical aspects of survival on the streets such as shelter, health and substance use.

Also since the paradigm shift in street children studies however (see section 1.2), in which the attention shifted from a focus on individual children as the site of problems to seeing children as capable social agents, spirituality has continued to receive little attention. I can think of two reasons that may partly explain this. First, as explained in

section 1.2, it has been argued that the rather uncritical and ‘celebratory’ notion of agency that emerged in street children studies has overshadowed attention to structures. However, precisely in contexts of extreme marginality it is vital to take structures serious and to explore the way they mediate between children’s agency and its outcomes. The sphere of religion is particularly illustrative in this sense as it encompasses both opportunities for individual action but also serious limitations that come in the form of normative frames to which people undisputedly commit. I will explore the way people internalize highly local (spiritual) rules and principles and how this influences agentive possibilities in much more detail in this thesis (see for instance chapter 2, section 2.5.1 and chapter 5, section 5.2).

Second and more importantly perhaps, the gap in literature on street children and spirituality (religion/witchcraft) could be explained by what I see as a the - continuing - lack of a person-centred approach in most studies. Many studies have sought to describe street children’s everyday *lives* but fewer studies have tried to portray life from the perspective of these children, allowing their subjectivities even more than their activities to structure analysis. Through GUOTS participatory approach however, young people were both free and encouraged to bring those themes to the fore that truly mattered to them and one of those themes was spirituality. In the light of this realisation of the value of such a person-centred approach but also based on the empirical evidence of this thesis, I thus argue for a further shift in studying street children: from contemplating their lives to exploring how they see and value their lives.

Based on the prominence of spirituality in GUOTS data, I used (part of) the first year of my PhD to analyse all references that were qualitatively coded under the ‘spirituality node’ in the GUOTS data set. I created sub-nodes in a new NVivo project to categorize the very diverse references to spirituality, from faith and superstition to church aid, spirits and magical animals, and I linked them with the GUOTS capability statements. This analysis provided preliminary insights that were further explored in the fieldwork. For instance, in the GUOTS data, spirituality featured as a complex and important aspect of street life, something which could both aggravate young people’s vulnerable position as well as providing opportunities for survival (Krah et al. 2016). This analysis also helped me to design my research methodology. For instance, instead of conducting a comparative research between three or two cities, as initially proposed by GUOTS, I decided to do long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Bukavu only. One reason for this, which was based on my initial analysis of GUOTS data, was that spirituality appeared in

different forms across the cities of Accra, Harare and Bukavu. Although themes such as church aid, spiritual money, witchcraft and faith appeared across the three cities, the 'weight' of the data differed. For instance, in Accra, young people's personal relationships with God was most present whilst in Harare there was most emphasis on the role of the church in supporting street children (Krah et al. 2016). A comparative research would have been appropriate if I had planned to focus on one specific aspect of spirituality, exploring for example street children's relationships with churches across the three cities. However, since I aimed for a comprehensive analysis of the different complex manifestations of spirituality at the level of the individual lived experience, the choice for one location seemed most appropriate.

Such in-depth exploration of lived spirituality I aimed for, implied the analysis of an individual's 'deep-seated' thoughts, feelings and emotions. I estimated this would require significant time investment to allow for the development of trust and *rappport* with an extremely vulnerable group of young people along with progressive understanding and reflection. For this reason as well, I opted for a relatively long term ethnographic examination of lived spirituality in just one field site, Bukavu, over comparative explorations across three different cities (see chapter 3, section 3.1 and 3.2 for a more detailed discussion).

I chose for fieldwork in Bukavu instead of Accra or Harare because GUOTS data from Bukavu was 'richest' in many ways. There were important similarities between the cities, indicating the setting of Bukavu is not unique when it comes to the prominence of spirituality in street life. However, there were more references to spirituality in Bukavu than in the other cities, addressing a very diverse range of aspects. Specifically, data from Bukavu revealed a distinctive intertwining of spirituality with virtually all other aspects of street life: it appeared an essential and integral part of making a life and living on the streets.

Finally, although GUOTS's use of Sen's capability approach has certainly contributed to my thinking on children's agency in difficult circumstances, I chose to not use this conceptual approach in my thesis but to draw, instead, on (Bourdieuian) practice theory (see section 1.2 and chapter 2, section 2.5). As explained, spirituality was not among the ten selected capability statements by the GUOTS researchers and I argue it is different from those ten in the sense that it cannot be seen as one single capability but rather as an opportunity structure impacting all of them in different ways (Krah 2017).

Furthermore, a particular strength of the capability approach is that it allows researchers to recognize children's agency, abilities and choices. Through this emphasis however, it leaves less room for looking at and theorizing the structures that influence children's agency. In contrast, practice theory offers a broad theoretical framework which enables a focus on both agency and structure, allowing an analysis of their complex intertwinement in constrained settings. In the context of my research, the work of Bourdieu in particular is useful to shed light on the way sociocultural contexts help determine opportunities and limitations for the spiritual practice of street children. In particular, Bourdieu's understanding of the 'field' helps to understand both practical constraints to agency, such as poverty, but also the way people are 'socialized' into a cultural system that shapes the way they 'internalize' rules and principles that come with growing up in a particular place and time. Because spirituality can be seen as (part of) a cultural system which is historicized and contextualized, I chose to draw on Bourdieusian practice theory in particular to help understand the way Bukavu's sociocultural and spiritual context shapes agentive (im)possibilities for street children.

1.5 Methodology

Studying street children's spiritual lives implied a confrontation with some key challenges. It meant approaching a hard-to-reach and extremely vulnerable group of research participants and working in a war-torn and highly unstable environment, managing multiple languages, and, finally, accessing and making sense of people's deep-seated thoughts and feelings that may be concealed even from the children themselves. To address these challenges, I opted for a multi-methods qualitative approach, combining ethnographic explorations with participatory, creative methods. From my experience, it is precisely this combination of methods, what I call a 'synergetic' approach, that proved very effective in exploring the richness and diversity of children's lived experiences. This synergetic approach was firmly embedded in an ethnographic epistemology, to which notions of reflexivity and flexibility are central, as well as problematising the construction of 'data' and power relations in the field. By using participatory and 'child-friendly' methods, it has been my intention not necessarily to 'give voice' to children - a popular aim among sociologists of childhood in particular (see James 2007 for a critical discussion) - but rather to *facilitate a dialogue* in which their voices are represented, acknowledging that data is the product of a dialogical negotiation of knowledge, emerging from *interaction*. In the literature, ethnography has been hailed as a powerful

approach to studying children in general (e.g. James and Prout 1990) and street children and youth in particular (Young and Barrett 2001; Beazley 2003; Ursin 2011; Conticini 2005; Greene and Hogan 2005; Evans 2006; Gigengack 2008). Furthermore, I argue, ethnography is the only approach that allows a comprehensive assessment of people's *lived experiences*. It is explorative and intrinsically inter-subjective which means it allows the (foreign) researcher to be guided by her research participants to and through their subjective experiences and feelings. It is holistic and open to serendipity which means it allows unexpected insights to emerge. Besides these benefits, participant observation, the key method in ethnography, enabled the building of trust and rapport with vulnerable young people who have learnt not to trust. This was an essential pre-requisite before any other methods could be introduced.

The creative methods - participatory diagramming, mapping, pictorial interviews, theatre and drawings - resulted in exceptionally rich and multi-layered data, inspiring reflection, imagination and dialogue (see chapter 3, section 3.3). Their key strength was that they encouraged self-reflection, inviting children to contemplate their positioned subjectivity. Ultimately this allowed me to 'expose' and explore their inner lives and lived spirituality.

The fieldwork in its totality was facilitated by *Programme d'Encadrement des Enfants de la Rue* (hereafter PEDER; Program Supporting Street Children), GUOTS' local partnering NGO with over thirty years of experience working with street children and youth. This NGO's support was of inestimable value for many reasons (see chapter 3, section 3.5.1). Only because I could build on pre-existing relations between the street children and PEDER, could I conduct in-depth ethnographic research in a period of six months. As explained above (section 1.4), PEDER was already working with a selected number of sixty-six street children through their collaboration with GUOTS. This group of children was thus experienced in participating in qualitative research. Roughly, these same young people became my informants. In total I worked with seventy-five young people including most of GUOTS' sixty-six participants. Furthermore, the six selected young people who worked as researchers with GUOTS became my key informants among others. In chapter 3 (section 3.5.1) I will elaborate more on the implications of having my study embedded in an existing research infrastructure (GUOTS) as well as local (cultural) expertise and existing relations of trust (PEDER). In the next section I will introduce Bukavu as a fascinating setting in which the lived spirituality of street children unfolds.

1.6 Field site: Bukavu, the Democratic Republic of Congo



Figure 1.1. Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Bukavu is a place of borders, marked by intense mobility and fundamental instability. Located on the eastern fringes of the DRC (see figure 1.1), the city of 870,000 people (CAID 2016) is built on five peninsulas stretching into lake Kivu. A ramshackle wooden bridge straddling the Ruzizi River marks the border with Rwanda in the southeast corner of Bukavu.

Few regions in the world have witnessed such levels of violence as those that determined the traumatic history, unstable present and uncertain future of eastern DRC. “Locating eastern DRC in today’s popular imagination”, as Seymour (2012, 376) writes, “usually involves descriptions of destruction and violence, notions of immense wealth and a vague sense of the dark heart of human suffering” (ibid). Such imaginings are not so far from the lived realities of a region affected by long-term exploitative resource extraction, repressive government regimes and protracted violent conflict (Seymour 2012). This conflict deteriorated in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, when

millions of Rwandan refugees sought refuge in the country. Afterwards, between 1998 and 2002, nine African countries were fighting each other on Congolese soil and presently, an estimated of 70 different armed groups are still active in eastern DRC, terrorizing communities and controlling weak governed areas (Nantulya 2017). Seymour (2012), who also conducted research in eastern DRC, argues that deeply embedded “structural violence” has precluded generations of Congolese people from the hope of improved survival outcomes. Suffering, hardship and adversity continue to form the nature of everyday life in the DRC, a place where “quotidian war, war as an everyday possibility” (Appadurai 2006, 31) is a reasonable expectation.

Unsurprisingly, decades of armed conflict and lasting political instability combined with severe poverty have led to a significant increase in children living on the streets in the DRC (UNICEF 2006). Some of them lost their parents among the 5,4 million war deaths (Moszynski 2008). Others belong to the population of nearly one million internally displaced people that were forced to flee their homes; the highest level of internal displacement globally in 2017 (Norwegian Refugee Council 2017). Furthermore, children have been direct targets of serious human rights violations; the DRC is known for having the largest number of child soldiers in the world (UNICEF 2006). After leaving the army or rebel groups, reintegration of children in communities affected by the conflict proves challenging and, confronted with very limited prospects, a large proportion of children end up living on the streets.

Alongside these issues, there is a relatively recent phenomenon of witchcraft accusations against children (Cimpric 2010; de Boeck 2013). Pentecostal churches and new religious cults play a role in this by affirming accusations and offering exorcism to ‘deliver’ children from the ‘spirit of evilness’ in exchange for high charges. In the context of a deep fear of witchcraft, such accusations often result in the abandonment or outright expulsion of children from the family home. Writing about the country’s capital, de Boeck (2008) argues that although street children have always existed in Kinshasa, their numbers have swollen “dramatically” (2008, 498). This rise is interpreted in the light of a changing pattern of witchcraft accusations (de Boeck 2005, 2008). De Boeck, an anthropologist who conducted years of research in the DRC, particularly in Kinshasa (see 2008, 2009, 2013 and de Boeck and Plissart 2014) shows how children have increasingly come to be seen as a source of evil in the collective social imaginary in the DRC. He argues that considering the DRC’s traditional moral and cultural matrix that defines children in terms of intrinsic wealth and as a social good, the current and unprecedented

demonization of children in Congo bespeaks a deeply rooted sense of social crisis. In fact, children and adolescents have never before occupied a more central position in the public space of the country's urban life. In this position they are not only victims but seen as active agents who contribute to shape Congolese society. De Boeck (2005) thus points out how this newly generated central but ambivalent societal status of children seems to have crystallized most clearly around the figure of the witch, as “the materialization of a cultural imaginary of crisis on the crossroads between, for example, money, power, kinship and sexuality” (de Boeck 2005, 191, see chapter 4, section 4.3.3).

Once on the street, young people continue to live with the consequences of conflict. One ‘visible’ remaining and particularly pervasive effect of war is current massive youth unemployment (Sawyer 2017). Prospects for street children to rise out of misery are extremely limited. In addition, these children's traumas of war and violence are kept alive not just in their dreams, but through the constant and currently growing threat of a new escalation of violence in the light of political unrest due to President Kabila's postponement of the 2016 democratic elections. Street children are often the first to be confronted with growing political unrest. Human Rights Watch (2006) reports on deliberate and opportunistic recruitment of street children to participate in political demonstrations with the intention of provoking public disorder, events in which dozens of street children have been killed or wounded.

Next to the enormous impacts of growing up in a war-torn area amidst profound and chronic instability, there are other factors contributing to the enhanced marginality and insecurity that determines the lives (and deaths) of street children in Bukavu. In the next section I will further explore the intricacies of street children's lives at the margins of society because they provide the very foundations of a lived street spirituality.

1.7 Marginal lives: sketching the everyday uncertainty of the streets

Early on during my fieldwork I came to understand that for the street children of Bukavu, spirituality has meaning most of all in relation to the existential threats they face in their everyday lives. Spirituality is thus lived primarily as part of a quest for survival amidst political instability, impending conflict escalation, severe state and parental neglect, socioeconomic adversity, a chronic lack of future prospects, ubiquitous (sexual) violence, discrimination, cold, hunger, pain and trauma. Having described the challenging and unstable context of eastern DRC and its consequences for street children, I here turn to the everyday experiences of those individuals occupying the bottom of the social ladder

in a society which is not only war-torn but also highly unequal. Because of their particularly marginal position in society, street children are confronted with grave existential insecurity. In particular, five interrelated dimensions of this insecurity surfaced in relation to spirituality which I will discuss here:⁹1) the insecurity of what to eat, 2) where to sleep, 3) how to stay safe, 4) how to stay healthy and 5) where to belong.

A first insecurity in the everyday lives of street children is simply accessing food. It is certainly not uncommon for them to be without food for days in a row or to live off just one meal a day. Children lack a place to prepare food themselves and thus rely on buying food from street vendors. Their earnings vary highly and there is no possibility to safely store money anywhere hence they often choose to spend all their available cash the same day they earn it. This means they may spend \$20 on food, alcohol and drugs on one successful day whilst not having a dollar to spend for a proper meal for days afterwards. In general, opportunities for earning money are extremely limited and highly gendered: all the female research participants engage in sex work, usually picking up clients from bars or working in night clubs. This is often complemented with earning from theft. For boys, stealing is by far the most common economic activity, often in the form of pickpocketing, followed by work in the informal economy such as car/motor washing, unloading ships at the dock or generally carrying loads, repairing fishing nets or helping fishermen to unload their catch. Other options are begging and participating in other criminal activities (besides stealing) such as extortion, violent shop robberies, selling drugs and working as a hitman. Needless to say, these activities inherently carry large risks. If a boy gets caught while stealing he can expect serious corporal punishment, either after being taken to the police or when the owner and bystanders decide to take the law into their own hands. Weeks after I had left the field, one of my key informants was beaten to death for stealing a sausage on the streets. He was killed by the street vendor he stole from, helped by bystanders.

A second uncertainty in the lives of street children is whether, where and how they will be able to sleep. Sadly, it is so common for them to be woken up in the middle of the night by being beaten, they consider it unusual if they can sleep through the night without waking up to violence. For their nightly protection, children often sleep in groups,

⁹ As I have not explicitly focused on these aspects of street children's daily lives (also because this has been done in great detail and depth by GUOTS, references here are primarily to a set of focus groups organised by GUOTS that were observed- but not conducted by me. In contrast, data presented in the empirical chapters of this thesis are exclusively my own.

occupying specific public spaces. For boys, places to sleep can be just a certain spot on a pavement along a busy road, amidst abandoned market stalls at fish markets on the city's shores, at a cemetery, in wooden fishing boats floating on the lake or in abandoned vehicles at a scrapyards. Girls are susceptible to sexual abuse when they sleep outside and often spend the night in the nightclubs where they work or combine their income to share in the rent of a temporary hut in one of the slums on the outskirts of Bukavu.

Staying safe is a key concern for street children. They have become used to not being safe, the “everyday violence” (Scheper-Hughes 1993) they face has almost become taken for granted and, to a certain extent, normalized by the children. In one GUOTS focus group for instance, the whole group laughed with amusement when a boy told us how he had been seriously beaten with a metal bar by the police (GUOTS focus group on safe movements, 23-02-16). The beatings had been so severe he was unable to stand up and walk away from the scene for the rest of the day and night. Yet, while telling his story, the boy himself also laughed and seemed rather indifferent to this outburst of violence. In fact, one of the first things I noticed when I started seeing the children regularly, was how they were always bruised and often with open wounds where they had been kicked by police boots. They are confronted with excessive violence and abuse by authority figures specifically: the police, soldiers and two different civilian groups known as the *Forces Vives* and the *Volontiers*. Although the police and the army have distinct formal roles they are in practice both engaged in tackling criminal activity, very badly and/or rarely paid and generally perceived as being beyond sanction. Both soldiers and police are extremely violent against street children. I heard many stories but a recurring experience of girls included (gang) rape by police officers while being blindfolded and constantly driven around in a police car. The *Volontiers* is a civilian group working under a mandate from the Mayor to tackle public order offences because the police fails to control crime. The *Forces Vives* have no mandate but are tolerated by the police. Both these groups have no formal power and operate at street level. The children consider them a key threat, even more than the police, because they permanently focus on (occupying) the public spaces where street children live and work (GUOTS United Nations General Comment focus group,¹⁰ 23-02-2016). Furthermore, street children face threats from what they call “street adults”, armed gangs and also from each other. Girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In a focus group, one girl explained that each time she

¹⁰ These were focus groups carried out by GUOTS to consult the street children and youth on the United Nations General Comment No. 21, on children in street situations (2017).

was travelling from A to B within the city and she came across a group of (street) boys, she needed to have sex with all of them before she would be allowed to pass on and continue her journey (GUOTS United Nations General Comment focus group, 24-02-16).

Furthermore, street children are vulnerable to many health-related risks due to a lack of shelter, clean water and nutritious food and because of their lifestyles, particularly their engagement in drug use and sex work, and restricted access to health care. All but one of my informants were regular-to-heavy drug users. Marijuana was the most common drug, with sniffing glue being popular among younger children in particular. However, a highly addictive crack cocaine, known as “sniff” rapidly gained popularity during my fieldwork time. Drugs, but also alcohol, are widely used to shield against the cold, to escape gripping hunger pangs, to numb physical pain and to forget feelings of sadness, loneliness and trauma. In addition, drugs are also used to boost one’s courage when embarking on risky operations, such as stealing at night. Besides drugs, STIs, pregnancy and abortion pose severe health risks in particular for girls. Street girls often choose to have unprotected sex because it pays more (generally they earn \$1-3 for sex) or they are forced into unsafe sex by clients. Unwanted pregnancies are very common and because abortion is illegal in the DRC under every circumstance, girls rely on unsafe abortion techniques. Most participating girls had had at least one abortion, while some had a history of four or five unsafe abortions. In addition, the majority of girls had at least one (young) child either with them on the streets or left in the care of relatives living in rural areas. Access to health services is highly restricted as it requires having money.

Besides these harsh conditions impacting physical well-being, street children struggle with a quest for belonging. They are very much aware of their stigmatised position and “otherness”. When talking about themselves they always positioned themselves in opposition to “children from the neighbourhood”, who may be poor but live with their families. Informants indicated they felt looked down upon, mocked and were tired of people randomly shouting at them (GUOTS focus group on safe movements, 24-02-16). Also from my own experience walking with informants through the city their stigmatisation surfaced strongly. It was for instance nearly impossible to enter any bar or restaurant with them as they would be denied entrance. The children seemed to struggle most with feelings of dehumanization. One boy said he did not know whether he was a human being or not, “because whenever I pass any police station, the police comes out to chase me and beat me” (GUOTS United Nations General Comment focus group, 25-01-2016). Gloria, a street girl and key informant, recounted the last time she accidentally saw

her father on the streets; when he noticed her, he turned to his friends and said “look, a demon” (Gloria, *Bile*, informal conversation, 03-03-2016).

In the light of their overwhelming marginalization and exclusion, street children struggle for belonging, moral worth and legitimacy. As a response to stigma they seek possibilities to construct positive identifications. One very clear example is their self-identification as *Biles*. *Biles* means “those who are tough and without fear”. Calling oneself *Bile* is a way to rearticulate a negative self-image associated with shame into a meaningful valorisation of the toughness required to negotiate life on the streets (cf. Farrugia, Smyth, and Harrison 2016 for a similar process in Australia and Beazley 2003 on Indonesia). In the next section I will introduce the *Biles* and I will reflect on the name they have chosen for themselves. In the light of the person-centred approach of my study, adopting and contemplating these children’s self-identifications is a crucial start to understanding their personal experiences and positioning and it has important ethical and epistemological benefits.

1.8 The research participants

The street children from Bukavu, both boys and girls, self-identified as ‘*Bile*’ ([‘b i : l ə] ‘*Biles*’ (plural). I assume the word comes from (Buffalo) Bill, a cowboy from American Western movies.¹¹ However, informants seemed unconscious of this etymology yet were aware of the semantic connotations of the word; a ‘*Bile*’, they told me, is “tough and without fear”. *Biles* is a name that is used with pride. In fact, they were also fine with being called ‘street children’ (either *enfants de la rue* or *enfants de rue* in French or *watoto wa mu barabara* in Swahili). Referring to them as ‘youth’ or ‘young people’ was not particularly offensive either, but it does not make much sense since it is not a term that is locally used and well understood. The one thing they all agreed on was that they were not street *adults*. This was a highly offensive term to them, because the *Biles* identified themselves in contrast to street adults. In practice, the boundaries between these groups

¹¹ This assumption comes from the existence of a Kinshasa teenage street gang in the 1950s, young people roaming the streets in cowboy clothes. They called themselves ‘*Bills*’, after Buffalo Bill (Gondola 2016, 2009, De Boeck and Plissart 2014). Gondola (2009) argues the re-appropriation of the aesthetics of cowboy movies’ violence was a way for youth to frame their critique of the colonial system, while creating the elements of a new masculinity built on a vernacular of violence. Born over forty years later and a thousand kilometres away from the capital’s cinemas, my informants still seemed to use traces of this cowboys’ name as a positive self-identification.

were blurry, with ‘street adults’ sometimes only being one or two years older than the *Biles*. What mattered, however, was that this group embodied everything the *Biles* did *not* want to be or ever become: with their more mature age, street adults indicated to the *Biles* hopelessness and the ultimate impossibility of leaving the streets. The ‘adults’ were also morally despised by the *Biles* for committing serious crimes such as violent robberies, extortion, kidnapping and murder, while the *Biles* liked to think of themselves as being small and committing small offenses such as pickpocketing.

The term *Bile* lacks an explicit reference to age, in contrast to some definitions of ‘street children’ or ‘street youth’ from the UN or other international discourse. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as “any person below the age of 18” (UN 1990, Article 1). My informants struggled defining “child”, but attempts included: “someone between zero and six”, “a baby who walks on hands and feet”, “someone who doesn’t know the future”, “someone who has not yet given birth”, “everyone smaller than one week old”, “him who needs advice” and “him who cannot distinguish between good and bad” (focus group PEDER, 17-03-2017). The fact is that these children do not know their real age but flexibly ‘construct’ it depending on contexts. In chapter 2 I will further explore the multiple reasons motivating street children to ‘construct’ their age flexibly depending on contexts.¹² My study involved a group of 75 street children in total, 61 boys and 14 girls. These children told me ages ranging between fourteen and twenty-one at the end of my research (July 2016), with the majority being aged between 15 and 19; with an average of 17 years. If questioned further, however, the children often mentioned a year of birth which was completely incongruent with their own estimated age.

The point I want to make here is twofold: first; that it is impossible to know the real age of street children and youth in Bukavu; second; that this is not at all problematic if the aim is to understand street life from a person-centred perspective. If the starting point is the acknowledgement of children as actors who give meaning to their own lives,

¹² Literature indicates younger street children are likely to be perceived as vulnerable victims, which makes it easier for them to gain money with ‘begging’, but when they age into youth they transform into delinquents in the public mind (Thomas de Benitez 2011a, Beazley 2003, Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003). This phenomenon played a role in fluid age-constructions in Bukavu. If my informants thought it could increase their chances of receiving aid, they would reduce their (estimated real) age in order to be more ‘pitiful’. In other situations, they pretended to be older as a way of managing other people’s impressions of them to take a stronger position in context of (the threat of) a conflict with other actors on the street, most notably street adults.

it seems an obvious first step to study and interpret how they give meaning to their own names (and ages) within the context of their lives. As Hecht (1998, 93) already argued: “if children can be imagined as social actors rather than as merely passive recipients of adult culture, they can also be seen to have a claim on defining their own identity”. This thus implies both the adoption and critical contemplation of their self-identification as part of the quest for knowledge. As the example of ‘*Bile*’ indicates, self-identifications can be extremely valuable as politics of representation (cf. Bourgois 2003). The term *Bile* does not carry any explicit reference to age, but rather alludes to various positive values of being ‘courageous’ and ‘tough’ and of differentiation from ‘street adults’. The importance of this is emphasized also by the opening story of Nuru who proudly stressed he “resisted fear” while descending into the dark underworld. Ultimately, the ‘act’ of defining oneself is in itself an indication of conscious reflection on one’s positioned identity and as such a nice illustration of agency. In chapter 6 I will elaborate more on this, exploring how spirituality relates to children’s profound reflexivity and (moral) subjectivities.

Recognizing the richness of self-identifications and working from a person-centred perspective, I thus choose in this thesis to use either *Biles* or ‘street children’ to refer to the individuals who participated in my study. This group of ‘street children’ thus includes ‘children’ under the age of 18 as well as young people aged 18 or (a little) above. In the final section of this chapter, I will present the outline of the rest of the thesis.

1.9 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of 7 chapters in total. In **chapter 2** I outline the theoretical framework I use to analyse the role of spirituality in the struggle for everyday survival of the *Biles*. I employ practice theory, in particular notions of field, *doxa*, capital, agency and subjectivity, as tools for the analysis of the way in which spirituality works to constrain and facilitate survival strategies, consequently providing options and restrictions for children’s (experience of) agency.

In **chapter 3** I outline my ‘synergetic’ methodological approach combining ethnographic explorations with creative, participatory methods that work to strengthen one another and tackle the complexities of approaching a difficult-to-reach group of young people, working in an unstable environment and trying to assess children’s subjectivities and inner lives. In addition, I will reflect on the ethical struggle that is inherent to this kind of research, building on a ‘situated’ ethics approach and seeking to

‘balance’ institutional ethical agendas with the local ethos and personal moral frameworks.

Chapters 4-6 form the empirical core of the thesis. **Chapter 4** builds on the Bourdieusian notion of field to sketch and analyse the Spiritual Field of Bukavu as a non-physical, highly diverse *conceptual* space in which lived spirituality unfolds. I explore the importance of the field as the contextual determinant of opportunities and limitations for street children’s agentic experience and abilities. It reveals how factors influencing agency and its outcomes are not just external structures of inequality and poverty but also the way people *internalize* a cultural system which is heavily local. By introducing and explaining important actors, institutions and sociocultural and historically embedded values and beliefs that constitute Bukavu’s Spiritual Field, this chapter provides the basis for understanding children’s actual spiritual practices better as it links them to the experience and reality of opportunities, constraints, conventions and threats.

Having situated the Spiritual Field, in **chapter 5** I then explore children’s spiritual beliefs and practices. I show how, based on their often implicit knowledge of the rules regulating practice in the field, children creatively employ spirituality with the immediate goal of day-to-day getting by. Presenting data from collective creative methods, particularly theatre, as well as the wider ethnography, this chapter thus focuses on the spiritual practice of material survival, examining children’s reciprocal relations with spiritual beings and experts across the opposing spheres of religion and witchcraft. Whilst challenging Bourdieu’s notion of capital here, I employ the concept of ‘relational practices’ to explore children’s relationships with spiritual others. I ultimately explain the specific kind of agency children experience in these relations as ‘alternative agency’, belonging to a distinct field of practice with a social realm extending beyond the conventional, narrow confines of a street child’s stratum.

Chapter 6 explores the spiritual practice of moral survival. Interpreting children’s drawings and (emotional) responses to pictorial interviews in particular, I argue spirituality is central to sense-making on the streets, enabling in particular the contemplation of the moral self in time and place. Based on their experiences of marginalization and exclusion, spirituality offers these children the realisation of a state of normality to which they aspire. I analyse this as being two-fold across time: in the present, they ascribe themselves a position of moral exception which makes them feel included and loved by God. True religious conversion however, including the desired abandonment of what they and others view as sinful conduct, is postponed for some

unspecified point in the future. Because spiritual change is believed to have the potential to generate wider socioeconomic change, spirituality ultimately allows them to keep the dream of a better future alive, imagined as a point in time in which the *Biles* will be recognized by others as ‘normal’ human beings.

Finally, **Chapter 7** provides a conclusion. I directly answer my research question and reflect on insights and ideas related to the methodology. I address each of the four objectives, which together constitute the scholarly relevance of my study. Specifically, I argue how my study’s focus on lived spirituality has been relevant to understanding street children’s lived experiences in a comprehensive way, exposing their positioned subjectivities and revealing their extraordinary creativity and reflexivity. Spirituality is an underexplored aspect of street children’s lives but I plea for recognition of its importance for everyday survival (both material and moral) on the streets. It forces us to acknowledge these children’s urge to be ‘normal’, to be human among other humans, and to make sense of the circumstances of their lives. Grave existential insecurity does not imply an absence of reflexivity and we should acknowledge street children as sense-makers who think and reflect, who seek and find meaning. Furthermore, I also draw conclusions about the implications of studying lived spirituality for how we understand agency in difficult circumstances, situating my study in the wider Sociology of Childhood and the interdisciplinary body of street children studies in particular. I call for studying children’s agency and its constraints in relation to local cultural contexts. Structure should be more broadly theorized, by moving beyond practical limitations and by taking enculturation and people’s internalized structures into account. In the light of my endeavour to apply a person-centred perspective, I finally propose a broader definition of agency as a subjective sense of power regardless of objective outcomes of power plays. Finally, I draw on some insights from my study that might be relevant to practitioners and governments working with street children and youth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*A Practice Theory Approach to
Street Children's Spirituality*

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore relevant academic debates, moving towards the construction of a theoretical framework for understanding the spiritual practice of street children. I start, in section 2.2, with a discussion of the term 'street children', which has been critiqued for obscuring the heterogeneity of the category to which it refers. In this light, some ethnographers choose to work with street children's self-identifications, adopting a context-specific definition of who is, and who is not, a street child. Such an *emic* approach has strong advantages, but it does not aid cross-cultural comparison. In line with Gigengack (2014b), I therefore propose an anti-essentialist Wittgensteinian approach which would conceive street children around the globe in terms of "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein 2009). Referring to the various resemblances that exist between members of the same family (e.g. build, hair colour, temperament etc), this term refers to resemblances that overlap and criss-cross.

In Section 2.3, I contemplate street children further by turning to their conceptual 'home': the Sociology of Childhood (Corsaro 1997; James and Prout 1990). Besides some note-worthy exceptions (e.g. Punch 2003; Katz 2004; Ansell and van Blerk 2005a; van Blerk and Ansell 2006) there are two large bodies of literature examining childhood/children in the Global South. The first body is concerned with childhoods which are 'strange' to 'us' (in the West) yet completely normal in their own sociocultural contexts, such as children who are working instead of/as well as to playing or attending school. These have - somewhat eurocentrically - been called 'other childhoods' (Robson 2004; Robson and Ansell 2006; Twum-Danso 2009). The second body of literature is what Kesby et al. (2006) have called "other 'other' childhoods", which are *exceptional* childhoods in their own sociocultural contexts. Together with studies of child soldiers, young carers, child-headed households and child sex workers, the multidisciplinary field

of street children studies can be situated here. Interestingly and perhaps counter-intuitively, studies of these exceptional childhoods often evolve around an agency framework (Payne 2012).

This ‘agentive turn’ in the Sociology of Childhood is outlined in section 2.4. In section 2.4.1, I show how researchers have been inspired by the Sociology of Childhood to demonstrate agency - rather than vulnerability - specifically among those most marginalized. Section 2.4.2 continues with a discussion of scholarly response to this tendency to a somewhat ‘celebratory’ notion of agency. In particular, researchers have tried to nuance the concept of agency by re-emphasizing social structures and processes that constrain young people’s agentive abilities. These studies have been very helpful in re-directing our attention to structures. However, two important issues remain underexplored. The first concerns the need to theorize not just agency or structure separately, but rather their complex *intertwinement*. I aim to respond to the call to critically re-think the notion of agency while paying “greater attention to the factors that *mediate* between so-called agency and its outcomes” (Campbell et al. 2015, 62, emphasis added). My second concern relates to my commitment to studying children from a person-centred perspective, allowing not just their voices but perhaps more so their subjectivities to structure scholarly analyses. Although very insightful, most attempts to nuance agency in the context of structural constraints continue to interpret agency from the perspective of the researcher (as I will argue in section 2.4.2). I aim to shift the attention further towards a person-centred definition of agency (section 2.5).

In section 2.5, I address these two issues by turning to a theoretical body outside the Sociology of Childhood: practice theory. Practice theory is a broad theoretical framework aimed at overcoming the structure-agency opposition by arguing for a dialectical rather than oppositional relationship between structure and agency. In this light, I introduce the fundamentals of Bourdieusian practice theory in section 2.5.1, including Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus*, field and capital. As I argue, Bourdieu’s work is particularly useful to gain a better understanding of those factors mediating between structure and agency, specifically the often overlooked sociocultural structuring dynamics and conditions that are specific to time and place. In section 2.5.2, I complement Bourdieusian theory with Ortner’s work on subjectivity and agency, working towards an person-centred perspective of the agency of young people operating at the margins of power. In section 2.6 I turn to an overview of ‘spiritual fields’ in Africa, exploring scholarly literature on religion (section 2.6.1) and witchcraft (section 2.6.2) in Africa. I

will focus on the relationship between children/youth and witchcraft in section 2.6.3. Finally, in section 2.7, I present the overall theoretical framework which helps me to make sense of the spiritual practice of street children in Bukavu.

2.2 Conceptualizing street children

The ‘classical’ term ‘street children’ has become increasingly contested over the years. As is often the case with such troublesome concepts, however, the more pressure one applies, the more resilient they tend to become (cf. Vries 2008; Moore and Sanders 2006). Conscious of avoiding essentialist thinking, scholars have argued there is no ‘universal street child’ (Magazine 2003). Indeed, if there is any essence of street children, it must be their heterogeneity. When it comes to case-studies, ethnographers often use children and young people’s self-identifications to describe a versatile category and to differentiate between street children and non-street children (Hecht 1998; Gigengack 2014b) Such an *emic* approach is interesting and useful because it comes with epistemological and ethical advantages, as I will contemplate below (section 2.2.1). For the sake of comparison however, and in order to analytically define a subject, we still need some kind of *etic* understanding, i.e. we do want to be able to say something about a category notwithstanding the diversity it implies. In line with Gigengack (Gigengack 2014b), I therefore propose a Wittgensteinian (Wittgenstein 2009) approach which conceives street children around the globe in terms of “family resemblances”. In this section I will outline poststructuralist critiques of the term ‘street children’, list proposed alternatives, examine the potential of emic definitions and propose an anti-essentialist Wittgensteinian approach to allow an etic understanding in academia and policy.

2.2.1 Problematizing the universal ‘street child’

The term ‘street children’ has received considerable critique from academics in particular. A key text has been Panter-Brick's (2002) work in which she outlines five reasons why the term is problematic. Her first arguments relate to ‘street children’ being a generic term that obscures the heterogeneity in children’s actual circumstances. This argument is shared by many others who argue the term is not capable of capturing the essence of ‘street child’ (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003; van Blerk 2006). Informed by social constructionist theories from the ‘new social studies of childhood’ (see Nikitina-den Besten 2008 for a discussion), researchers have come to acknowledge that street children

do not form a unified, homogenous group but are a social category constructed through discourse and reflecting particular visions of society (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003).

A second argument presented by Panter-Brick (2002) is that the term does not correspond to the ways many children relate to their own experiences or to their own reality of their movements on and off the street. Street children frequently move between homes, streets, shelters and prison (Gigengack 2014b). In line with this argument, van Blerk's (2013) study stresses the need to conceptualize street children in relational terms, by demonstrating the complex and multidimensional relations 'street children' have with their families/communities both on and off the street in Cape Town.

A third argument presented by Panter-Brick (2002) against the term 'street children' points to its pejorative or pitying connotations. Furthermore, she argues the term deflects attention from the broader population of children affected by poverty and social exclusion.

A final argument alludes to the observation that street children have been used in politics and policies. This relates to concerns shared by other scholars (Scheper-Hughes 2004; Hecht 1998; Panter-Brick 2002; Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003; Gigengack 2008) that broad definitions of what a street child is are used to manipulate a rhetoric of there being 'millions of street children' globally; such high numbers serve to add weight to the necessity of intervention, in favour of the agendas of stakeholders such as welfare agencies (Ennew and Milne 1989; Poretti et al. 2013). For instance, a UNICEF report in 1989 spoke of 100 million children growing up on the streets of urban centres world-wide (UNICEF 1989, cited in Panter-Brick 2002). Similarly, in the late 1980s, UNICEF reported about 7 million street children in Brazil alone. According to Hecht (1998) the actual percentage was around 1% of this estimate. In this light, Poretti et al. (2013) point to a rhetoric about icons of 'stolen childhoods' which are crucial devices in activists' strategies aimed at demonstrating the urgency of the problem and mobilizing scarce resources on behalf of children.

In the quest to find an adequate alternative to 'street child', children for whom the street is their home (Márquez 1999; Hecht 1998) have been labelled anything from 'abandoned minors', 'children of the street', or 'homeless' (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003) to 'children at risk' (Raffaelli, de Morais, and Koller 2014) 'street-involved children' (Malindi 2014) or 'street-connected children' (Thomas de Benítez 2011b). For the 2017 General Comment from the United Nations' Committee on the Rights of the Child the widely used (originally) Latin American term 'children in street situations' was

chosen (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2017; Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). It should be noted however that all of these alternatives solely address the ‘street’ part of the definition, while its second half, child/children, is not further problematized. Nevertheless, it could be argued, as Butler and Rizzini (2003) optimistically did in 2003, that each new term reflects greater sensitivity to the actual situation of those it studies.

From a less optimistic stance, however, what has been achieved with decades of deconstructionism could be questioned. Gigengack (2014b, 1) argues we have reduced ‘street children’ to a discursive construct. What has been achieved with deconstructionist arguments, he stresses, is “ethnographic refusal” (2014b, 9, cf. Ortner 2006, 40). Concretely, he argues that researchers ignore that street children emerge as fairly discrete, intergenerational groupings. In particular, such research refuses to conceptualize street children’s authenticity: “street children’s politics and culture are not merely reactive to dominant structures, but are woven together through their own locally and historically evolved logic” (Gigengack 2014, 9). The ethnographic illustration provided by Gigengack (Gigengack 2014d; see also Magazine 2003) analyses Mexico City’s ‘street youth’ and ‘gang youth’. These two groups are virtually identical in terms of age, gender, class and family background. They also engage in similar practices, including solvent use. Yet, they perceive each other as different and prefer to relate to their own kind.

2.2.2 *Emic solution: Self-identifications*

One possible solution to avoid the complexities of homogenizing definitions and uncritical categorizations is to adopt an *emic* approach to definition. Through ethnography, this can be done by respecting and adopting the self-identifications of ‘street children’ (e.g. Hecht 1998, Beazley 2003, Evans 2006, Gigengack 2014a). There are two important advantages.

The first relates to epistemology: as a politics of representation (Bourgeois 2003) children’s self-identifications are extremely valuable. For instance, Evans (2006) states that her informants never refer to themselves as street children, unless in the presence of NGO workers or media, which highlights the flexibility and fluidity of identities. In Brazil, Hecht (1998) analyses children’s self-identifications which he argues are oppositional in the sense that they are about who the children are *not* instead of who they are. Street children identify themselves in opposition to children who live at home, not because of the differences in physical space they inhabit, but because of the relationship with their mother, which they lack, he argues. Gigengack (2014a) has similar findings for

Mexico, where children make a distinction between those who do not have a father, *des-papayosos*, and those who do not have a mother, *des-madrosos*. This distinction is important because not having a mother is seen by the children as much worse as it represents pure chaos and is therefore adopted as the most appropriate term for street children.

Second, respecting self-identifications is in line with ethical arguments foregrounded by the Sociology of Childhood of studying children in their own right. As Hecht (1998, 93) already argued: “If children can be imagined as social actors rather than as merely passive recipients of adult culture, they can also be seen to have a claim on defining their own identity”.

Notwithstanding the value of adopting and reflecting on these emic approaches for case-studies however, an etic solution to the definitional complexities of the term ‘street children’ is required if we aim to speak of ‘street children’ universally, for the sake of comparison and in light of developing policies to address these children’s needs. I propose one etic solution in the next section, section 2.2.3.

2.2.3 Etic solution: Family resemblances

I agree with Magazine (2003) and Gigengack (2008; 2014d) that street children’s lives must be understood in their cultural contexts and the term should be conceptualized in its own “locally and historically evolved logic” (Gigengack 2014d, 175). Taking young people’s context-specific and positioned self-identifications seriously as local definitions does not necessarily mean comparative or cross-cultural studies are not possible, nor does it mean the concept of ‘street child’ has become utterly meaningless or “impossibly constructed” (Ennew 2000, 701). Gigengack (2014b) claims that even if the term is used carefully, street children will remain a versatile category which is not necessarily problematic from an anti-essentialist perspective. According to him, such a perspective would conceive street children in terms of overlapping and crisscrossing family resemblances, a term borrowed from Wittgenstein (2009). Wittgenstein explains his theory by the example of ‘games’: board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games etc. and he asks the question “what is common to them all?” The answer is, that there is not one thing common to all, but rather “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (2009, 66). It is worth quoting his explanation at length:

“To repeat: don't think, but look!—Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ballgames, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.—Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear” (2009, 66).

Wittgenstein then continues writing that he can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than the word “family resemblances” because the various resemblances between members of a family, build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. Hence, he argues, ‘games’ form a family.

In this line of thinking, it might be interesting to explore if we can perceive street children as such a family. This approach helps to move beyond essentialist, homogenizing definitions and ethnocentrism (cf. Magazine 2003), while at the same time allowing meaningful discussions on a cross-cultural and comparative level. Furthermore, the essence of street children’s self-identifications, grounded in empirical research, can be the basis for contemplating Wittgensteinian “family resemblances” between the *des-madrosos* of Mexico City (Gigengack 2014a) and the *Tikyan* of Yogyakarta (Beazley 2003b) and the *Biles* of Bukavu. Following Wittgenstein, we would thus have a set of resemblances where different similarities overlap in each situation, but it might well be possible that there is not one such resemblance shared by all those who we consider ‘street children’ worldwide. Such an approach requires close collaborative efforts to determine a set of resemblances. Perhaps street children’s mobility, the way they move between homes, streets, shelters and prisons (Gigengack 2014b), the way they engage in relationships both on and off the street (van Blerk 2013) and the way they perceive mobility as a chance for improving their lives (Bourdillon 2017; Jones and Thomas de Benítez 2009), is one such ‘resemblance’. In fact, aspects concerned with the ‘street’ in ‘street child’ might be easier to ‘detect’ than ‘child-resemblances’, not least because in emic approaches in which children’s self-identifications are adopted, such as with the *des-madrosos* of Mexico (Gigengack 2008) the *Tikyan* of Yogyakarta (Beazley 2003)

and the *Biles* of Bukavu, there is no clear reference to age (boundaries) setting them apart as ‘children’. Perhaps the ‘child’ in ‘street child’ remains largely neglected in street children studies because there is another, wider body of literature concerned with deconstructing child/children and childhood. This work builds on and critiques the ‘Sociology of Childhood’ (James et al. 1998; James and Prout 1990; Nikitina-den Besten 2008; Shanahan 2007). I will now turn to this literature and reflect on its implications for understanding the ‘child’ in ‘street child’.

2.3 The Sociology of Childhood

The Sociology of Childhood (James and Prout 1990; Corsaro 1997; Qvortrup, Corsaro, and Honig 2009) is one key field in which the study of street children is embedded. It emerged as a counter-paradigm to previous hegemonic essentialist ideas on childhood such as socialization theory in which children were seen as passively undergoing a process of ‘becoming’ and as ‘less-than-adults’ (Nikitina-den Besten 2008). The paradigm’s important contribution can be summarized in two claims: childhood is a social construct and children have agency. The Sociology of Childhood, also called ‘the ‘new’ social studies of childhood’ (cf. James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, see den-Besten 2009 for a discussion), emerged in the 1990s and positioned itself as an epistemological break with the past (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998). However, the ‘newness’ of the paradigm has been questioned (Nikitina-den Besten 2008; Tisdall and Punch 2012).¹³

Despite earlier traces of its theoretical foundation(s), the Sociology of Childhood provoked a multidisciplinary body of research from the 1990s onwards, with contributions from sociology, geography, anthropology, education, law, health studies, history and political sciences. Notwithstanding wide recognition of its importance and lasting relevance, almost three decades after its introduction we can identify a substantial body of critique to its core assumptions, or, more precisely, to the output that these core realizations have inspired. Prout (2005) makes the observation that novel intellectual

¹³ First of all because it is widely recognized that the founding ideas of childhood as a social construct can already be traced back to the magisterial *Centuries of childhood*, written by French historian Philippe Ariès and translated to English in 1962 (Ariès 1962). Ariès made the counterintuitive claim that childhood was a relatively modern, seventeenth century intervention. In medieval society, he argued, the idea of childhood simply did not exist. Ryan (2008), however, argues that even before Ariès, other scholars such as Locke, Rousseau, Freud, Dewey, Erikson and Mead had already made similar claims about childhood and adolescence. Indeed, Margaret Mead (1936) for instance - in what is generally seen as the first ethnographic research with children outside Europe - already challenged the assumption of adolescence as a universal with her research among young people in Samoa, providing robust alternatives to leading developmental psychological theories of the time.

initiatives frequently overstate their case; overplaying their difference from earlier formulations. This has been the case, he argues, with the Sociology of Childhood as well: it emerged as a counter-paradigm positioning itself in opposition to conventional approaches (see also Holloway 2014).

Specifically, there are two important lines of critique towards the Sociology of Childhood which I will discuss in detail in the following sections (2.3.1 – 2.3.3 and 2.4 respectively). The first line of critique points to the constructionist perspective on childhood having led to binary thinking (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Aitken 2001; Prout 2005; Hart 2008b; Nikitina-den Besten 2008; Shanahan 2007). I will explore this critique further in section 2.3.1 and I will explain why this critique is particularly valuable when it comes to children in the Global South, including street children. In sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 I will illustrate this by discussing the most important debates about these children and childhoods in the Global South. Consequently, this will bring me to the second line of critique directed at the Sociology of Childhood: the emphasis on children's competence as social actors which has led to what have been argued to be uncritical or unsophisticated depictions of agency (Utas 2005; Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, and Chizororo 2006; van Blerk 2013; Bordonano and Payne 2012; Punch and Tisdall 2012; Campbell et al. 2015; Durham 2008a). This will be discussed in section 2.4.

In fact, both these criticisms can be said to basically detect *exaggerations*; the exaggeration of constructionism; the exaggeration of individual agentic ability. It is 'executorial' critique in a sense that there is no actual doubt about the legitimacy of the core assumptions of the Sociology of Childhood, but rather the way these have been translated into a full embrace of theoretical ideas and have analytically been executed in practice.

2.3.1 Deconstructing child/adult boundaries

The first critique relates to the paradigm's founding idea that childhood is a social construction. This social view of childhood is counterposed to a natural or biological one. In this sense, it assumes a set of oppositional dichotomies such as socially constructed/biologically determined, i.e. culture/nature, but also adult/child, local/global and agency/structure (Prout 2005). These oppositional dichotomies deriving from an uncritical or 'exaggerated' constructionist perspective have been subject to critique. Himself one of the pioneers of the Sociology of Childhood, Prout (2005) has been a leading figure in this critique (but see also Ryan 2008). Particularly problematic is the

child/adult dichotomy which, originating from Rousseau, has been implicitly assumed by and central to the Sociology of Childhood. As many scholars (Aitken 2001; Gable 2000; Rasmussen 2000; Hart 2008b; Valentine 2003) have emphasized however, a clear separation between children and adults is problematic. Prout (2005, 34) himself also acknowledges that the boundary between childhood and adulthood “[...] is beginning to blur, introducing all kinds of ambiguities and uncertainties”. However, this separation is particularly problematic when it comes to children from the Global South who may (be forced to) behave in (what we consider as) ‘adult’ ways. In particular working children, child sex workers, child soldiers, street children, HIV/AIDS orphans and young carers fall outside western conceptualizations of childhood as a time of innocence and play and ideas about children as firmly positioned in a family context.¹⁴ It is in this light that we should understand the initial labelling of street children as ‘out of place’ (Invernizzi et al. 2016; Connolly and Ennew 1996).

As argued in chapter 1 (section 1.8) and based on my experience of working with the *Biles* of Bukavu from a person-centred perspective, Western conceptualisations of childhood may be rather confusing in African contexts. In fact, the legal definition of what a child is (anyone under the age of 18) often clashes with locally constructed ideas about childhood, youth and adulthood. In many African countries for instance, transition to adulthood is often linked with a change in societal status, such as marriage or child birth, rather than realized through aging. This is particularly true for women, for whom status of adulthood is almost completely contingent on motherhood (Johnson-Hanks 2002). Writing about South Africa, van Dijk and van Driel (2009) argue that it is not someone’s biological age, but rather the generational order - which runs parallel to other key dimensions of social differentiation such as class and gender - which determines the (structurally subordinate) position of younger people to older people (van Dijk and van Driel 2009). In this light, the classical anthropological approach to childhood/adulthood is anchored in the idea of life stages, in which youth is defined in relation to the correspondence between social and physical developmental thresholds (Shroff, Utas, and Vigh 2006). From this perspective, young people will classically be seen as children when they are not yet able to procreate, as youth when they are able to procreate and as adults when actually having procreated and acquired a family (Johnson-Hanks 2002; Vigh 2006).

¹⁴ Of course, children outside the Global South may indeed also fall into such categories.

In fact, with regards to child-adult boundaries, a similar argument can be made with the universal definition of the term ‘street children’ (see above, section 2.1): recognizing the practical value of agreeing on a cross-cultural legal definition of a child (anyone below 18 years of age) for international legal and UN discourses, it should at the same time be acknowledged this universal definition may have very little (ethnographic) relevance in the actual lives and contexts of these people themselves. As argued in chapter 1 (section 1.8) I thus choose, in the context of Bukavu, to use the term ‘street children’ *or Biles* to refer to an intergenerational group existing of young people under the age of 18 as well as above (cf. Gigengack 2014b), because they self-identify as street children and *Biles*, and not based on their age, but rather on position and moral status.

I will now move on to outlining two important bodies of literature concerned with children and childhoods from the Global South, most notably Africa: looking first at work on ‘other childhoods’ (section 2.3.2.) and then at work on ‘other ‘other’ childhoods’ (section 2.3.3). Both bodies of work reflect the lasting relevance of the new sociological paradigm while at the same time critiquing its output, in particular highlighting the complexity of child-adult boundaries in particular.

2.3.2 *Other childhoods*

Within the first body of literature, it is especially children’s paid and unpaid work in the Global South that has been topic of much debate (Ochs and Izquierdo 2009; Punch 2003; Robson 2004; Robson and Ansell 2006; Twum-Danso 2009). In fact, this tendency to focus on working children can perhaps be explained if we remember that although the legitimacy of the Sociology of Childhood’s core assumption that childhood is socially constructed is not generally questioned in academia, there is still a tendency in policy to universalize some aspects of childhood (Tisdall and Punch 2012) such as in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (for discussions of the universality of children’s rights see (Rosen 2007; Kjørholt 2007; Twum-Danso 2009; Jones 2005; Twum-Danso Imoh 2011; Pells 2012; Seymour 2012; Poretti et al. 2014). The idea that children should not engage in paid work is most problematic in the context of universalizing children’s rights as it is, quantitatively, in a global context, more common for children to work and to go to school than to have a childhood dedicated to play and school (Punch 2003). In this light, the notion of the ‘global child’ as the subject of rights has provoked critique because of its claim to universalism, whilst it rather draws on a Western notion of a happy and protected childhood which is set as the moral and political

standard (Jones 2005; Panter-Brick 2002). Research focusing on children's working lives could therefore be seen as critiques of ethnocentric representations of childhood (Aitken 2001; Holt and Holloway 2006; Tisdall and Punch 2012), while on the other hand we could critically question if they succeed in this endeavour when they call the lives of working children 'other childhoods'.

In this light, Payne (2012) argues that an almost exclusive focus on children's working lives has led to an obfuscation of more ordinary everyday aspects of majority world children's childhoods. It has been argued we should understand this disproportional focus on children's working lives as rooted in an underlying crisis of childhood (e.g. Aitken 2001). Working children, namely, challenge the boundary between children and adults, reified and reconstructed in the course of the Sociology of Childhood. Aitken (2001) notes that children that work do not only 'lack' childhood as it is constituted in the North but that their economic savviness disrupts ideas of children as innocents thus transgressing boundaries between adults and children. He argues that contemporary crises surrounding the construction of childhood relate, at least in part, to how child/adult boundaries are designated. Hart (Hart 2008b; Hart 2008a) comes to similar conclusions arguing that conceptual shortcomings derive from the notion that the lives of the young are separable from those of adults: an assumption underlying common invocations of children's 'worlds', 'cultures' and 'communities' (James and Prout 1990).

Besides engagement in labour, other aspects of those 'other' childhoods can be found for instance in a 'strange' engagement with the public sphere (Jones 2011; Aitken 2001) or an extended family context in which parents do not necessarily have to be the primary care givers (Twum-Danso 2009; van Dijk and van Driel 2009; Boakye-Boaten 2010; Tisdall and Punch 2012). Different from the western romanticized notions of childhood, these 'other' childhoods are of course completely 'normal' childhoods and calling them 'other' is a mere indicator of an ethnocentric perspective on childhood. As Punch (2003, 1) argues, "rather than perceiving Third World children as having 'abnormal' childhoods, it should be remembered that First World children tend to experience more privileged, protected childhoods". Hence, while 'other childhoods' may be strange to us, they are 'normal' in their contexts. In contrast, the next section explores so-called other 'other' childhoods, which are 'unusual' also in their own contexts.

2.3.3 *Other 'other' childhoods*

The second body of literature concerns what Kesby et al. (2006) have called “other ‘other’” childhoods. These are, in fact, *exceptional childhoods in their own sociocultural context*. These exceptional childhoods, or exceptional dimensions to childhoods - un-childlike behaviours (Aitken 2001; Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, and Chizororo 2006) - can of course be found everywhere. Yet, although they are universal they tend to be rather excluded in children’s studies in the West, which have long been dominated by children’s micro-geographies of livelihood, play and school (e.g. Holloway and Valentine 2000). They are, however, very prominent in studies in the Global South.

In African contexts in particular, exceptional childhoods have been the point of departure by studying child soldiers (Hart 2006; Rosen 2007; West 2000; Seymour 2012; Verma 2012), child sex workers (van Blerk 2008; 2011), street children (Young 2003; van Blerk 2006; 2012) and HIV/AIDS orphans and/or young carers (Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, and Chizororo 2006; Robson 2004; van Dijk and van Driel 2009; Payne 2012).

(Dimensions of) exceptional childhoods, such as violent crimes, challenge the conceptual foundations of childhood itself not only because they endanger children’s imagined collective innocence and dependence and, consequently, the boundary between children and adults. Another, even more prominent challenge derives from the fact that exceptional childhoods are studied through an agentic conceptual framework, which is at the core of the Sociology of Childhood. Interestingly, as Payne (2012) noted, agency comes to the fore precisely, and it often seems only, because these children live in situations of ‘permanent crisis’. Discussions about agency are thus often contrasted directly with the perceived inherent vulnerability of such young people. Hence one could argue that the new paradigm’s claim that children are competent social actors has led to many empirical endeavours to find evidence of agency particularly in those most marginalized. As Madhok (quoted in Campbell et al. 2015, 62) states: “the search for agency in the least favourable situations has reached almost epidemic proportions”. At the same time, researchers increasingly have encountered the limitations of the agentic turn, and have used their empirical accounts of children ‘at risk’ to problematize the notion of agency, as will be discussed in section 2.4.2.

In the next section, section 2.4, I will elaborate further on this agentic framework which characterizes studies of so-called other ‘other’ childhoods, including street children living in the Global South. Primarily, I will discuss ethnographic studies of street children

and other children in difficult situations which demonstrate that whereas agency is already a thorny concept when studied in relation to children in the West, studying (structure and) agency among children in the Global South comes with particularly difficult challenges.

2.4 The agentive turn

The ‘new’ paradigm in the Sociology of Childhood has strongly emphasized children’s agentive capacities. In their seminal work *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, Prout and James (1990, 7) stress that: “Children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes (Prout and James 1990, 7). The authors do not give a clear-cut definition of ‘agency’ however, but loosely link the concept to “action” and “creative production” instead (1990, 27). In section 2.4.1, I will outline some important critiques of the use of agency by the Sociology of Childhood. Before starting with this however, it should be stressed that doubts about the full adoption of the notion of agency should be seen as ‘executorial’ in a sense that there is no actual doubt in the literature about the legitimacy of the observation that children indeed are competent social actors, but what is problematized rather is the way this has translated into a full embrace of agency and how this has been analytically ‘executed’ in practice. Then, in section 2.4.2 I will reflect on scholarly attempts to nuance the concept of agency.

2.4.1 Problematizing the agentive turn

The Sociology of Childhood has been critiqued for predominantly emphasizing agency over structure (Ansell 2009). It has been argued that assumptions about agency have become taken for granted and are “infrequently interrogated with much depth” (Vanderbeck quoted in Nikitina-den Besten 2008, 12). Demonstrating agency in the “least favourable situations” (Campbell et al., 2015, 62; Bordonaro 2012) such as among street children surviving in a context of extreme marginalization has led to a notion of agency which is argued to be uncritical (Bordonaro 2012), “too narrow” (van Blerk 2012, 321) or “unreflexively positive” (Gigengack 2008, 7). Other scholars have pointed out a “romantic”(Durham 2008a), “decontextualized and top-down” (Campbell et al. 2015, 54) notion of agency which should be deconstructed as being “less celebratory” and “more constricted” (Hess and Shandy 2008, 771). This observation is shared by many others (Utas 2005; van Blerk 2012; West 2000; Ansell 2009; Payne 2012; Pells 2012; Punch and

Tisdall 2012).

More specifically, Durham (2008a) accuses researchers of “romanticization” when identifying actions as agency through neglecting the often extreme contextual limitations in which these actions are positioned. Indeed, agency is a blunt analytical tool to describe for example a 12-year-old girl’s ‘choice’ to have unprotected sex with an HIV-positive older man, to generate income to feed her younger siblings, or a child’s decision to drop out of school to care for a dying parent (Andersen in Campbell et al. 2015). Campbell (2015), for instance, draws on a study of Zimbabwean school children’s accounts of the lives of their HIV-affected peers to argue that the *Sociology of Childhood*’s view of agency does not take enough account of children’s own experiences, unwittingly masking the degree of children’s suffering.

In street children studies, children’s use and appropriation of space has been a popular focus to demonstrate and contemplate agency. More precisely, mobility is hailed as a powerful agentic tool allowing street children to experience freedom and to construct new identities (Beazley 2003a; Beazley 2003b; Conticini 2005; Evans 2006). However, van Blerk (2013) argues that despite the much-needed focus of previous work with street youth drawing attention to their agentic capacities and illustrating resourcefulness, merely positive understandings of mobility are uncritical and insensitive to power relations. She points out that “despite the centrality of positive mobility to much of daily life [...] youth are still subject to forced mobility [...]” (2013, 558) and “little attention has been paid to street youth’s mobility as shaped by power held by others” (ibid: 560). Van Blerk shows how mobility is often forced and does not always equal freedom. This is the case for instance with the forceful removal of street youth in Cape Town who are chased out of the city and choose to relocate themselves to obscure and hidden spaces in an attempt to reduce their visible presence in the context of urban renewal governance. Bordonaro (2012) also argues against perceiving agency as freedom. He says this perspective is in fact pre-emptively selective because such notions of agency rest on the idea that to act freely is to act in conformity with reason. In other words: we only consider actions as agency when people’s choices seem morally right to us (see also Gigengack 2008). The work of Jones, Herrera and Thomas de Benítez (2007, 466) further problematizes any romantic notion of street youth’s agency and resilience by paying attention to the underexplored theme of suicide, suggesting the strategies and “steeling effects” of street youth “may also be signs of stress, risk and coping with suicidal ideation personally or among peers”.

I agree with these scholars who, despite general recognition of the importance of the Sociology of Childhood's core assumption that children are capable social agents, encourage critical standpoints as to how agency is demonstrated and interpreted in empirical accounts. In fact, there is one additional observation to make. When it comes to studies of African children/childhoods in particular, it can be noticed that even situations which are not about agency per se but rather about the 'nature' of 'exceptional childhoods' in general, are often turned into an agency discussion.

An example is Payne's (2012) understanding of "everyday agency". She studied children who are heads of households in Zambia. Critiquing how these children have typically been depicted as extraordinary survivors within the literature on coping strategies, she argues we should not see the acts of these children as "coping through a lens of crisis" (2012, 408) because the children themselves don't necessarily perceive their lives as crisis. Her notion of "everyday agency" then refers to (expressions of agency within) situations of so-called "crisis" which turn out to be perceived as part of everyday life by actors themselves, "rather than something which is inherently extraordinary or unusual, always an example of coping, resilience and competency, or a social problem in need of correction" (Payne 2012, 400, see also Bordonaro 2012). The concept of 'agency' itself is not further defined here, but Payne's understanding of "everyday agency" as "everyday life" raises the question if this is then still agency. This fully depends, of course, on how we define agency. I will come to my own definition of agency towards the end of section 2.5.2 and, based on this definition, I will argue why I think "everyday agency" is not agency. First however, I will turn to creative attempts by scholars to 'balance' the optimistic notion of agency as foregrounded by the 'new' sociological paradigm in childhood studies. Various alternatives have been developed, stressing its relation to vulnerability (Mizen and Ofofu-Kusi 2013), calling it "constrained" (Panelli, Punch, and Robson 2007), "thin" (Klocker 2007), "tactical" (Honwana 2005), "performative" (Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, and Chizororo 2006) or "relational" (Holt 2006). Others have pointed attention to "infantile" (Vacchiano and Jiménez 2012), "ambiguous" (Bordonano and Payne, 2012, Seymour 2012) or "self-destructive" agency (Gigengack 2008). The next section will take a closer look at some of these nuances.

2.4.2 Nuancing the concept of agency

In the wake of the Sociology of Childhood, many scholars have encountered the limitations of the agentic turn and they have used their empirical accounts to construct

a more nuanced perspective on agency (Honwana 2005; Klocker 2007; Robson and Ansell 2006; Gigengack 2008; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2013). In fact, all these attempts can be seen as problematizing the celebratory and taken-for-granted notion of agency by shifting the attention to (external) constraints and to actions in contexts of structural marginalization and (unequal) power relations.

One solution provided in the literature is the deconstruction of agency as one all-encompassing concept into different types or scales of agency to account for situations in which individuals in highly constrained settings may actually possess very little agency at certain times (Honwana 2005; Klocker 2007; Robson and Ansell 2006). To avoid being dismissive of the pressures on child domestic workers in Tanzania, Klocker (2007) for instance, distinguishes between “thin” and “thick” agency. “Thin” agency is thus defined as: “the decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives” (2007, 85). In contrast, “thick agency” refers to: “having a latitude to act within a broad range of options” (*ibid*). From Klocker’s perspective it is possible for a person’s agency to be ‘thickened’ or ‘thinned’ over time and space, and across various relationships. Structures, contexts and relationships can act as ‘thinners’ or ‘thickeners’ of an individual’s agency, by constraining or expanding their range of viable choices. Klocker’s understanding of agency as something which can be ‘thickened’ or ‘thinned’ over time and across relationships acknowledges that individuals may possess ‘more’ or ‘less’ agency depending on particularities of time and place. Yet we can question if a set of just two alternatives - ‘thin’ versus ‘thick’ - does justice to all the alternatives of individual’s agentic capabilities and there is a risk of reconstructing binary categories which were subject to extensive critique when used in the Sociology of Childhood (e.g. social/biological, child/adult, global/local etc.). Robson et al. (2007, 135) take Klocker’s conceptualization one step further by creating an agency-continuum with four different options. The possibilities they employ range from “no agency”, to “little agency”, “secret agency” and “public agency”.

Honwana (Honwana 2005, but see also Utas 2005) deconstructs agency not into different scales but into different types. She makes a distinction between “strategic” and “tactical” agency applied to make sense of the ambiguous actions of child soldiers in Mozambique. She draws on de Certeau’s (1988) analysis of trajectories, strategies and tactics. With “tactical agency” she means “a specific type of agency that is devised to cope with the concrete, immediate conditions of children’s lives in order to maximize the circumstances created by their (violent) environment” (2005, 49). Tactical actions

however, she stresses, come from a position of weakness. They have no power base - the absence of a locus (the *proper* as de Certeau calls it) - and act within the confines of a 'foreign' territory. Tactics are the *art of the weak*, who must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities. It is a manoeuvre within the enemy's field of vision that operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them. This gives a tactic more mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must "accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment" (de Certeau in Honwana 2005, 49). Child soldiers, argues Honwana (2005, 49), are "tactical agents" who respond to the demands and pressures of their lives. In contrast, the exercise of "strategic" agency would imply a basis of power. It would also require mastery of the larger picture, of the long-term consequences of their actions, in form of political gain or benefits/profits. This does not seem to be the case for the majority of Honwana's informants, in particular because some of the child soldiers see the period of fighting the war as a waste of time. After years of fighting and enduring the most adverse conditions of existence, they have nothing: no jobs, no skills, no studies, no homes, no parents, no food or shelter.

Honwana's insightful analysis of tactical agency of child soldiers also partially fits the lived realities of street children. Different scholars have pointed to a "live for today" mentality of street children (Conticini 2005; Beazley 2003b; Lockhart 2002) or so-called "immediatism" (Butler 2009) where they operate within public, 'foreign' territory (in de Certeau's terms) and constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities. Their lifestyle is characterized by intense mobility (van Blerk 2013) which allows them to accept the chance offering of the moment. At the same time, street life differs from life in a warzone precisely with respect to those long-term consequences. Street children sometimes perceive the street as a (long-term) solution to their problems. Thomas de Benítez (2011a) seems to draw on de Certeau too when she concludes that "children make tactical, - if not *strategic* - decisions to be on the street, whether to reduce harm, or improve social economic options for their families or for themselves" (2011a, 21, emphasis added). Also Conticini and Hulme (2007) argue that children in street situations are able to move from an initial situation of managing survival strategies (meaning here; tactics) to more complex and articulated development of coping strategies built on experience, skills development and access to resources precluded at an initial phase. In line with this I argue street children are not only tactical agents just concerned with immediate survival (this will be argued in chapter 6).

Other alternatives to problematize the Sociology of Childhood's notion of agency as solely positive can be found in the work of scholars paying attention to what we can refer to as "negative agency" (Gable 2000; Gigengack 2008; Gigengack 2014c; Jeffrey 2011; Bordonaro 2012; Seymour 2012; Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, and Chizororo 2006). A clear illustration is what Gigengack describes as "self-destructive" agency (2008, 14). This kind of agency is mostly manifest in the use of drugs, which Gigengack himself at first described in terms of coping and resilience, despite his informants consciously stressing their concerns about the destruction that was going on. Also street children's indifference with respect to their own survival can be understood as a form of self-destructive agency (Gigengack 2008; 2014b, see also Lockhart 2002 and Conticini 2005).

To conclude: two important points have now been firmly established in children's studies. The first dates back to the 1990s; that children are able to act, show resourcefulness and survive. To that extent they are indeed social actors. The second point, to some extent countering the first - in itself a counter-movement to previous ideas - relates to important constraints to children's ability to act and survive. By problematizing "romantic" (cf. Durham 2008a) connotations of agency in particular, this second body of literature clearly succeeded in acknowledging the boundaries of children's agency in constrained contexts. With this thesis I would like to add to these new theoretical directions by bringing two issues to the fore. The first concerns the need to further theorize the complex intertwinement of structure and agency. Here I agree with Tisdall and Punch (2012, 255, emphasis added) who argue limitations to children's agency are indeed *acknowledged* yet "perhaps insufficiently *problematized*". A nuanced and contextual understanding of the opportunities, limitations and complexities of young people's agency continues to be somewhat lacking, says also Rosen (2007). My second concern relates to my commitment to studying children from a person-centred perspective, allowing not just their voices but perhaps more so their subjectivities to structure scholarly analyses. Although the idea of "studying children in their own right" has been foregrounded by the Sociology of Childhood and scholars have argued against "top-down" approaches (cf. Campbell et al. 2015) this is something, I argue, which requires further effort, which becomes most clear in how agency often continues to be explained: top-down instead of actor-centred.

The next step, I argue is thus twofold: 1) a move from *acknowledging* both agency and structure in children's lives to *theorizing* their intertwinement while 2) shifting the

focus to an actor-centred perspective. So far, scholars have provided many empirical accounts - in the 1990s to point out agency and in the 2000s to demonstrate structure - but in the meantime, as it has been argued by some, childhood studies have become “complacent and uncritical on a more theoretical level” (Tisdall and Punch 2012, 251; Horton and Kraftl 2005; Horton and Kraftl 2006; Vanderbeck 2007; James 2010; Horton, Kraftl, and Tucker 2008).

I follow Campbell et al. (2015, 62, emphasis added) who call for a critical re-thinking of the notion of agency while paying “greater attention to the factors that *mediate* between so-called agency and its outcomes [...]”. Hence, after bringing structure back in, we need to problematize and theorize it further because important questions remain unanswered. For instance, questions addressing the limitations of individual freedom in society and understanding how constraints or limitations precisely shape agentive (im)possibilities. By acknowledging ‘structures’ exist and interfere with young people’s agentive abilities, scholars have usefully pointed at external constraints such as war and violence (Seymour 2012, Honwana 2005, Utas 2005), HIV epidemics and their inherent consequences for young people (Payne 2012, Robson et al. 2007, Klocker 2007) among others. However, what remains underexplored are the dynamics of the socio-cultural setting and conditions that help determine individual life courses. That is the local logics, behavioural norms, values, belief systems, economic and political organization and gender and kinship structures that are enculturated from a young age and form a deeply buried taken-for-granted repertoire shaping individual practices.

With regard to my second concern, an actor-centred approach to agency, it should be noted that previous attempts, discussed above, to nuance the notion of agency have been very helpful in deconstructing a static, one-dimensional vision of agency. However, it can be argued they have not truly succeeded in putting the child’s view at the centre of analysis. Explaining agency as “thin” or “thick”, “constrained” or “tactical” derives, in essence, from the researcher’s evaluation of agency as the realistic (potential) outcome(s) of power plays, and not necessarily from how children, as social actors, interpret their own agentive capacities.

Addressing these two issues, and taking internal critiques of the level of theorization within childhood studies into account (e.g. Tisdall and Punch 2012, Rosen 2007), I choose to draw on a theoretical body of work outside childhood studies: practice theory. Practice theory is a broad theoretical framework that aims to overcome the structure/agency opposition by analysing a *dialectical* rather than *oppositional*

relationship between the structural constraints of society and culture on the one hand and the ‘practices’ of social actors on the other. In specific, the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1971; 1977; 1986; 1990; 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), arguably the most well-known practice theorist, is particularly useful to gain a better understanding of those factors mediating between structure and agency, including the localized sociocultural structuralising dynamics and, subsequently, the intertwining of (partly unconscious) behavioural strategies and (conscious) rational conduct. By unravelling this intertwining, we may gain a deeper understanding of a “cultural specificity of agency” (cf. Magazine 2003, 305; Ortner 2006, 57), which has remained underexplored in existing literature examining structure and agency among marginalized young people in the Global South. Bourdieu’s work is invaluable for theorizing the multiple dimensions of structures shaping street children’s agentic (im)possibilities. However, Bourdieusian practice theory still does not provide us with a person-centred perspective, largely because notions of reflexivity and intentionality are not fully taken into account in explaining an individual’s behavioural practices. Therefore, to be able to address my second concern, an actor-centred agency approach, I will complement Bourdieusian practice theory with the work of Sherry Ortner (2006), a contemporary practice theorist who adds subjectivity, reflexivity and intentionality to my theory of practice. I will expand on Bourdieu’s and Ortner’s work in the next section, working towards a comprehensive theoretical framework, including my own definition of agency, which will help me to explore and explain the spiritual practice of street children.

2.5 Towards a better understanding of structure-agency: practice theory

Practice theory can be seen as a highly comprehensive attempt to overcome the apparent antinomy between human agency on the one hand and social structures or systems on the other hand: the well-known structure/agency opposition. Rather than assuming agency and structure as opposites, practice theory stresses their relationship as dialectical. Although there are different practice theorists (e.g. Schatzki 1996; Giddens 1979, among others), French sociologist Bourdieu remains one of the most prominent thinkers in the field. His work will be the point of departure here to deepen our theoretical understanding of the practices of social actors vis-à-vis the structural constraints of culture. Specifically, I will discuss his notions of ‘field’, ‘*doxa*’, ‘capital’ and ‘*habitus*’ which I will use to explore the ‘Spiritual Field’ of Bukavu (chapter 4) and the spiritual practice of material survival (chapter 5).

2.5.1. Bourdieusian practice theory

To understand Bourdieusian practice theory, I find it useful to draw on the metaphor of a ‘game’ which Bourdieu himself suggests (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Despite associations of the word ‘game’ with ‘play’ and ‘innocence’ which are slightly unfortunate in the context of writing about street children, I still choose to use this concept because of its deeper (theoretical) meaning in the context of practice theory and because of its illuminative potential. For instance: a game is something which is actively played, hence it assumes the players as active actors. Also, a game is oriented towards culturally constituted life goals and projects and it involves both routine practices and intentionalized action. Ortner (2006) adds to this that her idea of “serious games” emphasizes the agent’s embedding in relations (of solidarity and power) with others. Drawing on this metaphor of social life as a ‘game’, I will here discuss four concepts that are important to Bourdieusian practice theory: field, *doxa*, capital and *habitus*.

A field in this sense can be understood as the game’s playing board. This game however is not a product of a deliberate act of creation such as a game like Ludo for instance, and it follows rules that are not explicit. Like a game however, there are *stakes* (French: *enjeux*) which are for the most part a product of the competition between players. There is an investment in the game, what Bourdieu calls *illusio* (from Latin *ludus*; the game), interest in the game, and a commitment to its presuppositions. This last one, a commitment to the presuppositions of the game, is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*. *Doxa* is that “undisputed, pre-reflexive, naive, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field” (1990, 68). The word *doxa*, δόξα, is Greek, coming from the verb δοκεῖν which means ‘to assume, to believe, to suppose’¹⁵. *Doxa* is all that is taken for granted in a field; the unquestioned truths (Bourdieu 1977). These unquestioned truths often take the form of (semi-conscious) belief. Bourdieu argues that belief is an inherent part of belonging to any field (1990, 67). Hence the field can be seen as the play’s battlefield: the local context which determines important pre-conditions and rules for the game. There are different yet interrelated fields: a social field, religious field, political field etc.

Extending this idea of the field as a game, there are two important characteristics of every Bourdieusian field that are particularly important in the light of understanding what I am calling the ‘Spiritual Field’ of Bukavu, which I will introduce in chapter 4. The

¹⁵ Muller en Thiel 1958 (Dutch-Greek dictionary, own translation).

first characteristic of Bourdieu's field concerns the strong association of the notion of 'field' with power (struggles) and the second is the association with an economic logic.¹⁶ Regarding the first connotation of field, power, it should be noted that whereas the English word 'field' carries relatively neutral connotations, the French word *champ* is associated with the notions of 'force field' and 'battlefield'. This becomes clear immediately in Bourdieu's own definition of 'field' as: "a structured space of social forces and struggles" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 243). Elsewhere he defines a field in analytic terms as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (1992, 97). According to Rey (2007, 41), one of Bourdieu's contemporary commentators, a field is a "competitive arena of social relations wherein variously positioned agents and institutions struggle over the production, acquisition and control of forms of capital particular to the field in question". Important here is the centrality of 'positions' and 'relations' in the notion of the field. It is the state of the relations of force between players that defines the structure of the field. We can thus conclude that when comparing the field to a game, this should be seen first and foremost as a highly competitive game in which players can be seen as competing with each other in their attempts to pursue their own interests.

This brings me to the second connotation of 'field': its economic logic. Bourdieu's understanding of 'field' as a 'competitive arena' becomes evident also through the fact that he sometimes uses the term 'market' interchangeably with the term field (see also Urban 2005). In fact, Rey (2007) points out that Bourdieu uses other fundamentally market-related terms such as 'profit', 'interest', 'capital' and 'investment', terms that are associated with economics and thus reflect a strong Weberian (and Marxist) bent to Bourdieu's work. At the same time, it has been argued that field is a more inclusive concept than market; as a spatial metaphor it suggests rank and hierarchy as well as exchange relations between sellers (Swartz 1996). Indeed, Swartz (1996) argued, Bourdieu's concept of field should not be reduced to the classic idea of the market. He says fields denote "arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize different kinds of capital" (1992, 79). Hence, a field is both

¹⁶ It should be emphasised, as Bourdieu does (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), that a concept such as field should be "put to work empirically in systematic fashion" (1992, 96). Notions such as *habitus*, field and capital can be defined, but only within the theoretical system they constitute, and not in isolation.

‘a space of action’ and a ‘space of struggle’ (Rey 2007, 44). Here, ‘action’ should be understood as focused action concerning the production and consumption of this capital while ‘struggle’ should be put in the light of inter-personal struggle over capital. This adds then to our understanding of the nature of the game as being not just competitive but as interest-oriented competition over the accumulation and consumption of diverse forms of capital.

Now if we analyse Bukavu as a social field, street children clearly occupy marginalized positions, considered ‘out of place’ by others and lacking access to various forms of economic capital. However, in the ‘Spiritual Field’ of Bukavu, my own concept expanding on Bourdieu’s field (see chapter 4), street children have various potentially creative ways to exercise power, as I will show in chapters 4 and 5. The notion of field is particularly useful in the context of my study precisely because of these connotations with power dynamics and struggle which are central to the spiritual practice of street children. In a context of not ‘everyday’ but profound existential insecurity - picture a ‘daily life’ in which a young person goes to sleep each night while not knowing whether he or she will wake up the next morning - a thorough contemplation of spiritual power dynamics should be central. Therefore I adopt the Bourdieusian notion of field as a ‘structured space of social forces and struggles’ to contemplate the spiritual setting of Bukavu as a space with opportunities and threats in which actors compete for various forms of capital.

Hence, capital is the third crucial concept in Bourdieu’s work. Capitals are: “resources distributed throughout the social body which have an exchange value in one or more of the various ‘markets’ or ‘fields’” (Crossley in Rey 2007, 51). Bourdieu (1986, 46) distinguishes between three forms of capital: 1) economic capital: immediately and directly convertible into money (including property rights) and at the root of all other types of capital; 2) cultural capital: social assets (e.g. education, intellect) that promote social mobility; 3) social capital: the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or in other words: the membership of a group.

Then, Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* is the fourth and arguably most fundamental concept of his theory. However, I will not use this concept in my analysis as I choose to substitute it with Ortner’s notion of subjectivity, as I will explain in detail in the next section (section 2.5.2). Nevertheless, I will very briefly explain what *habitus* is, first of all because it helps to understand Bourdieu’s approach to practice as a whole. Second,

briefly introducing *habitus* will help explain why I choose not to use it despite employing Bourdieu's other concepts. *Habitus* illustrates how Bourdieu understands the interplay of structure and agency at the level of the acting individual. If field is the game's playing board and inherent rules, *habitus* is a "feel for the game" (*sens du jeu*) that causes us to do what we do at the right moment without needing to thematise what had to be done [...]" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 223-224). This "feel for the game" is what gives the game a subjective sense, meaning and *raison d'être*, but also a direction, and orientation, and impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake (*illusion*), in the sense of investment, interest in the game, and a commitment to its presuppositions. The relationship between *habitus* and field should be seen as 'double and obscure'. On one side, Bourdieu says, there is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the *habitus*. On the other side, *habitus* contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy (1992, 127). In other words, (social/political/religious) space impacts the *habitus* which, in its turn, transforms such spaces into meaningful places. In his own words, *habitus* is understood by Bourdieu as a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions [...]" (1977,83). It should be noticed that a large part of what constitutes the *habitus* consists of what we could see as 'subconscious inclinations'; rather than strategic reasoning, we act according to pre-set and internalized 'dispositions'. As Bourdieu puts it: "The habitus is precisely this immanent law, laid in each agent by his earliest upbringing [...]" (1977, 81). In fact, Bourdieu strongly emphasises these pre-reflexive, subconscious aspects of behaviour, subsequently largely neglecting reflexivity and intentional action. This has led to wide critique by other scholars, who argue that despite Bourdieu's aim to overcome the duality between subjectivism and objectivism, he tends to be drawn more to the objectivism side: emphasizing (the power of) structure and institutions over individual agency (Rey 2007; Ortner 2006; Verter 2003).

An illustrative example of this tendency can be found in Bourdieu's approach to religion. Unsurprisingly and much like his approach to culture as a whole, Bourdieu's perspective on religion is a fairly pragmatic - some say 'negative' - economic one. In his own words, Bourdieu wants to "utilize the economic model to extend materialist critique into the realm of religion and to uncover the specific interests of the protagonists of the religious game, priests, prophets and sorcerers" (1990, 107). Competition for religious

power thus seems to be the central principle constituting the dynamics of Bourdieu's religious field. Crucially, according to Bourdieu, only religious leaders - that is priests and sorcerers - can obtain and exercise what he distinguishes as "religious capital": religious symbolic systems and religious competences. Hence, religious lay-people are seen as passive subordinated victims of the religious games played by religious experts. This explicit denial of religious capital for lay-people indicates Bourdieu leaves little room for individual agency of lay-people. In a reaction, contemporary scholars theorizing religion with Bourdieu (and *against* him) suggest a rethinking of his notion of religious capital which, by de-institutionalizing it, grants agency to the layperson that Bourdieu denied (Rey 2007, Verter 2003). Having said this, it should have become clear why I do not draw on Bourdieu's work on religion despite building on his wider theory of practice. In fact, I agree with Verter (2003) that in order to see Bourdieu's relevance for the social scientific study of religion, one must - quite paradoxically - turn away from his writings on religion.

In conclusion, I have found the wider work of Bourdieu very insightful particular to gain a deeper theoretical understanding of the structuring role of 'fields' as local contexts that both limit and enable individual practice. To explore the rich reflexivity of street children as sense-makers as well as their strategic, intentional practices oriented towards life goals however, Bourdieusian theory is too limited. Building on Bourdieu, I will therefore add Ortner's notions of subjectivity and agency in section 2.5.2, working towards my own working definition of agency (section 2.5.3).

2.5.2 Building on Bourdieu: Ortner's work on subjectivity and agency

As explained above (section 2.5.1), the main emphasis in Bourdieu's work is on the way *habitus* establishes a range of options and limits for the social actor. Insisting on the deeply internalized and largely unconscious nature of social knowledge in acting subjects, he thus leaves very little room for agency. Other practice theorists, including Giddens (1979) and Sewell (1992) pay more attention to agency. Yet also in their work, so Ortner (2006) argues, there is a tendency to slight to question of subjectivity, which she explains as: "the view of the subject as existentially complex, a being who feels and thinks and reflects, who makes and seeks meaning" (2006, 110). I agree with Ortner that subjectivity is important and deserves a central place in a theory of practice. First of all because it is a major dimension of human existence and to ignore it theoretically is to impoverish a sense of 'the human' in the so-called human sciences (Ortner 2006). Also, subjectivity is

particularly crucial in Ortner's work because she considers it the very basis of agency: a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency in this sense is not a natural or ordinary will; it takes shape as a set of specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts and meanings.

I agree with this perspective of subjectivity as the basis of agency and I argue that taking subjectivity into account is a useful starting point towards a better understanding of (street) children's lived experiences. Ortner defines subjectivity as: "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects. But I always mean as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize and provoke those modes of affect, thought and so on" (2006, 107). In line with this definition, I assume with Ortner that actors are always at least partially knowing subjects, which means they have some degree of reflexivity about themselves and their desires. They are, in other words, 'conscious' in the psychological sense of the word. It is important to stress that this insistence on the importance of subjectivity should be seen as a compliment to, not a replacement of, Bourdieu's emphasis on processes of internalization of more structured 'rules of the game'. On the other hand, I will substitute Bourdieu's *habitus* with Ortner's notion of subjectivity, seeing it as the basis of agency while being 'shaped' by the cultural and social formations Ortner acknowledges.

As a consequence of Ortner's emphasis on subjectivity in agency, the concept of intentionality becomes crucial for a further theoretical assessment of agency. 'Intentionality' includes a wide range of states, both cognitive and emotional, and at various levels of consciousness, that are directed forward towards some end. Thus intentionality in agency might include highly conscious plots and plans and schemes: somewhat more nebulous aims, goals, and ideals; and finally desires, wants, and needs that may range from being deeply buried to quite consciously felt. In short: "Intentionality as a concept is meant to include all the ways in which action is cognitively and emotionally pointed *toward* some purpose" (Ortner 2006, 134, emphasis in the original). Ortner distinguishes between so-called "soft" and "hard" definitions of agency, depending on the importance theorists place on intentionality. Drawing on Sewell (1992) Ortner herself argues for a "hard" definition of agency which implies "the strong role of active (though not necessarily fully 'conscious') intentionality in agency" (Ortner 2006, 136). Importantly, it is this focus on intentionality that differentiates agency from the routine practices of 'everyday life'.

Furthermore, Ortner distinguishes between two (related) modalities of agency: the first is closely linked to social power (transformative capacity), including both domination and resistance, but the second is related to the ideas of intention and the pursuit of people's (culturally constituted) projects, or in other words, this agency is defined by "local logics of the good and the desirable and how to pursue them" (2006, 145). I will draw on this distinction between 'agency-as-power' (in chapter 5 in particular) and 'agency-as-projects' (in chapter 6 in particular) to explore the dynamics of agency of the *Biles* of Bukavu. This second modality in particular, 'agency-as-(life)-projects', is useful to understand the agency of marginal actors but also to understand agency in relation to spirituality. More specifically, during my fieldwork I started to question whether we should think of children's agency only in terms of outcomes that are realistically feasible or whether we should take children's aspirations and the subjective *experience* of agency as central to our analysis. The focus on spirituality ultimately guided me towards this second option. This was based first of all on the realisation that an important aspect of children's survival concerns their emotional well-being, or what I call 'moral survival' (see chapter 6) which does not manifest as an objective 'outcome' but rather as a process to which agentic awareness is crucial. Second, spirituality in itself always goes beyond that which is objectively or scientifically measurable.

In the light of these considerations and in an effort to merge Ortner's two modalities into a single definition of agency, I have come to understand street children's agency as *'the experience and pursuit of possibilities'*. This experience and pursuit should be seen as independent of feasibility, actuality and outcomes whether intended or not. Although this definition builds on Ortner's conceptualisation, it also moves beyond it, in particular, because of my recognition of children's experienced agency in circumstances where their 'actual' agency might be severely limited. Importantly, this 'agentic experience' from my definition should be understood as inherently reflexive and linked to subjectivity. It implies a contemplation of the multiple positioning (economic, social, moral, spiritual) of the self in society. This contemplation leads to a valuation of being (alive) and the formulation of strategies for action. Both these things - contemplation *and* (formulating) strategies of action - are agency. In the light of my definition, aspirations as such are not agency but the experience of (having opportunities for) realising these aspirations is agency. In this thesis, this experience of possibilities of realising aspirations, in other words the pursuit of life projects, is often linked to spirituality, as I will show in my empirical chapters (specifically chapters 5 and 6).

Coming back to some examples of the way children's agency is conceptualised in the Sociology of Childhood, I cannot agree that Payne's (2012) "everyday agency" (section 2.4.1) is actual agency precisely because it seems to lack reflexivity and intentionality, with children themselves presenting it as "everyday life". Subsequently, and following Ortner, I would argue we could take Payne's argument one step further and use the rhetoric of "everyday life" instead of "everyday agency" in this context. Payne herself claims we should start with "children and young people's own perspectives" (2012, 408). She demonstrates that these children do not perceive their lives as being 'in crisis'. Yet the question which remains unanswered is whether they perceive the everyday actions in their lives as being filled with expressions and awareness of agency. Perhaps as agency simply as the 'ability to act', but most likely not in the sense of 'contemplation of the positioned self and the pursuit of life projects', at least there seems to be no empirical material demonstrating this.

In contrast, Campbell et al.'s (2015) 'extended conceptualization of agency' does for instance explicitly take intentionality into account. They argue we should regard independent action as the means to an end that actors themselves would value, instead of positing these actions as an end in themselves. Drawing on Sen's *Development as Freedom* (1999), Campbell et al. (2015) argue against the trend to assess poor people's life situations and possibilities in terms of externally derived criteria. Instead, they argue, situations should be assessed in terms of the extent to which people's actions open up opportunities for them to lead the lives that they themselves would want to lead. This is in line with my understanding of reflexive agency and Ortner's idea of agency as the pursuit of culturally constructed projects, which is about "people having desires to grow out of their own structures of life, including their own structures of inequality" (Ortner 2006, 147).

To my knowledge, very few, if any, studies have (explicitly) used practice theory as a framework to understand the spiritual lives of individuals. In many social scientific studies on religion or spirituality, the focus has often been on either 'structure' or 'agency'. An illustrative example of the first concerns Weber's famous analysis of how Calvinistic Protestantism 'shaped' the consciousness of early modern subjects (Weber 1977). An example of an agency-oriented approach can be found in the many contributions to the relatively new field of 'lived religion', a cross-disciplinary - yet mostly sociological - stream of scholarship studying how religion is *lived* by ordinary people (most of all: what people *do*) in their everyday lives. Despite internal claims that

‘practice’ is a key notion (Ammerman 2016; Hall 1997; McGuire 2008; Aune 2015), the scholarship on ‘lived religion’ lacks an adequate theory of practice (Ammerman 2016). As a consequence, ‘agency’ too is insufficiently problematized yet implicitly celebrated - even more so than in the Sociology of Childhood - and in a way that alludes not just to conceptual confusion but also to deep eurocentrism.¹⁷ Because of these reasons, lived religion debates have not been terribly useful for my study. Instead, I have chosen to build on practice theory to gain a better understanding of the complex intertwinement of structure and agency in street children’s spiritual lives.

Now, spirituality is an exceptionally rich field to study the interplay of structure and agency, including the manifestation of a cultural specific kind of agency. Spirituality is precisely a sphere of social life characterized by a fusion of taken-for-granted dispositions on the one hand and (opportunities for) strategic action on the other hand. It connects the reasonable and the unintelligible, the individual and the collective, the worldly and the transcendental and the human and the divine. The next section explores literature on the culturally specific manifestations of ‘spirituality’ in contemporary Africa: religion, most notably Christianity, and witchcraft.

2.6 Spiritual fields in Africa

Settling on a (universal) definition of spirituality has proved exasperatingly troublesome, not to mention the complexity of analytically separating spirituality from religion. It is often assumed that spirituality can be both part of religion, as its ‘personal interior dimension’ (Shingleton 2014) as well as something that goes beyond it. The problem with many definitions of spirituality as we find it in most contemporary literature is that the term has become increasingly interwoven with a tradition of American individualism in religious culture (MacKian 2012, Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott, 1999), which does not always make sense in the context of street children in the DRC. Very broad (universal) definitions however are still useful in bringing our understanding further. Seeing ‘spirituality’ as the human ‘search for meaning’ concerned with something ‘greater than the (physical) self’ (Kale 2004, Williams and Lindsey 2006, Flanagan 2007, Shingleton

¹⁷ Indeed, ‘lived religion’ is concerned almost exclusively with religious and spiritual practices and experiences of ‘ordinary’ people in the West. In an article reviewing 64 lived religion papers Ammerman (2016) shows the framework’s narrow focus in terms of religious tradition and geographic location. By far most of the articles focused on either Christian populations or on people with no specific religious tradition at all. Furthermore, out of 64 articles only three studies were conducted in Latin America, three in South Asia and just one in Africa, all the others were conducted in the Global North.

2014) is an example of such a broad understanding. This something ‘greater than the self’ should then be seen as either some superhuman power (e.g. God), an ethical ideal, a supernatural concept (like karma or reincarnation), supernatural beings (the spirits of the deceased) or as something more nebulous, like a sense of ‘oneness with all living things’. On a broad level, I follow Edgell (2012) who states that spirituality and religion share the same core tasks of explanation and meaning-making. This quest for meaning is a human universal, constituting, as Flanagan (2007) argues, an ‘indispensable dimension of what it is to be human’. Hence the urge towards this quest for meaning, the *inclination* towards sense-making beyond the comprehensible, is something all humans share.

Nonetheless, it is inevitable that this universal inclination takes a local shape, it ‘becomes’ in a joint venture with for instance local systems of governance, local forms of societal organization etc. I call these local shapes *culturally patterned externalizations*, which are manifestations shaped through time and in place. When we look at contemporary African studies of these externalizations, they seem concerned with the broad categories of ‘religion’ and ‘witchcraft’ to which a notion of the ‘supernatural’ is central (see chapter 4, section 4.2 for a detailed explanation). It is based on this understanding that I come to formulate my own ‘working definition’ of spirituality in Eastern DRC. In this thesis, I define spirituality as “people’s thoughts and practices related to (interactions with) the ‘supernatural’”. By ‘supernatural’ I mean anything that is above or beyond what is ‘natural’, with ‘natural’ being everything that can be explained by science or the laws of nature. I will now take a closer look at the categories of ‘religion’ and ‘witchcraft’ as together constituting the supernatural in Bukavu.

In line with the complexities in defining spirituality, it can be argued that few concepts are more troublesome than the notion of ‘religion’ and several scholars have questioned religion as a comparative, universally applicable concept (Asad 2003; Eisenlohr 2012). However, as de Vries (2008) argues, “paradoxically, the more pressure one applies to ‘religion’, to its concept(s), referent(s), and requisite(s), the more resilient these categories tend to become (2008, 9)”. Acknowledging the complexities of settling on a definition, I will here follow Spiro who defines it as “an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings” (2004[1966], 96). This notion of ‘institution’ echoes the Durkheimian understanding of religion as an attribute of social groups; it is a social (explanatory) *system* providing meaning and order. As opposed to religion which is imbued with positive associations, witchcraft is perceived as something concealed and ‘dark’. Notwithstanding its highly

heterogeneous character, witchcraft is commonly understood as ‘malicious human action’; the penetration of harm through mystical or occult means (Geschiere 1997, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000, Ashforth 2005).¹⁸

Two vital points can be made based on existing literature: the first regards the high prominence of both religion and witchcraft in Africa. Whereas secularization theory is debatable only with respect to Europe (Davie 2006), it has become clear secularization frameworks make no sense in African contexts where, for instance, global Pentecostalism experiences its most spectacular rise (Robbins 2014). Second, researchers point to an intertwining of global formal religions, such as Christianity with ‘traditional African religion’ or more broadly, ‘indigenous beliefs and practices’ (Faulkner 2016). In part, this explains why witchcraft has proved remarkable resilience and vibrancy. In this section I will explore how religion (section 2.6.1) and witchcraft (sections 2.6.2 and 2.6.3), as culturally patterned manifestations of a shared inclination towards sense-making (spirituality), are assessed in Africa.

2.6.1 Christianity in Africa

Whereas Islam is widespread across northern Africa, Christianity has become the most prominent formal religion in Central and Southern part of the continent, including the DRC. Although the Roman Catholic church remains the largest and most established church in the DRC (see chapter 4, section 4.3.2), it is increasingly challenged by a proliferation of rapidly-growing Protestant denominations. Indeed, in contemporary Africa as a whole and far from a Weberian disenchantment, scholars argue there is a drastic resurgence of Protestant Christianity in particular (Asad 2003, Meyer and Moors 2005, Csordas 2009a, Anderson 2014). In a key text, Meyer (2012) outlines a shift from African Independent Churches, as the prime focus of study since the 1960s, to studying Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches since the 1990s. This shift, she argues, impinged on three discursive frames shaping research on Christianity in Africa. Although outlined in 2004, Meyer’s frames continue to be relevant to date: a) the relationship between Christianity and ‘traditional religion’ and the question of Africanization (e.g. Faulkner 2016, Woodhead et al. 2016), b) the relationship between Africa and ‘the wider world’ and the question of globalization (e.g. Haynes 2012, Robbins 2014) and c) the relationship

¹⁸ In contrast to religion then which is concerned with superhuman *beings*, witchcraft is thus concerned with supernatural *powers* (i.e ‘mystical means’) held by - essentially - normal ‘natural’ human beings.

between religion and politics and the question of religion in the public sphere (e.g. de Boeck 2013, Meyer and Moors 2005).

It is not surprising that the majority of contemporary studies on African Christianity are inspired by the sensational rise of Pentecostal or Charismatic Christian denominations across the continent. Pentecostalism is a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity, which places specific emphasis on a personal relationship with God through receiving ‘the gifts of the Holy Spirit’ through ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesying (Csordas 2009b, Anderson 2014). It is without doubt one of the success stories of the current area of cultural globalization, being the most dynamic and fastest growing sector of Christianity worldwide (Robbins 2009). Its surge in Africa is most spectacular however, where 44% of the religion’s 560 million adherents live (Pew forum 2011). To explain this success, scholars often point to the religion’s remarkable ability to adapt itself to the cultures in which it is introduced (Robbins 2004, Engelke 2004). Engelke (2004) for instance, argues that the key to its success in Africa is that it takes the idea of witchcraft seriously. This is indeed evident in the context of Bukavu, as I will argue in chapter 4, section 4.3.3.1.

Hence Pentecostalism is credited with a high flexibility for adapting itself to social and cultural contexts, appearing in locally and temporally shaped fashions. Besides adapting itself to a new social context to which it is introduced, scholars emphasize that also in an existing though changing social and economic context, Pentecostalism is perfectly transforming ‘along’, adapting, for instance to ‘modern times’ of globalization. As examples of such explorations we can look at the body of literature on the ‘prosperity gospel’; a theological sub-strain of Pentecostalism which teaches that God will bless true ‘born-again’ Christians with prosperity (see chapter 4, session 4.3.3.2, Meyer 1998, Maxwell 1998, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, Robbins 2004, Robbins 2009, Haynes 2012, Daswani 2013, Anderson 2014).

Whereas Protestantism has always been associated with capitalism since Weber (2008), contemporary scholars have re-emphasized the connection between Pentecostalism and neoliberal global capitalism in the light of this prosperity gospel, which has been embraced by Pentecostalists all over the world according to Meyer (1998). The Pentecostal celebration of (the public display of) material wealth is often analysed as being a reaction to (the unequal distribution of) global capitalist flows (cf. Appadruay 1996) and the spread of (post)modern ‘western’ values of consumerism and individualism. Comaroff and Comaroff for example argue that the material goods which

are most central to the imagination of desire fuelled by the prosperity gospel are modern, ‘Western’ goods such as luxury cars, flat screen TV’s etc. They describe bold colour advertisements for BMWs and lottery winnings above the altar of a church, under the text: “Delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (1999, 291).

With regards to Meyer’s third frame - Christianity and the public sphere - studies have demonstrated Pentecostalism radically transforms the urban landscape through the visibility of its *representations* (Meyer and Moors 2005, Meyer 2006, de Boeck 2012, Hopkins et al. 2013). In the Democratic Republic of Congo for instance, de Boeck (2012) shows how Pentecostal charismatic renewal churches have deeply penetrated urban life by imposing their logic and temporality on the city. One of the forms in which Pentecostalism is increasingly present in the public sphere is through its adoption of modern audio-visual mass media. Meyer and Moors (2005) show how Pentecostal TV hosts can easily become influential broadcasters who shape public opinion. In Bukavu, Pentecostal preachers use the radio most of all to spread their message, and some of them indeed become influential social figures, as I will show in chapter 4, section 4.3.3.3. In this light of the public presence of Pentecostalism, geographers have shown a revival of interest in the geographies of religions (e.g. Hopkins et al. 2013), while anthropologists have placed renewed interest in religions as mediations in what has been called the ‘media turn’ (Engelke 2010, Meyer 2006, Meyer and Moors 2005, Engelke 2010, Eisenlohr 2012).¹⁹

A final aspect of Pentecostalism in contemporary Africa which has received considerable attention is the process of conversion. Scholars studying Pentecostal conversion, in the form of adult baptism, argue it is the most radical form of conversion, a total ‘rupture’ or ‘complete break with the past’ (Meyer 1998), after which believers are said to be ‘Born-again’. This radical notion of ‘rupture’ has received much scholarly attention (Meyer 1998, Engelke 2004, 2010b, Robbins 2004, 2009, Daswani 2013).

2.6.2 *Witchcraft in Africa*

Arguing against the modernist assumption that witchcraft as something ‘traditional’ would irreversibly disappear under the modernizing forces of globalization, contemporary scholars of witchcraft have been particularly busy with demonstrating that

¹⁹ Although the adoption of mass media by religions takes novel forms in the globalised area, Meyer (2006) argues that in fact, media have always been intrinsic to religion since religion has always been a practice of mediation between people and the divine.

witchcraft is very much alive in contemporary Africa, and in fact, thriving in creative ways and engaging with novel postcolonial realities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, Geschiere 1997, Parish 2000, Moore and Sanders 2001, Sanders 2003). Mills (2013) argues that a very large body of work has developed over the last thirty years attesting that not only has witchcraft failed to disappear with the rise of political and economic modernity in Africa, it has actively flourished (see also Sanders 2003, also Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 1999, 2000, Geschiere 1998, Meyer 1998, Moore and Sanders 2001, Bähre 2002, Meyer and Pels 2003, Armstrong 2011).²⁰ Indeed, the centrality and ‘normality’ of witchcraft in Africa cannot be overstated. Several ethnographers argue it is perhaps best understood as a matter of social diagnostics rather than belief because for many people in Africa, witchcraft is “not so much a ‘belief’ about the world as it is a patent feature of it, a force that is “both self-evident and solemnly real” (Moore and Sanders 2003, 4).

In studies on African witchcraft, researchers have repeatedly emphasized a close relationship between witchcraft and consumption, (means of) production and, more recently, capitalism. In this light there is a clear parallel with materialist aspirations from the African prosperity gospel. Witchcraft has always been analysed as being concerned with (people’s ideas about) production, exchange and consumption (Moore and Sanders 2001, Bähre 2002, see also Crapo 2003 on cargo cults). Hence the wide-spread metaphors of witches as ‘eating’ their victims (Geschiere 1997, Bowie 2006, de Boeck 2008). Bowie (2006) argues that a fundamental notion here is that of *limited good*: There is only a certain finite amount of wealth, health and happiness to go around. If someone is particularly successful, fertile and fortunate in life, there is an assumption that they have profited at someone else’s expense. Witchcraft (accusations) then work as a levelling mechanism: they oppose inequalities in wealth (Kottak 2008), because it makes people cautious not to be (much) wealthier than their family members or even neighbours. Kottak (2008) furthermore argues that witchcraft accusations in general are often directed at socially marginal or anomalous individuals. In such situations witchcraft is explained as a means to restore social order in society.

Modern global forces, in particular global capitalism, have radically changed the modes of production, exchange and consumption (Geschiere 1997, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000, see also Appadurai 1996). In this light, scholars have argued that

²⁰ Despite these observations however, and the revival of interests for African witchcraft around the millennium, considerably less studies on African witchcraft have been published over the past 10 years.

witchcraft itself is taking on new forms and dimensions, adapting itself to changing socio-cultural and economic contexts. An example is given by Comaroff and Comaroff (1999; 2000), who argue that witchcraft is rearticulated through its engagement with modern forces, manifest in the global resurgence of what they have called ‘occult economies’. Occult economies are strategies to acquire wealth through occult means. We live in a world in which the *possibility* of rapid enrichment, imagined for instance through migrating abroad, is always palpably present. Nevertheless, most people experience modernity as something they are excluded from (Moore and Sanders 2001, see also Burrell 2008, 21). Discourses on the prospects of gaining money out of nothing through the exploitation of occult forces are characterized by the omnipresent paradox that people, on the one hand, attempt to conjure wealth through magic means while, at the other hand, morally condemn and prosecute other people who succeeded in acquiring assets through these illicit means (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). In this light, Geschiere (1997) concludes that witchcraft is both jealousy *and* success.

Besides new technological developments and modern forms of ‘suspected’ wealth, there are other societal changes shaping contemporary witchcraft discourses and accusations. Sociocultural transformations as a result of globalization or conflict influence new forms of kinship and struggles over (intergenerational and gender) authority. With regards to post-Apartheid South Africa for instance, Bähre (2002) interprets the interlinkages between a financial crisis and a crisis of masculinity among Xhosa migrants in Cape Town, leading to highly unstable relationships in which sex, money and kin are constantly re-negotiated. In this context of large-scale unemployment, labour migration, rape, uprootedness and social constraints by relatives, collective witchcraft fantasies offer a genre in which the anxieties and desires of interdependencies and the nexus of sex, blood, and money can be expressed and made comprehensible.

In the next paragraph I will show how children and youth are particularly vulnerable to witchcraft in times of social crisis, such as demonstrated in the context of the DRC by de Boeck (2005; 2008; 2013).

2.6.3 *Witchcraft and children/youth*

It can be argued that young people in particular have come to play a crucial role in processes of social economic and cultural transformations in Africa. They are seen as ‘social shifters’ (Durham 2004, 2008b), ‘emblematic of modernity’ (Gable 2000) and ‘makers or breakers’ (de Boeck and Honwana 2005). They seem most burdened by the

failed promises of a lost modernity characterized by an inter-generational struggle for power, not in the last place over the means of production (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) and the desire for western-style consumption (de Boeck 2008). Hence it is not surprising, as de Boeck (2005) argues, that young people are often involved in occult economies, either as the initiators, such as in *Sakawa* practices (Armstrong 2011), or as victims/means, such as in the example of Burke (2000) in which a young girl is ritually murdered by a business man who wants his business to prosper.

Through a contemplation on the *nyongo* witch, Geschiere (1997) analysed witchcraft as a discourse to comment upon morality, or the imagination of ‘evil’ (see Meyer 2008). Green and Mesaki (2005) state that witchcraft is an idiom through which the various dimensions of the universe - social, moral and natural - are experienced and acted on. More precisely and in the context of sociocultural transformations, scholars have emphasized that witchcraft provides a ‘meta-commentary’ on the ill-doings of modern capitalism and on the meaning and merit of modernity itself (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, Geschiere 1997, Moore and Sanders 2001). In the previous section I showed how people’s ideas about production and consumption are altered through processes of global economic change, but at the same time, social and cultural transformations have led to the breakdown of the order of kinship, power and the logic of gift-exchange (Bähre 2002, de Boeck 2005). Witchcraft in this context is portrayed as 1) offering a dynamic field for contesting and negotiating moralities, and 2) witchcraft accusations as functioning as perverse attempts to restore the *moral* order. With respect to the DRC, de Boeck (2005, 2008) shows how children have increasingly become a source of evil in the collective social imaginary and that child witchcraft accusations have increased. Considering the traditional moral and cultural matrix that defines children in terms of intrinsic wealth and as a social good, the current and unprecedented demonization of children in Congo bespeaks a deeply rooted sense of social crisis according to de Boeck (2008). He explains this by pointing out that children and adolescents have never before occupied a more central position in the public space of urban life. In this position they are not only victims but seen as active agents who contribute to shape Congolese society. He argues this newly generated central but ambivalent societal status of children seems to have crystallized most clearly around the figure of the witch, as “the materialization of a cultural imaginary of crisis on the crossroads between, for example, money, power, kinship and sexuality” (2005, 191). De Boeck (2005, 2008, 2013) argues that although street children have always existed in

Kinshasa, the changing pattern of witchcraft accusations in which children are the victims, has greatly contributed to growing numbers of street children (see also Foxcroft 2007 and Cimpric 2010 on street witch-children in other countries).

Concluding we have seen that both witchcraft and religion (Christianity) are thriving in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. The presence of one does not seem to exclude the other. In contrast: with the wide spread of Pentecostal Christianity new ways of co-existence emerged, especially because Pentecostal churches openly acknowledge the existence of witchcraft, engage in witchcraft accusations and claim that with the power of God, such ‘evil forces’ can be overcome. Furthermore, both Pentecostal Christianity, particularly through its popular Prosperity gospel, and witchcraft have been analysed as being inextricably interwoven with people’s aspirations, ideas and practices concerning (the acquisition of) material wealth. Nevertheless, whereas Pentecostalism is demonstrated to have gone ‘public’ due to the visibility of its representations, witchcraft continues to belong to concealed spheres. Finally, there is a body of work analysing the close relationship between witchcraft, kinship and children and youth.

In the next and final section I will come to a conclusion, applying my theory of practice, with combined insights from Bourdieu and Ortner, to the question of spirituality. Ultimately, I will work towards a theory of spiritual practice of street children.

2.7 Conclusion: Towards a theory of spiritual practice of street children

My choice of a practice-theory based approach - which can be seen as Bourdieusian yet certainly not Bourdieu’s - is based on the specific manifestation of spirituality among young people living in a context of chronic existential insecurity. In such a context, the quest for survival is an everyday affair. Subsequently, spirituality seems to play a key role in this quest for survival (Krah et al. 2016). This relation between spirituality and survival demands a very different approach to spirituality compared to, for instance, a study on the spiritual beliefs and practices of middle class university students in the UK. A Bourdieusian approach, in particular the notion of ‘field’, is useful here. For example, Bourdieu’s acknowledgment of hierarchies and power dynamics in the field is indispensable for the context of my study. Imagine for example the distinctive setting of street life and its inherent violent structures, impacting both options and restrictions for how spirituality is lived. Bourdieu (1990) may be pessimistic, but he does explicitly relate religious actions with survival:

“[...] magical or religious actions are fundamentally 'this-worldly' (*diesseitig*), as Weber puts it; being entirely dominated by the concern to ensure the success of production and reproduction, in a word, survival, they are oriented towards the most dramatically practical, vital and urgent ends” (Bourdieu 1990, 95).

Importantly, the employment of spirituality for survival is not just a calculative way of extending opportunities but also a culturally embedded and appropriated system of behavioural opportunities (thoughts and practices). Here, the notion of ‘field’ is relevant because the field does not just explain practical limitations but it helps to shed light on the way street children, as everyone else, are ‘socialized’ into a certain cultural system which shapes the way they *internalize* rules and principles that come with ‘playing’ or traversing the field. Spirituality can be seen as (part of) such a cultural system which is contextualized and historicized. This system gets form and meaning by the grace of traversing the field (chapter 5) and, in particular, in children’s knowledge of the (often implicit) rules that regulate (opportunities of) the field. As I will explain in much more detail in chapter 4, the field comes with conditions, conventions and constraints, structuring how spirituality can offer opportunities, including but not limited to economic ones. Bourdieu’s field is inherently economic and transactional, which fits the spiritual field of Bukavu (as I will explain in chapter 4) because in a context of marginality, spirituality offers an extension of opportunities (see also chapter 5).

However, whereas Bourdieu seems to limit himself to physical survival in this quotation above, I will focus as much on the role of street children’s emotional and moral survival (chapter 6). In the light of Bourdieu’s tendency to ignore questions of reflexivity and subjectivity, his theory falls short on this point. I consider spiritual practice to always be purposeful and inherently contemplative. Ortner’s emphasis on subjectivity and her broad definition of agency are useful here. Her dual notion of agency is particularly useful to think about the dynamics of local agency in the face of domination by outsiders and powerful others. Also, particularly useful is her recognition of agency as intentionality and the pursuit of (culturally constructed) life projects, “from certain points the most fundamental dimension of the idea of agency” (Ortner 2006, 147). This kind of agency is highly relevant both to understand the agency of the marginalized as well as the agency that can be experienced in relation to spirituality. Regarding the first; it is this agency-of-projects that those who are less powerful seek to nourish and protect by creating sites, literally and metaphorically, “on the margins of power” (2006, 142). I will show in chapter 6 for instance, how street children, amidst profound social exclusion,

nourish and protect their desire and intention to belong, an example of agency-as-projects to which moral contemplation and thus spirituality is key.

Finally, I have chosen a practice-based approach towards spirituality of street children because both Bourdieu and Ortner stress the cultural specificity of agency (see also Magazine 2003), an agency which is always culturally and historically constructed and which takes various forms in different times and places as well as under different regimes of power. I argue spirituality is an exceptionally rich field to study this manifestation of a culturally specific kind of agency and its intertwinement with structure. In particular, I will show that studying local spirituality offers an valuable opportunity to challenge and re-think how we understand children's agency from the protagonist's perspective. In the light of this commitment I have come to understand agency not as someone's capacity to have actual impact on the social world but rather as a personal experience and pursuit of possibilities.

METHODOLOGY & ETHICS

Blending Ethnography and Creative Participatory Methods

3.1 Introduction

Investigating the spiritual practice of street children in Bukavu implied a confrontation with some of the key challenges that mark the social scientific study of human life. To address these challenges, some of which only emerged in the field, I chose a multi-methods approach that is grounded in an ethnographic epistemology, combining more ‘classic’ ethnographic methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviewing with creative participatory methods that were designed and adapted during the course of the research, including pictorial interviews, theatre and drawings. In total, six main factors contributed to the design of this methodological framework.

First of all, this choice was based on the work and experiences of other researchers. Ethnography in general has been widely promoted within the Sociology of Childhood (see James and Prout 1990) and the use of participatory methods has been a particularly prominent approach - one could say ‘innovation’ - to ethnography in children’s studies. In fact, employing ethnographic and participatory methods has been specifically advocated in research with street children (Ursin 2011; Mizen and Ofosekusi 2010; Gigengack 2008; Conticini 2005; Beazley 2003; Beazley 2002; Greene and Hogan; Evans 2006; Young and Barrett 2001a; Young and Barrett 2001b; Baker 2001; Hecht 1998).

Second, I was inspired by my personal academic biography in which ethnography has always been the methodological point of departure. Trained as a cultural anthropologist, my thinking about and my approach to research are grounded in the epistemology of anthropological fieldwork or ethnography. Specifically, problematizing ‘data’ as the construction of knowledge, including contemplating issues of power and representation in fieldwork relations, was something I was brought up on. Because ethnography’s underlying epistemology emphasises the intersubjective character of

qualitative research and portrays ‘listening/observing’ as a key method, it could be argued ethnography has always been an approach to data collection which inevitably foregrounds participation of the research participants (or informants)²¹ in the research.

Both the third and fourth factor that have contributed to my choice for this particular framework concern the local reality in the field. First of all, there was an existing infrastructure from the longitudinal research of GUOTS partnering with their local NGO partner PEDER. Hence the third point concerns this infrastructure for participatory research, in which six street youth had already been trained as (co-)researchers in the GUOTS project. The fourth point relates to the fact that the total group of about 66 children who formed the basis for my study were used to participating in ethnographic and participatory research by GUOTS, as they had previously taken part in focus groups. Taking over the existing structure of research for my own study was simply the most efficient and effective way of doing research.

Fifth, the geographical location of my study, eastern Congo, implied a confrontation with what I call the inevitable dictate of unstable environments. One of the consequences of the unstable situation I encountered in the field was for instance that I could not do research at night, as Bukavu was considered too unsafe for mobility between sunset and sunrise. This was another motivation for being creative with developing a research strategy; visual methods for instance are a powerful tool to extend the investigator’s reach into situations - both times and places - where he or she cannot be a direct observer (see also Young and Barrett 2001b).

Finally, a sixth factor relates to the topic of investigation specific to my study. In contrast to other themes that may be found more at the surface of social life (e.g. how people dress or what they eat), an in-depth exploration of spirituality required me to access and expose people’s inner lives. This was a process that first of all required time, trust and rapport; all aspects that are central to an ethnographic epistemology. However, exposing inner (spiritual) lives also implied facilitating the reflection, inspiration and imagination of research participants. Creative methods designed to trigger personal interior reflection (drawing exercise), associative imagination (pictorial interviews) or collective narratives (theatre) proved very valuable in the light of this endeavour.

Hence the result was a *synergetic* mix of participatory and ethnographic methods grounded in an ethnographic epistemology. From my experience, it was precisely this

²¹ ‘Research participants’ and ‘informants’ are synonyms for me and I will use both terms alternately.

combination of methods which proved very effective in exploring the richness of children's experiences, allowing for a better understanding and representation of their spiritual lives. Specifically, I found that the strength of each method was 'boosted' through this triangulation. In this light, I use the term 'synergetic' to refer to a methodology which gets stronger because of the layering of methods. Importantly, this methodological framework was never 'fixed' but partly emerged in the field where the use of one method or emerging empirical insights inspired me to adapt my methodology further. In this process of 'trial-and-error', continuous critical reflection on my methods, but also on my own position as a researcher as well as the ethical implications of my research was key. Ultimately, this resulted in an eclectic mix of methods that proved very useful to gain a comprehensive, in-depth, rich and multi-layered account of the spiritual practice of street children. Table 3.1 gives an overview of the individual methods and the (number of) research participants that participated in them.

Methods	Participants (Street children)	When (2016)
Participant observation incl. informal conversations	All, but mostly key informants (8)*	February – July
Participatory diagramming	Key informants (6)	February
Participatory mapping	Key informants (5)	March
Semi-structured interviews (n=37)	20 (8 key informants multiple times + 12 others)	March – July
‘Pictorial’ interviews	Key informants (8)	March – July
Theatre, including focus groups	All (67)	April
Focus group Islam	Muslim informants (4)	May
Basic information survey	All (75)	May - June
Drawings	All (66)	June
Participants (Experts)		
Religious expert interviews (n=8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Catholic priests • Two Protestant pastors • One Muslim Sheikh • One Witchdoctor • One Witchcraft teacher 	March – July
Other expert interviews (n=8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four PEDER staff • Two child protection experts from Centre Ek’Abana (centre for children accused of witchcraft) • One Congolese/Dutch anthropologist • One Bashi cultural expert 	January – July

Table 3.1. Overview of methods, participating informants and time frame.

**key informants are the six GUOTS co-researchers plus two other street children (i.e. Rizo and Esther) recruited by me and over the course of the fieldwork.*

In the remainder of this chapter, I further explain my methodological and ethical approach. Section 3.2 starts with a discussion of ethnography as the epistemological foundation of my framework. I first provide an overview of ethnography in research with children (section 3.2.1), before turning to a discussion of the use and value of ethnography in my research in section 3.2.2. Following this, I outline the individual ethnographic methods of participant observation (section 3.2.2.1) and semi-structured interviews (section 3.2.2.2), reflecting on their inherent strengths and limitations. In section 3.3 I turn to a discussion of the creative participatory methods that I have used: participatory diagramming (3.3.1), participatory mapping (3.3.2), pictorial interviews (3.3.3), theatre (3.3.3) and drawings (3.3.4). Section 3.4 then outlines some additional methods and context research; a basic information survey (3.4.1), expert interviews (3.4.2), research

activities with a centre for children accused of witchcraft elsewhere in Bukavu (3.4.3) and studying local literature (3.4.4). Having explained the individual methods, I turn to a wider discussion of epistemological as well as practical issues underlying the research process, in particular contemplating the construction of knowledge as a *relational* endeavour. I discuss the implications of my collaboration with PEDER (section 3.5.1), challenges of translation and interpretation, thinking about data as a communicative venture (section 3.5.2) and my religious positionality and the methodological ‘problem of belief’ (section 3.5.3). Section 3.6 outlines the data analysis process. Then, in the last part, section 3.7, I turn to a critical discussion of ethical considerations. In an introductory section (3.7.1) I outline my approach, adding to a ‘situated’ ethics approach, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the researcher’s personal moral frameworks for making ethical choices and discussing the inevitable balancing of empathy and disaffect in an environment of intense suffering and inequality. As part of this argument, I discuss the ethics of illegality and danger (3.7.2), informed consent (3.7.3), ethics of ‘emotion work’ in the creative methods (3.7.4), reciprocity (3.7.5) and the ethics of writing and representation (3.7.6). Finally, in section 3.8 I present some conclusions on my epistemological framework, synergetic mix of methods and situated ethics approach.

3.2 Ethnography

In this section, I introduce the first ‘half’ of my methodological approach: ethnography. I first outline the use of ethnography in studies with children and young people in section 3.2.1, arguing for an inter-disciplinary approach and explaining my perspective on what ethnography entails, emphasising the need to see ethnographic data collection as a construction of knowledge which is always a relational endeavour; a constructive dialogical negotiation. In section 3.2.2, I further outline how I used ethnography in my research with street children, highlighting advantages I experienced with ethnography’s exploratory and holistic nature, its importance for building trust with vulnerable young people and the way it is inherently interwoven with notions of flexibility and reflexivity, offering room for adaption, innovation and mixing of methods leading to a true synergetic approach. Subsections 3.2.2.1 and 3.2.2.2 then focus on the individual ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviewing respectively, contemplating their value but also reflecting on some limitations.

3.2.1 *Ethnography in research with children*

Ethnographic research with children is in itself nothing new, as we know from anthropology's Culture and Personality School in particular (e.g. Mead 1928; Benedict 1935). However, the recognition by the Sociology of Childhood in the 1990s that childhood is a social construct and that children are meaning-making subjects in their own right has inspired new ethnographic studies of children and youth around the globe. From the idea of children as competent informants, researchers were expected to leave their adult-world to seek to understand the world from children's perspectives. Giving children "a voice" became a central objective in most research. James and Prout (1990,4, emphasis added) argued that "ethnography has [...] a particular role to play in the development of a new sociology of childhood since it allows children a *more direct voice* in the production of sociological data than is usually possible to experiment or survey styles of research". Following James and Prout, human geographers and sociologists have started using ethnographic methods in their research with children and young people. Examples include the study by Punch (2003) on children's work and play in rural Bolivia and Edmund's (2005) study in a children's home in Scotland. In the latter, the researcher had initially not planned to conduct ethnographic research. Her research participants convinced her however that the only way to get beyond 'snapshot' knowledge about their lives was to move in with them. Hence Edmund moved in and lived in the children's home for a year, being subject to the same rules and routines as the children. Besides these ethnographies, there are many more examples of studies that have incorporated individual ethnographic methods such as semi-structured or unstructured interviewing, focus group discussions or life histories (Punch 2003; Katz 2004; Payne 2012; Holloway and Valentine 2000; Campbell et al. 2015; Punch 2001).

On a theoretical level however, I agree with Shanahan (2007) that the Sociology of Childhood sometimes remains a bit ambiguous in its conceptualizations. For instance, 'ethnography' is seldom actually defined and perhaps insufficiently problematized. This may be problematic because of the risk that the underlying ontological confusion may lead to empirical ambivalence. It can be argued that the many participatory methods employed by sociological scholars are 'ethnographic innovations' adapted to work in research with children. Reviewing some internal critique of participatory research in the Sociology of Childhood, Ansell et al. (2012) argue that the fundamental critique addresses the failure of participatory researchers to problematize knowledge production processes (see also Cooke and Kothari 2001). Interestingly, precisely this - problematizing

knowledge production processes - has been a key strength in anthropology, the discipline where ethnography originated (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rabinow 1977; Robben and Sluka 2012). This is just one example of why I think we can develop a stronger methodology if we work in an inter-disciplinary way. In this light, I have been inspired to combine insights and approaches from different disciplines, merging anthropology's reflections on what constitutes 'data' (see section 3.5 in particular) with creative solutions from children's geographers to putting much of this into practice (see section 3.3) .

Coming from the Greek words *ethnos* = 'folk, people, nation' and *grapho* = 'I write', the word 'ethnography' refers to two different things. In the first place ethnography is a writing exercise, the representation of empirical data in - mostly - a written text. Second, ethnography is a way of doing research, a methodological approach. If not further specified, I refer to this second meaning when I write about ethnography here but with the recognition of this dual meaning. The essence of ethnography - as a research practice - is the exploratory and dialogical (inter-subjective) approach to data collection; the aim is always the *discovery* of themes that are relevant *to the research participants* rather than the *testing* of hypotheses *set by the researcher* (Robben and Sluka 2012). It has often been argued the success of ethnographic research can be measured by the ability of the researcher to establish meaningful relations and rapport with research participants (e.g. DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). This can be explained by the anthropological perspective on research as an intersubjective endeavour in which knowledge production is seen as a dialectical negotiation process; a joint venture of discovery. Drawing on fieldwork in Morocco, Rabinow for instance concludes that both the ethnographer and the research participant live in a "culturally mediated world, caught up in 'webs of signification' they themselves have spun" (1977, 150). This experience made him argue that culture is interpretation and facts are made, and remade in the interactional process in which knowledge is acquired, shared and transmitted. Hence, he argues these "[facts] cannot be collected as if they were rocks, picked up and put into cartons and shipped home to be analysed in a laboratory" (1977, 150).

Furthermore, I argue we can apply a poststructuralist critique to the notion of 'power' in participatory research, in particular as discussed by Gallagher (2008), to the notion of 'voice' as well. Gallagher (2008) shows that power is often seen as a capacity with which certain people are endowed (e.g. adults) while others (e.g. children) are deprived from it. Like wealth, it is believed to be distributed unevenly. An uncritical participatory approach can thus aim to 'take' power from adults and 'hand it over' to

children. In fact, we can criticize the notion of ‘voice’ on the same grounds. The need to “give a voice” implicitly assumes ‘voice’ is something that can be handed over from one person (adult) to another person (child). Instead and in the light of these considerations, my approach to fieldwork has been concerned with representing voice albeit not grounded in the belief my methods were a magical tool to simply ‘give’ a ‘direct voice’ to my research participants. Rather, for me, ‘giving voice’ is to *facilitate a dialogue* by using creative and child-friendly methods. Ethnography is an intrinsically *intersubjective* endeavour, which means the researcher herself is the most important methodological tool. Hence data should be seen as emerging in *interaction*, and the construction of data as *a constructive dialogical negotiation of knowledge*.

3.2.2 *Ethnography in my research: towards a synergetic approach*

Besides the general benefits of ethnography as recognized by others, ethnography was a particularly relevant methodology in the context of my study for three important reasons. First of all, the sociocultural context of Bukavu was completely alien to me prior to the research, which made it impossible to come up with any hypotheses because I lacked the basic insights necessary. Ethnography offered the kind of exploratory and holistic inquiry which allowed me to familiarize myself with the setting and to start identifying themes that were important to research participants. Also ethnography’s holistic essence was highly useful. Traditionally, holism meant studying all aspects of a certain society (e.g. kinship, religion, gender, economy, marriage, conflict etc) (Robben and Sluka 2012). Nowadays, at least, it reminds us to interpret and understand findings which may at first sight seem to relate to just one of these social spheres (e.g. spirituality) in the context of all others and as depending on particularities of time and place. This holistic perspective was highly useful for exploring an unfamiliar context, particularly because it allowed serendipity: stumbling across unexpected but relevant insights about spirituality and street life.

Second; ethnography enabled me to build trust and rapport with research participants. Although this is always a key aspect of qualitative research, it is particularly essential and challenging when working with a group of young people who usually do not have many trustworthy adults in their life (and who may have had bad experiences with adults) (Punch 2002b; Young and Barrett 2001a; Greene and Hogan 2005). In my study I discovered that building trust was crucial as a pre-requisite before any other method could be used and before any reliable information could be gathered. Conticini

(2008) discusses a similar experience from his work with street-connected young people in Ethiopia. He argues that the role of trust in child research is poorly documented but that children tend to give access to ‘their world’ only after a long process of trust building and raising of confidence. Also, children on the street have often built a self-protecting wall against adults (see also Greene and Hogan 2005). The researcher must overcome this well-justified wall of suspicion, mistrust and fear to truly get to know the children’s world (Conticini 2008). Based on my experience, I argue the importance of trust in research with street children and youth cannot be overemphasized. Shortly after my arrival in the field, street workers of PEDER had assured me spirituality would not be a sensitive topic among the street children. However, in a very first meeting with the six young people who would later become my key informants, no-one was willing to give me any information about (their experiences with) witchcraft in particular, insisting it was a secretive topic they could not share with ‘an outsider’ (participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-2016). Hence, the only thing I could do was work towards a situation in which I would no longer be considered an outsider anymore. Participant observation, including daily ‘greetings’ and informal conversations but also being associated with PEDER helped me to reach that point, as I will discuss later, in section 3.2.3.

Finally, ethnography’s epistemological basis is inherently interwoven with notions of reflexivity and flexibility. In fact, an ethnographic approach facilitates a process of ‘trial-and-error’ as it encourages continuous reflection on the research process, the position of the researcher - including power dynamics - and the effectiveness and appropriateness of the methods used. Although flexibility may be important in all qualitative research, I agree with Bemak that there is need for “tremendous flexibility” in research with street children because research is not “precise” on the streets, time is fluid, conversations are frequently interrupted and weather conditions dictate patterns of movement (Bemak 1996, 153; Gigengack 2014). Also Young and Barrett (2001a) emphasize the need to be flexible and to adapt methods when working with street children, as events and unforeseen opportunities typically arise and result in the rescheduling of meetings. Ethnography is of particular relevance here because, I argue, it is an inherently inclusive methodology. Its basic stance is openness towards experimentation and the mixing of methods, which makes it an intrinsically dynamic approach. The use of multiple methods has been advocated in studying children and young people, recognizing the “multiple voices or languages of children” (Clark 2005, 13). Punch (Punch 2002b; Punch 2002a) argues for a combination of ‘traditional’

qualitative research methods and task-based visual and written methods considered more suitable for children (see also Tickle 2017). In a similar line of argument, Clark and Moss (Clark 2005; Clark and Moss 2001) developed the “Mosaic approach” aiming to include (young) children’s voices in research. The Mosaic approach combines the traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with the introduction of participatory tools. It is a multi-method, participatory, reflexive, adaptable approach that is focused on children’s lived experiences and embedded into practice (Clark 2005, 13). The name - the Mosaic approach - was chosen to represent the bringing together of different pieces or perspectives in order to create an image of children’s worlds, both individual and collective. Similar to the experiences of these researchers, I also found a combination of traditional ethnographic methods with participatory tools effective in exploring children’s lived experiences. However, although I found it important to include ‘child-friendly’ approaches and make research ‘fun’ and ‘interesting’ for the young people, my main concern was not how much participants enjoyed the research but rather the richness of the data it generated as this would mean a better representation of children’s lives and lived realities. In this light, I found triangulation to be very effective because the strength of each individual method was ‘boosted’ by being combined with other methods. Therefore I would suggest such an approach is not merely ‘mosaic’ but rather called a ‘synergetic’ approach. Whereas ‘mosaic’ suggests every tile ultimately remains a single tile, ‘synergetic’ points to a methodology which gets stronger - by which I mean in richness of data it leads to - because of the layering of methods. The individual methods of my synergetic approach are the ‘traditional’ ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews enriched with participatory creative tools.

3.2.2.1 Participant observation

From the first day in the field in January 2016 until the last in the field in July of that year, participant observation was a daily research structure. Nevertheless, it was of particular importance in the early stages of the research because it enabled me to familiarize myself with the sociocultural setting of Eastern Congo and to build the trust and rapport necessary to gain in-depth information in later stages of the fieldwork. In the first weeks, I conducted participant observation always in the presence of PEDER street workers or in PEDER centres. Being associated with PEDER worked very much to my advantage, because for many of these young people, PEDER street workers were the only adults they had ever trusted, which made them ideal gatekeepers. In early interviews, some

informants even told me they had only agreed to talk to me because I was a “friend” of their favourite PEDER street worker so they figured I was trustworthy (e.g. Esther, *bile*, informal conversation, 16-02-2016). Other researchers report similar experiences about how volunteering (e.g. van Blerk 2014; Young and Barrett 2001b) or even working as a street worker themselves (e.g. Blazek 2015) helped to gain initial access to street- or deprived children.

Of course it was not possible nor desirable for me to ‘become a street child’. Yet some involvement in the world of street children was possible and necessary for understanding their psychological and social realities and to be able to contextualize knowledge on spirituality within these lived realities. Concretely, since street children live extremely mobile life styles, this meant wandering the streets of Bukavu, in the beginning always in the presence of a PEDER street worker, to be able to meet and observe street children in their own surroundings. These ‘surroundings’ could be anything from a hidden, dark corner between some buildings in the morning to a busy fish market in the afternoon or a lively club or bar in the evening, located at very different spots across the city and often kilometres apart. In general these were unsafe areas, with a lot of crime and drug use, and -crucially- no escape routes. For this reason I only went there accompanied by a PEDER worker until I had built enough rapport to rely on the assistance of key informants knowing a particular area. These kinds of ‘street visits’ were a good way of building trust and rapport because it was a respectful and unthreatening way of meeting and spending some informal time with my research participants. They clearly appreciated my efforts of visiting their area rather than just expecting them to come to see me in a more formal setting at the PEDER centre for example. It was a respectful, and I would say ethical, way of approaching them because it meant showing genuine interest and also taking a ‘student role’ (cf. Bemak 1996), acknowledging the children as experts on their own lives. In later stages of the research, I would go on the streets by myself but always seeking the assistance and even protection of key informants known to the area I visited. On one occasion, key informants even warned me about thieves at the city’s Independence Square who were looking to steal my bag.

At the same time while embarking on these visits I encountered significant limitations to participant observation in the world of street children. Most of all, my presence so radically changed the field that it was not possible to continue participant observation activities for a relatively prolonged period. As a white, female researcher I was so much ‘out of place’, in particular in those areas where street children made their

homes, that as soon as I would stand still, people would be so curious about my reason for being there that they would all approach me and stand around me. Often when I tried to speak to informants I was surrounded by a group of about twenty random strangers who also happened to be there and who were curious about me and asked me questions. Needless to say, this is unwanted attention for every street child. Later, I discovered that we would generate less attention from bystanders if we continued walking during informal conversations, something which is also described by Gigengack (2014) in his study on street children in Delhi. Furthermore however, when I would show up somewhere to observe any kind of activity, everybody, including research participants, would directly stop with his/her activity and start staring at me instead. Whereas the idea of the participant observer being 'a fly on the wall' is definitely too romantic for any fieldwork setting, in Bukavu it turned out to be an extreme opposite. Finally, even with the help of key informants, it remained too unsafe for me to conduct participant observation at night, while an important part of street life happened after dark.

Because of these reasons, I could ultimately make less use of participant observation than anticipated before going to the field. Although I was disappointed at first, I later realised this limitation had forced me to design alternative methods which ultimately generated richer data than participant observation alone would have. As mentioned above, reflexivity and flexibility were essential elements to make my fieldwork successful. I thus agree with Bemak that there is need for "tremendous flexibility" next to "extreme patience" in street research (Bemak 1996; Gigengack 2014; Young and Barrett 2001a).

One way in which I adapted my initial plans for participant observation was by organizing more structured or 'guided' participant observation activities which revolved around observing spiritual practices. These practices were never 'invented' by me, but the exact moment was initiated by me, to invite informants to show how they usually pray in church/evoke spirits/interact with witchdoctors. For instance, one such activity was visiting a witchdoctor together with informants. The children already had a pre-existing relationship with this particular witchdoctor and they were used to visiting him every couple of months. By coincidence they had just visited him a few weeks before my arrival in Bukavu and there was no urgent need to re-visit him during my 6-months stay. Nevertheless they agreed to advance their regular visit to allow me to participate. Other examples included visiting church/mosque services and Rooms of Prayer together with informants and discussing them afterwards, visiting spiritual leaders together and

participating in spiritual rituals such as evoking.²² Interestingly, the fact that these kinds of guided participant observation activities were very often cancelled by informants was already insightful in itself. The various reasons nicely illustrate how spirituality is lived; for example the fact that church services were missed or spent sleeping because children were too stoned, drunk or hungry to focus. Even more interesting was the observation that children often were too shy or uncomfortable to enter the church building whereas they had told me they regularly do this (see chapter 5, section 5.3.1.1 for an ethnographic example). Hence these activities served also to cross-check and verify information derived from informal conversations or semi-structured interviews. This need to cross-check information is, again, of particular importance when working with street children, who are known to be prone to lying as part of their survival strategy (Bemak 1996; Young and Barrett 2001a). In this light, triangulation of data is essential, as well as paying attention to *why* informants are lying and how this can be interpreted (see Bleek 1987).

3.2.2.2. *Semi-structured interviews*

Besides participant observation, semi-structured interviewing was another ethnographic method included in the research design. In total, 37 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 different street children. These varied in length from 20 minutes to over an hour, but an average interview lasted around 30 minutes. This is relatively short for an interview but this has everything to do with the short attention span of most street children: after 30-40 minutes it became difficult for them to concentrate. Also in interviewing, flexibility and patience were important aspects. Often, children would not show up or they would be hours late. As Bemak (1996) notes, street research requires understanding and respecting a different time schedule as “work with street children is slow” (1996, 155). Sometimes, the child with whom I had arranged an interview would not show up, while another child would accidentally be present. It required flexibility to take advantage of the presence of this other child by interviewing him or her, even if this required a completely different set of questions I had not necessarily prepared.

All interviews with children were conducted with the help of a Swahili - French interpreter who was one of the three GUOTS project managers linked to PEDER.²³ They were always tape-recorded and transcribed by me through direct translation into English. Semi-structured interviews followed a qualitative interview guide in the form of a topic

²² See chapter 4 and 5 for a discussion of these practices.

²³ See section 3.5.2 on issues of language and translation.

list exploring spiritual experiences, beliefs and practices of informants. Often, previous insights from informal conversations and participant observation as well as budding (analytic) ideas formed the basis for the design of topic lists. With key informants multiple interviews were conducted throughout the study to facilitate progressive comprehension and reflection. Other participants were recruited either through snowball sampling - for instance by asking key informants to bring a friend - or based on information from the basic information survey (see section 3.4.1). Compared to group activities, individual interviews were particularly useful to address sensitive and/or confidential issues, such as witchcraft practices.

In general however, interviews worked best with key informants and in combination with other methods. After observing a pastor street visit to the group of Boniem, one of the key informants, for instance (see chapter 5, section 5.3.1.1), an interview with Boniem in which he explained more about his relationship with this pastor was highly relevant in complementing data from observations. At the same time, it was clear that informants did not enjoy participating in these ordinary interviews as much as they did participating in other kinds of methods for instance. As a solution to this, I included images in my interviews (see section 3.3.3 on ‘pictorial interviews’), which helped to make them more ‘fun’ and interesting for the young people and it also allowed me to trigger their imagination, memory and association, which was more difficult in ordinary interviews. In the next sections I will discuss the creative participatory methods I used to complement participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

3.3 Creative participatory methods

This section draws on the second ‘half’ of my methodology: the creative participatory methods with which I complemented ethnographic methods. The creative methods I used were all ‘participatory’ in the sense that they were concerned with producing knowledge *with* rather than *about* those who are the subjects of the research (Ansell et al. 2012; Cahill 2007; Blerk and Ansell, 2007, Punch 2002; Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003). Participatory methods have become particularly popular among children’s geographers for both practical and ethical reasons (Ansell et al. 2012) or what Gallagher (2008) calls “epistemological” and “ethical” advantages. Epistemologically, it has been argued participatory methods produce “better” knowledge (Cahill 2007), provide “more nuanced understandings of complex social phenomena” (Kesby 2000, 423) and lead to “situated, rich and layered accounts” (Pain 2004, 653). Ethically and in the light of the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child, giving children a ‘voice’, enabling them to speak and be listened to, is presented as a moral imperative. Also, participatory methods are said to have greater potential to transcend cultural difference (Pain and Francis 2003). Participatory methods have also been called “task-based methods” (Punch 2002b). Also “arts-based methods” (Bagnoli 2009; Akesson et al. 2014; Coemans and Hannes 2017), “an ‘umbrella term’ which includes a variety of different methodologies employing some art form as a method” (Bagnoli 2009, 548), can be seen as participatory methods. In a recent review article on the use of arts-based methods, Coemans and Hannes (2017) show these methods are often used to counter, enrich or compliment traditional qualitative approaches, to be participant-driven, to give a voice to participants and to facilitate richer reflection and dialogue. In addition, arts-based methods are said to be particularly useful in working with more vulnerable groups, such as young people (Lee and Finney 2005; Ho, Rochelle, and Yuen 2011). In the context of my study, I have chosen to call these kind of methods ‘creative participatory methods’ because next to committing to the ethical rationale of enhancing research collaboration of young people, their greatest asset - for me - was allowing creative expressions and encouraging self-reflection which was of essential importance in my effort to explore children’s inner spiritual lives. I discuss participatory diagramming in section 3.3.1, participatory mapping in section 3.3.2, ‘pictorial’ interviews in section 3.3.3, theatre in section 3.3.4 and finally drawings in section 3.3.5.

3.3.1. Participatory diagramming

Gallagher (2008) argues that participatory diagramming and mapping lend themselves to human geographers’ interest in investigating socio-spatial experiences at local scales (e.g. Young and Barrett 2001a; Pain 2004; Kesby 2000), and connecting local and global issues (e.g. Cahill 2007). Inspired by children’s geographers to explore the spatial and temporal aspects of spirituality, diagramming and mapping were the first two participatory methods that I tried. Whereas diagramming was effective in breaking the ice and as a reflexive start-up to get informants thinking about spirituality, the effectiveness of the mapping exercise was rather limited (see section 3.3.2).

During a first introductory session with the six young people who would become my key informants, I organised a diagramming session to explore and define what spirituality was to *them*. I purposefully chose to use the word ‘spirituality’ in that session hoping they would not know the term which would give them the opportunity to come to

Interestingly, this first ‘participatory’ exercise immediately implied a confrontation with the limits of the participatory ideal of completely handing over control of the research to the young people (Kellett et al. 2004). Initially, I had argued the idea of the exercise was for them to tell me what I should be looking for when studying spirituality. However very early in the meeting, one of the boys mentioned he very much relied on the help of solders/police when stealing, and for this reason he thought I should include solders/police on the flipchart. I hesitated to include this aspect as I didn’t think it belonged to the realm of spirituality as I saw it. I ultimately decided to include it (see figure 3.2, far left in the diagram), but I ‘corrected’ the boy explaining to him that I did not consider the police ‘spiritual’. That night, when I reflected to what extent this exercise had actually been ‘child-led’ and participatory I remembered the words of Clifford (1983, 488) from anthropology’s *Writing Culture* debates saying that: “it is the ethnographer who in the end assumes an executive, editorial role” as well as Shanahan’s cynical observation that “children may have voice, but adults control the conversation” (Shanahan 2007, 415).

In general, the diagramming exercise was not very useful in coming closer to a shared understanding of ‘spirituality’. Nevertheless, it had succeeded in its most important goal, that was facilitating reflection on my research topic. I was confident the young people would at least occasionally remember our meeting and hopefully ask themselves the question how they think about/see spirituality. The comments I got at the end of the session were promising in this regard; Raoul said: “I find this very interesting, because I have never been asked questions about this [spirituality] and it makes me think twice; like ‘how come?’” (*bile*, participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-2016). And Nuru said: “I am also surprised to hear [you asking] about things that I have actually experienced” (*bile*, participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-2016). Six weeks later, when this same group of key informants came together for a second participatory research activity, the mapping exercise, it became clear from their contributions they had indeed given ‘spirituality’ a second thought.

3.3.2. Participatory mapping

The participatory mapping exercise was organised to explore the spatial and temporal aspects of spirituality. It took the form of a collective and individual participatory mapping exercise and it was organised with the key informants. As a first practice, and

to make them familiar with the idea of making a map, they were asked to make an individual mental map of places that were important for them personally. This was interesting, because the six participants were all “at home” in different neighbourhoods of the city. An additional advantage was that children could not ‘copy’ each other’s maps as they all mapped different areas of the city. I had provided symbolic images, such as a church or a demon, but also for instance pickpocketing, that could be glued on the map to indicate where certain (spiritual) activities would take place but also to indicate day (a sun) or night (a moon)(see figure 3.3). Directly after they had finished drawing the individual maps, I invited the children for very short individual interviews in which they were given the opportunity to explain their individual maps and how they had used the provided symbols. Because they were tired by the end of this exercise, I wrote down the more in-depth questions I had, and later conducted a semi-structured interview with each of them to discuss the map in more detail.

The second stage then consisted of putting the individual maps together and to create one big collective map. The participants seemed pleased with the result and suggested a title for the map: *Carte de mouvement des Biles de Bukavu* (Map of Movement of the *Biles* of Bukavu, see figure 3.3).

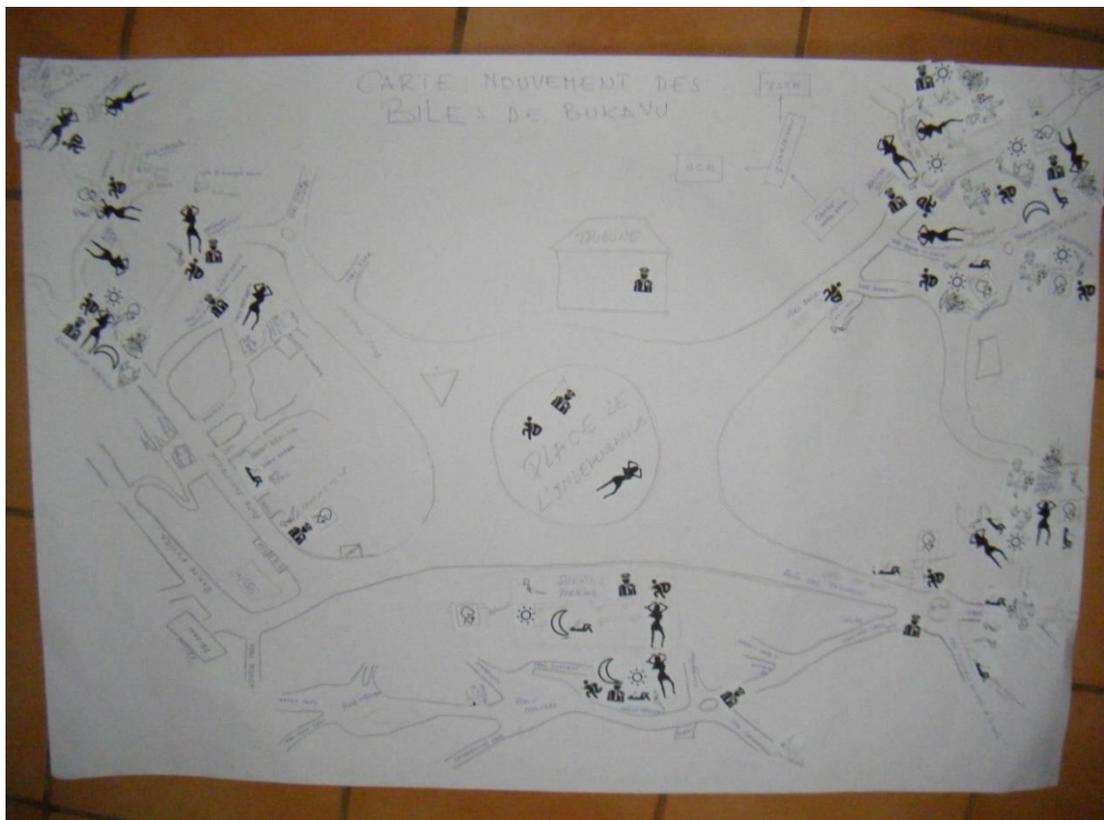


Figure 3.3. “Map of movement of the *Biles* of Bukavu”, participatory mapping exercise, 25-03-16.

It was interesting to observe and listen to the discussions of informants when they put together the collective map. It was clear their knowledge on Bukavu's spiritual environment was complementary. It was also useful to know that 'spiritual' places were believed to be scattered throughout the city and not restricted to one place. Ultimately however, the knowledge produced by the mapping exercise has not been prominent in structuring my analysis. Perhaps my inspiration to include a mapping exercise was primarily based on the popularity of the method in children's geographies (e.g. Young and Barrett 2001a; Mitchell and Elwood 2012; Quiroz and Milam-Brooks 2014; Horgan 2017; Beazley 2016), and to a lesser extent on the topic and methodological needs of my study. In their use of participatory mapping, Quiroz and Milam Brooks (2014) argue that mapping presented an opportunity for children to mentally expand on place-making. Similarly, Mitchell and Elwood (2012) show how their participants used their geographical imagination and included also the broader political and economic forces affecting their lives on their maps; for instance including an overseas country where their family received remittances from. In contrast, my informants restricted themselves to 'First World'²⁴ geographical places and did not include imaginaries of *kuzimu*, the 'Second World' for instance. In general I found that the mapping was less successful for learning about their spiritual beliefs and practices than the creative methods including theatre, drawings and the pictorial interviews, which I will discuss in the next section (section 3.3.3).

3.3.3. Pictorial interviews

This method was first piloted with a small group of children living in one of PEDER's centres. The results were immediately very interesting, but encouraged me to change it into an individual exercise instead of a group exercise after seeing the unexpected personal, emotional responses. Hence they were eventually conducted individually with the eight key informants and a few others from their network.

The pictorial interviews drew on very simple black/white 'spiritual' images which I showed to the young people (see appendix 1 for small copies of the images; in reality they all had the size of one A4 page). Examples include the image of a church (see figure

²⁴ 'First World' here means the visible world, in contrast to the 'Second World', which is *kuzimu*, or the 'underworld'.

3.4), Jesus Christ, an angel, a ghost, a cemetery, and a father who is praying with his child.

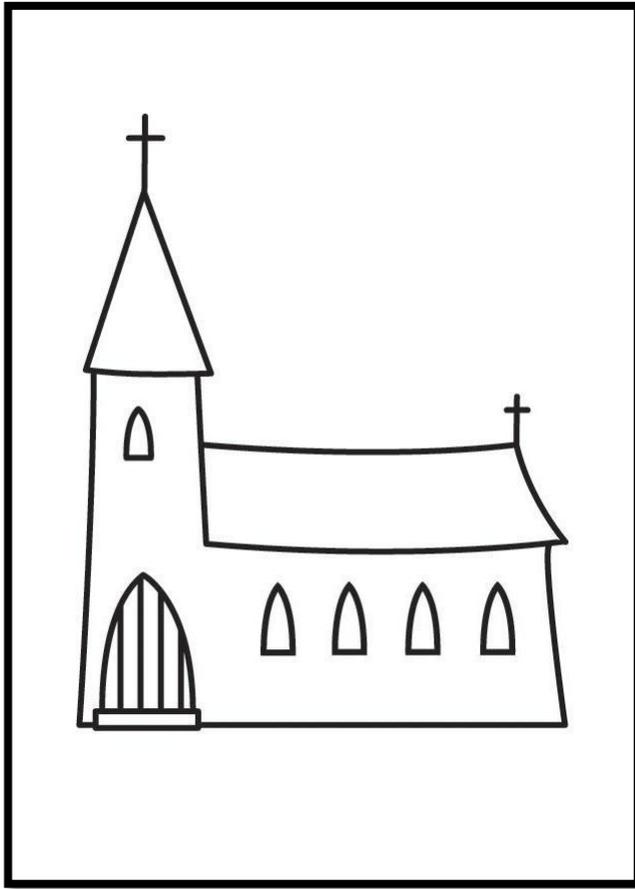


Figure 3.4. Image of a church used in ‘pictorial interviews’ method. See appendix 1 for the full list.

Essentially, the images served to inspire and ‘fuel’ discussion. Such material has been called “stimulus material” by Punch (Punch 2002a; Crilly, Blackwell, and Clarkson 2006). Punch (2002a) used video clips for instance but also copies of problem page letters from young people’s magazines as a “springboard for further discussion” (2002a, 51). In fact, the ‘photo elicitation method’, in which photography is used in interviews to fuel conversations, has been an important method in anthropology and sociology since the 1950s (Dennis et al. 2009). In a review article, Harper (2002) concludes that photo elicitation enlarges the possibilities of conventional empirical research, that it has the potential to cross cultural boundaries and, most of all, that it produces “a different kind of information” (Harper 2002, 13). In line with this, scholars working more generally with visual methods and/or sensory fieldwork argue images may invoke certain feelings or associations that ‘verbal’ methods would not have been able to invoke (Pink 2007;

Pink 2009). From my experience, this has certainly been true with regards to the simple black/white images I used as stimuli. They proved a highly effective tool in three different ways.

First of all, the young people enjoyed this kind of interview very much, it made participation more interesting and “fun”. This is in line with findings from other researchers who argued the incorporation of visual or arts-based methods make interviews with children more fun and comfortable (e.g. Epstein et al. 2006; Coemans and Hannes 2017). To include this variation in the research design was particularly important for my key informants, whom I saw multiple times per week and who participated in more than one semi-structured interview. When using the images, which I showed one at a time, full screen on my laptop, I could always count on everyone’s full attention. The young people were simply fascinated by them, they wouldn’t take their eyes off the computer in eager anticipation of the next image.²⁵

Second, in line with the findings from Punch (2002a), I found that using the images was useful as a memory-prodding technique. Because they triggered such a diverse variety of memories, experiences and feelings it offered a great opportunity to discover relevant pieces of information by coincidence. As has been argued by others, visual elicitation stimuli bring factors external to the interview into view, prompting responses to “not now” moments, “not here” events and “not present” actors’ (Crilly, Blackwell, and Clarkson 2006). The specific images I used were chosen based on their universal appearance (black/white, with no context whatsoever) and consequently cultural appropriateness. Nevertheless it was inevitable that street children from Bukavu would not recognise and rightly interpret all images. Rather than complicating analysis, however, it was actually very interesting to see what their interpretation was, particularly in those cases when they did not know what the image represented (but did not want to tell me this). As Young and Barrett (2001a) argue, street life produces information that would have been overlooked by an adult researcher.

Finally and most crucially, the images triggered emotional responses that would not come to the foreground with normal interviews. Observing the young people’s non-verbal/bodily reactions when they would be confronted with the images translated into many unexpected stories. From smiling when they would see the image of an angel, to

²⁵ This can partly be explained by the fact that they are not used to seeing lots of visuals. Most of them have not been inside a schoolroom for many years, they occasionally watch films in their free time, but the only other images they get to see are posters and billboards in the city.

outward flinching or looking away when they would be confronted with the image of the devil. In fact, some of the ‘toughest’ *Biles* would even get tears in their eyes when looking at certain images. With most of the other methods, information that was gathered pointed to a pragmatic attitude towards spirituality. Pictorial interviewing was a powerful tool to balance this analysis. An example which illustrates my point can be found in the pictorial interview session with Rizo, a key informant who had introduced himself in the participatory diagramming exercise with the words: “I don’t have a specific religion, I will go there where I can find something” (Rizo, *bile*, participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-16). At the start of the pictorial interview, before starting with the images, he was telling me about his plans to sacrifice his grandmother or older brother in his pursuit for richness.²⁶ His voice was neutral, emotionally detached from what he was saying. As soon as I showed him the very first image however (see figure 3.4), a very simple black-and-white image of a church, his attitude radically changed, he looked shocked and while looking away, he whispered “when I see this, I immediately regret that I am even considering doing witchcraft” (Rizo, *bile*, pictorial interview, 18-04-16). Clearly, the very simple black and white image of the church had triggered an intense embodied and affective response (see chapter 6, section 6.3 for analysis based on this incident).

This emotional response could be explained in the light of Harper’s (2002) account. He argues the reason that photo elicitation method produces a “different kind of information” compared to ordinary interviews has a physical reason: “the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words” (2002, 13). As such, Harper argues, photographs can jolt informants into a new awareness of their social existence. The summarized example of Rizo (see chapter 6.3 for a more detailed discussion) indeed suggests images helped to evoke different or deeper layers of consciousness. In the case of spirituality, showing spiritual images seems to trigger contemplation of one’s moral position rather than social existence however, as I will explain further in chapter 6, where I analyse the relationship between spirituality and moral subjectivity.

Hence, the success of the pictorial interviews demonstrates the power of visual methods to indeed expose deeper layers of consciousness, in my case self-reflexive and moral consciousness, which may lead to rich accounts of inner life. These benefits have

²⁶ See section 3.6.2 on the challenging ethics of dealing with illegality and danger.

inspired me to develop other methodological tools which would equally trigger and facilitate imaginative and reflexive processes and subsequently enhance access to inner life. In contrast to the pictorial interviews, the theatre method, which I will discuss below, was a collective method drawing on collective creative performance. It equally shows the power of participatory, creative methods, as the next section (section 3.3.4) shows.

3.3.4. Theatre

Arguably, using theatre as a research method was the most powerful way for me to have access to and to interrogate the lived experience of spirituality of the *Biles* of Bukavu. Although the strength of this particular method cannot be set apart from its embedding in the synergetic mix of methods (see section 3.2.2), using participatory theatre ultimately generated data which was more insightful and ‘richer’ than data from the semi-structured interviews and/or participant observation alone. Before coming to the benefits, I will first describe the method’s organization and rationale.

As with the pictorial interviews, the theatre method was also piloted on a smaller scale with two groups children living in a PEDER centre before organising it on a large scale during three days at PEDER’s centre in the city. In total, 67 street children participated (13 girls, 54 boys). They were divided into 12 different groups. The six pre-existing GUOTS research assistant groups were the point of departure, but these were each split into two smaller groups, consisting of five to six children per group. This means there were ten groups of only boys and two groups of only girls. Importantly, the plays were either semi-scripted or not scripted at all. Scripts were based on insights derived from other methods such as the semi-structured interviews. For the first day, the broad script was “A meeting between God and the Devil”. This theme, centred around spiritual protagonists, was chosen because God and the Devil were seen as the most important beings to whom children (could choose to) relate. In contrast, the second day was organised along spatial lines: instead of a theme the play was scripted by three different locations provided: the streets of Bukavu, heaven and hell (*kuzimu*). This script derived from my interest in further exploring the spatiality of spirituality and it built on data from the mapping exercise in particular. Also it was designed to allow insights on visualization of these places and the creatures to be found there. Then, the third day was unscripted to allow for a discovery of unexpected, still unknown manifestations and stories about spirituality and to grant the participants the complete freedom to manage their own script. During all three days however, there were objects provided as prompts to inspire the

young actors, including: candles, a Bible, a wooden cross, sunglasses, a raincoat, cash, a mask and a wig.

The twelve theatre plays were filmed, translated and tape-recorded on the spot, and both the theatre script including visuals and all dialogues were later translated into English and transcribed by me. The young people were asked to limit their play to twenty minutes, but often they took longer and they were so terrific we did not want to stop them. Crucially, after each performance, focus groups were organised in which the young actors could explain the story they had performed and in which I could ask them questions. These discussions generated exceptionally rich and in-depth data, despite being restricted in time to roughly twenty minutes as well. Perhaps they could be really in-depth because they could expand/elaborate on the information already provided through the play.

Arguably the most important disadvantage of this method concerned the amount of work and organisation it required, including intensive assistance from at least two street workers from PEDER, but also a huge amount of work for me transcribing and analysing all the material (video-taped visual material, tape-recorded dialogues and focus groups afterwards). Furthermore, despite working with three adults, the theatre-days still felt very hectic at times. Another issue was that informants stole the theatre props (e.g. small amounts of cash, clothes).

However, observing twelve theatre plays, we, the adults, were constantly amazed by the highly inventive performances of the young people. They showed not just extraordinary levels of creativity, but also exceptional reflexivity and an overall comprehension of life I would have never expected. In line with the experiences of others (Denzin 1997; Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008; Coemans and Hannes 2017; Francis 2010; Lee and Finney 2005), I thus found theatre a particularly powerful way to learn about lived experiences, including experiences and events I would not easily have access to because they happened in the past or they happen at places or times that were inappropriate or dangerous for me to go to (cf. Young 2003). This heightened reflexivity in theatre sessions is explained by Turner (1979) who argues that participating in drama interrupts the flow of social life and forces a group to take cognizance of its own behaviour in relation to its own values: "In other words, dramas induce and contain reflexive processes and generate cultural frames in which reflexivity can find a legitimate place" (1979, 83). Indeed, I found that theatre of the *Biles* was always situated in everyday life but at the same time more distant than everyday life, which made it easier for the young people to become reflexive. In my case, this became clear particularly during the

post-theatre focus groups. After the group had explained the story of the play and its protagonists to me, I used to ask them “why did you choose to play this/show me this?” or : “could this story be real?”, to explore the links between the theatre and their everyday experiences. Each time, informants assured me what they had performed was like the reality of their lives, because they had *wanted* to show me their lived realities. This, I argue, was possible only because sufficient levels of trust and rapport were established before the theatre method was introduced in the fourth month of the research: the whole group of research participants were familiar with my research topic *and* willing to help me constructing valuable data (see section 3.2.2 on trust and rapport). In many ways, the group discussions confirmed that the young people had stayed very close to their personal experiences when performing. For example, stealing or prostitution were never an explicit part of the script (not even close). Nevertheless, stealing was central to all the boys theatre plays as was sex work for the girls’ performances.

It has been argued the use of participatory theatre techniques are particularly useful for studying narratives of identity of marginalised groups as well as for illustrating perceptions and experiences of social positioning and power relations (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008). Indeed, theatre has been particularly advocated by researchers working with marginalized groups or vulnerable young people (Lee and Finney 2005; Boal 1979; Coemans et al. 2015; Mattingly 2001), as well as for exploring complex issues such as identity (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008) or sensitive issues such as risky behaviour (Conrad 2008) or HIV/AIDS (Francis 2010). It is unsurprising therefore that there are many links in the literature between theatre as a research method and its potential to change the lives of marginalized young people. Boal’s famous Theatre of the Oppressed for instance (Boal 1979), which builds on Freire’s critical pedagogy (Freire 1970), was designed to increase people’s freedom to act and make changes. Hence the aim is not just to represent the world, but to transform it. There are several contemporary examples of researchers who, following in the tradition of Boal, value theatre as a method not just to generate relevant knowledge but to empower young people in particular (e.g. Francis 2010; Lee and Finney 2005). Although I recognize and value this potential of using theatre as a way to empower “the oppressed”, this has not been my intention. Rather, I value theatre as a unique way to construct meaningful data, representing knowledge which is “embodied, culturally located and socially distributed” (Nicholson 2005, 39). Specifically, I agree with Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2008, 4.3) that participatory theatre produces *a specific kind of new knowledge*, which they summarize

as being “embodied, dialogical and illustrative”. These concepts resonate with my experience doing theatre with street children, as I will illustrate below.

First of all, the performances of the *Biles* were very much “embodied” as many narratives were acted out through the body as the central medium. For instance, the numerous physical fights (for instance between God and His helpers and the Devil and his helpers) and exorcist rituals, but also bodily reactions to witchcraft and inherent emotions that were performed were all heavily embodied performances. Furthermore, there were many non-verbal gestures and bodily signs relating to spirituality which would have never come to the fore in ordinary interviews, but were acted out naturally in embodied narratives of theatre. Examples of these were for instance positions of piety (various forms of praying) or gestures associated with the evoking of spirits and ghosts, such as making an inverted triangle with one’s hands, or the making of the signs of Satan’s horns with two fingers. Some of these signs I later recognized during participant observation on the streets.

Secondly, being inherently a group exercise, our theatre plays were certainly dialogical. They offered a collaborative production of meaning through the active embodiment of the narratives within a dialogical space created for action, reflection and ‘becoming’ (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008). When planning and practicing their theatre play, spiritual knowledge of the young people was complementary and there was a lot to learn from the way they reacted to each other. Sometimes they argued about things that went wrong in the play. These kind of discussions provided me with lots of data. In one focus group, one actor, who had the role of witchdoctor, was questioned about his choice to help the witch in the play, while the other boys thought this was not something real witchdoctors would do. The witchdoctor-actor insisted that this is how ‘real’ witchdoctors act and he illustrated this with several personal examples.

Finally, the plays were highly illustrative in the sense that Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2008) suggest: “focusing on particular moments of time and place, but encapsulating much wider insights regarding the participants’ lives and situations”. These narratives constitute what Freire (1970, 97) calls “generative themes” (see also Butler 2009), as actors produced the main themes that emerged from their lived experiences. Theatre work is “experiential and emotive” (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008, 3.6) and draws on very different modes of expression than interviews for instance. Working with street children, it was a clear benefit that the method provided an alternative forum of expression to young people who might have been not very comfortable with verbalising

certain experiences or emotions (see Winton 2007; Bagnoli 2009). In particular, I was struck by the performances of Batumike, one of my key informants, who I had known already for three months and who I had always thought of as a particular shy kid with a peculiar voice... reluctant to start a conversation, somehow clumsy in choosing the right words to express himself... I knew him as someone who doesn't particularly enjoy being at the centre of attention, someone who stays in the background; an introvert, quiet observer, not a talker. I could not believe my eyes when his group was about to perform. Beyond doubt, he was the best actor of all, his performance was close to being professional. His eyes were twinkling the whole time, he unmistakably enjoyed acting, being at the centre of everyone's attention and, most unexpectedly, his best performance was through dialogues.

On a last note and despite having argued the intention to "empower" my participants was not an explicit motive of doing theatre, I believe it was a positive, fun and arguably even "empowering" experience for them. They were all very proud of what they had performed and most of them came back in the following week to watch their own 'film' which I had promised to show them. Whereas the theatre offered an exceptional playground for (embodied) expression, collaboration and reflection in a team-context, generating valuable "embodied, dialogical and illustrative" insights, a final large-scale creative method, drawings, was very effective in inviting young people on an introspective journey, exposing their rich subjectivities, contemplation, aspirations, hopes and fears.

3.3.5 Drawings

Scholars who question the use of conventional research methods in research with children often propagate the use of drawings as a child-friendly alternative (Fargas-Malet et al. 2010; Punch 2002b; Winton 2007). Particularly in research with street children, who often have limited or no access to education, visual methods have been promoted as providing a forum of free expression (Young 2004; Young 2003; Young and Barrett 2001a; Swart 1990; Evans 2002; Young and Barrett 2001b; Wiencke 2009; Couch 2010; van Blerk 2006). The use of drawings gives children time to think about what they want to portray. The image can be changed and added to, which gives children more control over their form of expression, unlike an interview situation where responses tend to be quicker and more immediate (Punch 2002b). As such it has been argued the use of drawings reduces

the power imbalance between the adult researcher and children, giving young people a greater sense of confidence (Couch 2010).

However, the most important advantage of my use of drawings was the powerful way in which it provided me access to children's inner lives, exposing their positioned subjectivities, revealing their deep-seated thoughts, hopes and dreams. It complemented the theatre method which was a collective production narrating power relations and children's social interactions with spiritual experts and beings in particular. In contrast, the drawings were an individual, very personal exercise based on the contemplation of the self.

In total, 66 drawings were collected. Like the theatre method, this method took place at PEDER's centre across three days, with two groups of approximately 11 young people per day. This led to each participant producing a drawing on the theme of the day they were present. I provided the participants with white A4 paper, pens and pencils, crayons and markers. I explained the exercise emphasising its individual character (in contrast to what they were used to with the theatre method and GUOTS focus groups). Like the theatre sessions, the drawings were scripted, hence 'thematic'. I had decided on three different scripts - one for each day - based on themes that had emerged through other research activities and which I thought were particularly suitable for further exploration in this artistic exercise. The first day, children were asked to draw their afterlife. The aim was to see participants' colourful visualisations of afterlife but also to gain insights into their spiritual subjectivities, hoping to learn about how they judge their own spiritual/moral position and which ending they hope, fear or foresee (see figure 3.5 for an example). The themes from this material will be analysed in chapter 6.



Figure 3.5. Example of a drawing of the “afterlife”, showing the battle between heaven (above) and kuzimu (hell, below) over the soul of the deceased one, who is pictured in the middle, laying in a coffin and surrounded by grieving family members. Angels (in red) are guarding over the coffin. Above, the central figure is the head angel, accompanied by the Holy Spirit (imagined as two doves) (Richard, *bile*, drawings 23-06-16).

The second day the exercise was twofold (divide your paper in two): “yourself as serving God and as serving the Devil”. These were phrases the children often used themselves and I was interested to know more about what kind of activities they would categorize under “serving God” and which ones under “serving the Devil”. The aim here was thus to explore the moral dimension of spirituality and their understanding of good and evil as illustrated by examples from their own life (see figure 3.6 for an example)



Figure 3.6. Example of a drawing “you as serving God and you as serving the Devil”. Explanation by artist: “To serve God, I [orange figure inside the church] have built this church. Unfortunately the Devil is not happy for what I have done for God. Here he is [figure in blue with knife] waiting for all of us to leave the church. He is asking his daughter [figure in orange, bottom right corner] for a knife to kill all of us. And to go against God’s will, he puts everything which is bad for us, such as drugs, especially weed, outside the church. The machine there [upper right corner] is a generator which is generating electricity for the church but unfortunately the Devil has cut the cable so there is a black-out” (Michael, *bile*, drawings 24-06-2016).

The third day, the exercise was dual again: “the most blissful/happy thing you can imagine and the most terrifying thing”. The aim here was to address the role of spirituality in personal hopes/hoping and joy (including future prospects) and fear (see figure 3.7 for an example).

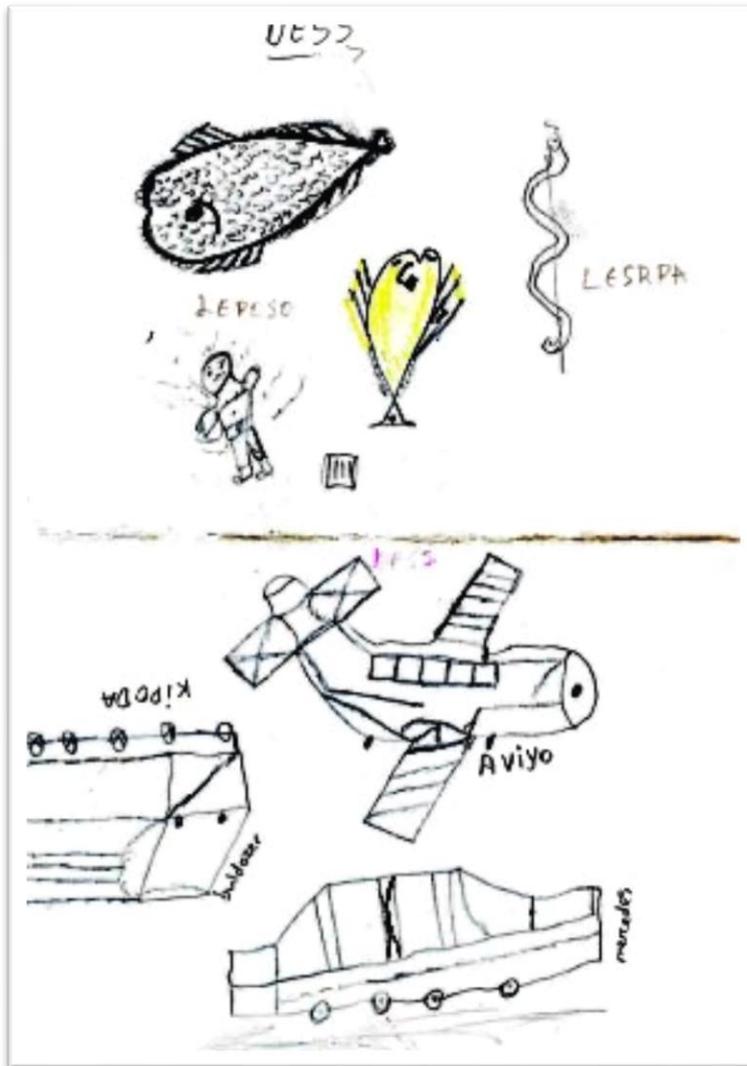


Figure 3.7. Example of a drawing “most happy/terrifying thing”. Explanation from the artist: “I am most afraid of snakes, because when I am in a tree and when a snake awaits me underneath, it can kill me. Also, one day, after drowning in the lake, I am afraid a fish will come to eat my eyes. Here you see someone who has stolen and the people have burnt him alive. It makes me afraid. The things that make me happy are: an airplane, a bulldozer and a Mercedes. The Mercedes because I wash cars and I earn some money through it. The airplane...when I see one I just feel very very happy” (Thomas, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

Importantly, after finishing the drawing, I would invite each participant for an individual mini-interview of five or six minutes in which he or she could explain the drawing. Because the quality of the drawings was not always good, I wrote down in pencil what things represented. It was crucial to hear children’s own explanation of what they had made, often revealing interesting experiences or narratives. This short time frame of five-six minutes was usually enough to gain sufficient understanding of the meaning of each drawing and also to connect the stories on paper with the lived stories. All 66 mini-interviews were tape-recorded, translated into English from French and transcribed by me. In line with the experiences of other scholars, I found children participated freely in

the drawings without being worried about artistic inadequacy, something which may occur in more literate children (Young and Barrett 2001a). Rather, they seemed proud of what they had created, and many insisted on putting their name on their work of art. Interestingly and as the examples above show (figures 3.5-3.7) the children had often not stuck to the exact exercise. This, in itself, is indicative of the fact that they were in control over the data that was ultimately collected and I felt it made the information richer. When asked to draw themselves as serving God or the Devil for instance, it proved more interesting (or less challenging) to draw God and the Devil themselves. In general, it was rare to find clear references to the ‘ego’ or the artist, despite being explicitly asked for it this time. This did not result in a lack of personal reflection however. Quite the contrary: data from the drawings were richest in terms of personal reflection. Often, the drawings would narrate real-life experiences including reflections from the protagonists. These reflections were often written with pencil on the drawing itself (e.g. phrases like: “what do I do now?” “Does God still want me in heaven?” “Where will I go?” “I will go to God” “I should never steal again” “Drugs is bad” etc.). Interestingly, girls’ drawings in particular took the form of ‘scripts of life’, narrating their biography from birth/being a child to starting a life on the streets, including sex work and inherent moral reflections about it (e.g. “this house here, this is the room where we commit our sins”) to death and ultimate decision on their fate: to heaven or hell (or to France, as someone believed). As such, some drawings accidentally took the form of storyboard drawings, used by other researchers to gain insights in a particular sequence of events (e.g. Ansell and van Blerk 2005a). In chapter 6, section 6.3.2, I will explore these drawings as ‘scripts of life’ analytically.

Hence, similarly to the theatre method, the drawings resulted in a proliferation of creativity, showing the rich imagination of children in colourful, artistic representations, often blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, resulting in a unique blend of mundane and other-worldly stories. Specifically, it provided data on temporal aspects of spirituality as well as reflections on subjectivity and the contemplation of the self in past, present and future (see chapter 6 for analysis based on this method in particular).

3.4 Additional methods and context research

Besides these ethnographic and creative methods together forming the core of a synergetic methodology, I used a number of other methods to complement this approach, filling in some remaining gaps of knowledge. I conducted a basic information survey with

all street children who were involved in the study (section 3.4.1) to gather some quantitative data on lived spirituality. Furthermore, I did context research: interviews with local experts on childhood/street children and Congolese culture, religion/spirituality (section 3.4.2.1), research activities with an NGO helping children who are accused of witchcraft (section 3.4.2.2) and literature study of local sources (section 3.4.2.3).

3.4.1 Basic Information Survey

In addition to the qualitative methods described above, one quantitative method was used: a survey asking for basic information for all street children (n=75)(see appendix 4). This information was gathered in 75 small individual interviews (5-10 minutes in length). In contrast to the semi-structured interviews, these were not tape-recorded but directly inserted in Excel. Questions included basic information such as someone's name, age, time living on the street, reason for being on the street, 'sector' on the street (geographical location), and level of education. Then there were questions about spirituality, including religious denomination, faith, frequency of church visits and several questions about experiences with witchcraft and pastors. Closed yes/no questions were inserted in the Excel form and questions demanding explanation (when the answer was 'yes' I asked for examples and/or explanation) were typed in a separate Word file. This information served to identify participants that could be invited for a semi-structured interview based on the information they provided. Furthermore, by providing a more quantitative overview of certain experiences and beliefs it served to reduce bias from qualitative data. For instance, after having explained my research interests to the young people, quite a few came up to me with the wish to participate. Often, they seemed to be children who were particularly engaged in spiritual activities. With the information from the survey, I could cross-check whether these children were indeed exceptional or rather average.

3.4.2 Context research

These research activities directly with street children were complemented by additional 'context research'. This was three-fold: 1) 'expert' interviews, 2) participant observation and semi-structured interviews related to a centre in Bukavu for children accused of witchcraft (centre Ek'Abana) and 3) literature study. In chapter 4 in particular, I draw on insights from this context research, sketching the Spiritual Field of Bukavu.

3.4.2.1 *'Expert' interviews*

Individual and group semi-structured interviews were conducted with 'experts'. 'Experts' here refers to different types of experts. Most prominent were the 'experts of spirituality' (n=8): Catholic priests, Protestant pastors, Islamic sheiks, witchdoctors and a witchcraft teacher. I also interviewed 'experts on street children' (n=4): PEDER staff and the staff of centre Ek'Abana (see appendix 5 for a topic list for interviews with PEDER staff as an example). Furthermore, one Dutch-Congolese anthropologist (expert on Congo and religion) and one cultural expert (Bashi) participated. These 'expert' interviews (with the exception of the witchdoctor and witchcraft mediator) were conducted in French, without the interference of an interpreter. They generally lasted longer than the interviews with children; some took over two hours. They were all tape-recorded, transcribed and translated into English.

Expert interviews were useful to construct context information on relevant topics. For example, street children's knowledge on the formal organisation of religion in Bukavu was often ambivalent. Speaking to pastors and priests was helpful in providing a clearer understanding of these issues. It helped me to sketch an overview of Bukavu's Spiritual Field and to understand children's experiences with spirituality in the cultural context of this field (see chapter 4). Also, the experiences of these experts with the street children served as a verification of things the children had told me themselves, such as the prominence of pastors on the street.

3.4.2.2 *Activities with centre Ek'Abana: for children accused of witchcraft*

PEDER is the principal organisation in Bukavu reaching out to street children and youth. The Centre Ek'Abana however is an organisation specialised in helping children, mostly girls, who are accused of witchcraft. Contact with this organisation was particularly interesting to gain a better understanding of the sociocultural dynamics of Eastern Congolese witchcraft in general and child witchcraft accusations in particular. The majority of my research participants were experienced with the impacts of being accused of witchcraft (or accusing others). There is a direct link between witchcraft accusations and street life as these accusations often lead to an abandonment or exclusion of a child who will be at risk of becoming a street child. The only reason why the often very young children from Centre Ek'Abana were *not* on the streets was because they were taken care of by the centre. In contrast to the PEDER centres, the Ek'Abana centre was a residential centre where girls lived permanently.

In addition to semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with the Ek'Abana staff, I included participant observation and informal interviews with some of the girls from the centre who were old enough to have a conversation (quite a few were under five years old). Because I visited the centre regularly I built rapport with some of the girls who trusted me with their accusation stories often including abuse or torture. To include the family perspective as well as the accuser's perspective I visited and spoke to some of the families of these girls in their (often poor, rural) homes. These visits in particular and hearing the stories from different angles (accuser, victim, family) were very insightful for constructing a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics and underlying causes and effects of child witchcraft accusations (see chapter 4, section 4.4.3).

3.4.2.3. Literature study

Finally, to enrich my understanding of the lived experiences of spirituality of street children, it was important to study the sociocultural context and historicity of religion and spirituality *in general* in Bukavu. In this light, I benefited from my time in Bukavu by studying and reading those materials, including one-copy books and dissertations which have never been digitalised but were to be found in the local libraries. I registered as a member of the University of Bukavu's library to be able to read and copy (pages from) books about Bashi culture (Bashi is the prominent ethnic group in Bukavu) in general and Bashi religion and witchcraft in particular. Interestingly, it turned out books with hundreds of Bashi proverbs were very useful to understand Bashi perspectives on religion and witchcraft.

Nonetheless and perhaps most crucial, such literature study also served as a verification of my presentiment that the ancient cultural (Bashi) tradition shapes contemporary practices of 'street spirituality'. An example concerns the Bashi credo that the self is God's gift, which is reflected in people's spiritual subjectivities. I will discuss this in detail in chapter 4, section 4.3.1.

3.5 Contemplating the (dialogical) construction of data

Discussing my methodological approach, in particular reflecting on the epistemology of ethnography (section 3.2), I have highlighted the intersubjective character of ethnography and foregrounded a perspective on fieldwork as an interactional process in which knowledge is acquired, shared and transmitted. As put forward by Rabinow (1977, 150)

ethnography is a knowledge construction process involving at least two, *but usually more*, subjects. As such, data cannot be collected as if they were rocks, but we should acknowledge that all data should be seen as emerging in *interaction*, meaning data construction is a constructive dialogical negotiation of knowledge. In this section, I aim to reflect on the processes of interaction through which my data were constructed. A first important example is the collaboration with PEDER, the local NGO that supported my fieldwork. In section 3.5.1, I reflect on the implications of having my research facilitated by them, providing me with efficient access to street children but also limiting to some extent my autonomy as a researcher. In section 3.5.2, I discuss the complexities of doing research in not just one, but two new languages. When fieldwork is based on interaction, this is clearly affected when researcher and researched do not speak the same language, but also when information goes through a process of translation. In fact, interpreters deserve to be acknowledged as examples of the “usually more subjects” (cf. Rabinow 1977) who are central to the knowledge construction process. Finally, studying spirituality, I saw an opportunity for ‘spiritual interaction’ with informants, approaching each other *spiritually* (Latour 2005). In section 3.5.3, I will reflect on my attempts to solve what Engelke (2002) has called “the problem of belief”: the age-old question whether a researcher would understand the religious experiences of her informants better if she shared, to a large extent, the same conviction.

3.5.1 Working with an NGO and research assistants: data and collaboration

PEDER, *Programme d'Encadrement des Enfants de la Rue* (program for street children), the local partnering NGO of *Growing Up on the Streets*, greatly impacted the kind of data I returned home with. Most importantly, PEDER facilitated access to my research population. I truly believe I would not have been able to conduct the same research in the same amount of time without their assistance. Sketching an overview of the advantages and problems of working with NGOs in development research, this point of NGOs being “entry points” is mentioned by Mercer (Mercer 2006; see Campbell et al. 2006 for a discussion on 'gatekeepers'). I argue this is of particular advantage when working with a hard-to-reach group such as street children. As discussed in section 3.2.2.1, it worked enormously to my advantage to be associated with PEDER since the organisation’s street workers were highly trusted by the street children. In fact, volunteering with NGOs or activist organizations in early phases of research is a common technique for researchers to gain access to street children and youth (Hecht 1998; Young and Barrett 2001b).

Studying children in deprived neighbourhoods in Bratislava, Blazek (2011) even decided to enter the field as an outreach worker, not as a researcher, and he continued to combine his work as a practitioner with his academic research throughout the research period, constantly balancing two professional identities. Whereas it was relevant for him and other researchers to actually engage in voluntary work with an NGO I had the advantage that my informants were already familiar with the concept of research(ers) through their experiences with *Growing Up on the Streets*. Therefore, PEDER could introduce me as a researcher from the beginning.

Other benefits of partnering with local NGOs mentioned by Mercer (2006) are also in line with my experiences. She mentions that NGOs are a “fount of local knowledge”, “field area experts”, “a source of background information” and helpful in terms of local language skills, translation and interpretation (Mercer 2006, 99, see section 3.5.2 for a discussion on language and translation). Indeed, as field area experts, PEDER helped me to get more ‘street-wise’, accompanying me on the streets of Bukavu, showing me the places where I could find street children. They also functioned as cultural advisors, teaching me about local cultural customs and traditions. An additional aspect that proved relevant in politically unstable and potentially dangerous areas such as Eastern DRC, was the fact that PEDER could provide me with accurate safety information and updates on a changing political situation.

Unavoidably, I also encountered disadvantages and challenges in my collaboration with PEDER. As gatekeepers, PEDER decided who to introduce me to. Ultimately, I only worked with street children and youth that were known to PEDER, which may have resulted in a bias. PEDER’s Catholic identity for instance may have led to a bias of more Catholic participants. Furthermore, a large majority of my informants were already GUOTS research participants. This meant I worked with a large group of young people who were experienced with participating in research, and consequently perhaps more able to express themselves and more likely to give answers that were socially desirable or to tell me things they thought researchers would be most interested in.

Mercer (2006) warns against NGOs who may wish to become research directors, micro-managing fieldwork on a daily basis. This is something I experienced only in the beginning of my fieldwork; for the first couple of weeks, PEDER had made a ‘programme’ for me, in which I would spend each day at one of their four different centres where they offer shelter and education to children and youth. I soon realised however,

that these children were not my intended research population of children and youth working and living on the streets, since these children lived in centres. After two weeks, I could discuss this with PEDER and they suggested I could make a research programme and ask for their assistance when needed. Something I continued to struggle with however, was the lack of freedom and independence I experienced as a researcher. Also in the light of efforts to protect my safety, PEDER always wanted to know where I was and with whom. In particular, I felt this complicated my efforts of keeping my research confidential, because PEDER staff would often ask the names of children I had seen or spoken to. After some time, I tried to go on the streets alone, together with Celestin, my research assistant, or accompanied by key informants, but because I was a very visible ‘outsider’ on the streets of Bukavu and PEDER streetworkers also used to go on the streets, I was often spotted by them and sometimes interrogated afterwards. Furthermore, I was confronted with some differences in how the NGO and I thought about doing proper (ethical) research. I will discuss the example of having to fight for obtaining children’s informed consent in section 3.6.2. However, due to PEDER’s engagement with *Growing Up on the Streets* and their appreciation and support for participatory research these differences were limited.

Whereas I relied very much on PEDER during the first weeks of my research, I started to work with Celestin, a new research assistant, in the second half of my fieldwork. There were different reasons for this. First of all, I wanted to reduce the ‘burden’ I put on PEDER supporting me. Second, I planned to do more participant observation on Sundays and evenings, when PEDER was closed. My relationship with informants had improved, I felt secure enough to approach the street children by myself hence only needing some assistance with the language. Third, I wanted to be more independent. Fourth, acknowledging that assistants/interpreters are part and parcel of the knowledge production process (Turner 2010; Temple and Young 2004), I was curious to see whether the involvement of Celestin, a 17-year old former street child who had lived in a PEDER centre himself, would lead to new insights. In anthropology, the role of research assistants has long been neglected, upholding the myth of ‘lone ranger research’ (Wasser and Bresler 1996; Geertz 1974). Even today however, although increased attention is being paid to subjectivity and reflexivity and the impacts of the researcher’s positionality on data collection, the role and positionality, sometimes even the very existence of interpreters and assistants remains too often “silenced” (Turner 2010). Reflecting on the impact Celestin would have on my research, I believed he would be the perfect research

assistant precisely because of how he was positioned in society and vis-à-vis informants. First of all, he was familiar with street life and consequently he knew quite a number of my informants already, which helped to generate trust. At the same time, the fact that he had left the street and was now familiarized with non-street life, granted him the ‘outsider’s’ perspective which made it easier for him to see things from the point of view of a foreign researcher and act, or explain accordingly. Finally, Celestin knew French which allowed us to communicate and share ideas directly without the interference of an interpreter. To a large extent, my expectations were right. However, there were some issues I had overlooked. First of all, Celestin was not a streetworker and he had no experience approaching street children. For instance, I had seen that PEDER streetworkers used a lot of humour in interactions with the *Biles*, whereas Celestin was rather serious. Furthermore and although I cannot be sure, I sometimes ‘sensed’ some jealousy from the part of informants towards Celestin, who had been a *Bile* like them, but, unlike them, had had an opportunity to leave the streets and, although still poor, he was now walking around in nice clothes. Nevertheless, we could overcome these initial issues and the children came to trust and like Celestin in the end. His experience with street life also had advantages as Celestin certainly had some capacities PEDER streetworkers did not have. For instance, Celestin could detect and differentiate street children from other young people at a large distance observing just their body language and movements. He taught me how to recognize drug use through looking at children’s nails, and he was familiar with both the places where street children were and the ‘street slang’ they spoke. In the next section I will elaborate further on the important role of interpreters as mediators in the research process, discussing issues of language and translation.

3.5.2 Language and translation: data and communication

If the point of departure is a perspective on data as the co-construction of knowledge as a joint venture, and if we agree with Spradley (1979) that language is not just a means of communication about reality but a tool for *constructing* reality, communication and translation *as methodological issues* deserve to be at the centre of our attention. Nevertheless, this is only rarely the case. In fact, researcher’s language competence and complexities of working with an interpreter are underexplored in the literature (Tremlett 2009; Smith 2010; Smith 1996; Tonkin 1984).

Doing fieldwork in Bukavu meant learning not just one, but two new languages. In order to be able to communicate with PEDER it was necessary to learn French. French

is the official language of the Democratic Republic of Congo, but it is not the language that is spoken at home. The Congolese start learning French when - and if - they go to primary school. For the majority of the people with low or average education levels, knowledge of the French language remains limited and grammatically erroneous; its spoken form is usually mixed with local languages, in the case of Bukavu this is Kiswahili, in everyday conversations. Unsurprisingly, street children usually do not speak French, besides a few words or phrases. Their passive knowledge of the language is more elaborate however and they do understand bits and pieces when French is spoken to them. In the Netherlands, I had studied French at high school level, but I had forgotten most of it, also in the context of having to learn Spanish for previous research in South America. Before going to the field, I took some extra French lessons and based on prior experiences with learning new languages, I trusted my French would soon improve once I got in the field, in particular because I knew very few people would be able to speak English or indeed Dutch.

Furthermore, the importance of learning Swahili in addition to French was evident and I took daily private lessons in Bukavu until the end of my fieldwork. Although I soon realised I would not reach anything near fluency in Swahili at all, I became aware that despite this, maybe even *because of it*, my efforts to learn the language were very beneficial as a methodological tool in my study. First of all because it functioned as an excellent icebreaker. In the first days, even weeks, I was ‘hanging out’ at PEDER’s centres, in an effort to make contact with my research population. I would sit outside in one of the plastic chairs, with a notebook and pen in my hand, and I would ask the curious children who would approach me to teach me some Swahili words and to help with the pronunciation. This proved to be a very effective and ‘fun’ icebreaker, offering low-key access to my research population. Second, and perhaps more crucial, once I started knowing the street children a little bit better, they emphasised how much they appreciated the fact that I put effort in learning their language. In fact, PEDER staff and other people told me the same. They compared me with other “white people” who would not make any effort in learning their language, even if they were living in Bukavu for years, while they thought my Swahili was already outstanding! Of course, the Swahili I was learning is local to the eastern Congo region. Because I learned it quite literally ‘in the streets’ it is also a ‘slang’ Swahili, a mixture of French and Swahili and some Mashi²⁷ and English

²⁷ Mashi is the original language of the Bashi people, who form the majority in Bukavu.

words as well. Gradually, I became to feel that my effort to approach street children in their own tongue contributed to a more power-sensitive form of interaction (Watson 2004).

Everybody who has ever tried to learn a new language will understand what I mean when arguing there is an inevitable 'awkwardness' that accompanies the process of language acquisition, which is manifest in particular when having to practice it in front of native speakers. As Temple and Young (2004, 164) stress, "for people who do not speak the dominant language in a country, the idea that language is power is easy to understand". At times I felt very uncomfortable, not knowing for instance if the children were laughing because of my poor pronunciation, or because of my poor pronunciation *and* the fact I was saying something else than I thought I was saying. Watson (2004) writes about similar experiences from her fieldwork in Ethiopia. She admits that learning the local language was "difficult and upsetting" as she felt reduced to a child-like status, a three year old who depended on her informants for help and guidance. Similarly, I felt like a toddler every now and then, but at the same time and despite personal unease, I experienced this as a methodological benefit because the children liked the idea there was something they had to teach me, some area in which I was the child, in need of their experience, guidance and good-will. In particular, among this research population, of children who struggle with literacy, openly exposing my own 'illiteracy' in a language which they believed was 'the easiest language in the world' was a sensitive way of balancing their view of me as an extremely educated/academic white person. I also argue that the effort to learn at least the basics of the language which is central to the everyday reality of one's research participants is a good way of showing respect and genuine interest in their lives, which fits the ambition of conducting ethically grounded participatory research (Clark and Moss 2001). Even more crucial, arguably, for me it formed quite literally the basis for a *dialogical* approach which fits the epistemology of ethnography (Robben and Sluka 2012). It was a way of helping to reduce the social distance between me and the children and it worked to bridge our vastly different worlds. It has been argued also by others that the use of language helps to build rapport and trust (Mead 1928; Watson 2004). Watson argues that being able to speak to people in their own language changes the nature of the intersubjective encounter between people, and it changes the understandings that the researcher develops. A useful way of thinking through this is to extend the idea of spaces of 'between-ness', in which new meanings,

representations and understandings are generated between people and across cultures (Smith 1996).

By the end of my stay in the field, I was familiar enough with Swahili to be able to read and understand all billboard advertisements in the city and all (often religious) texts on motorbikes, taxis and minibuses. I could hold basic conversations and I could understand the context of conversations. During interviews, I would detect incorrect translation from the interpreter, and, very helpfully, if I was transcribing interviews and I thought a particular phrase or paragraph was particularly interesting, I would go back to the original tape-recorded conversation and translate from Swahili directly into English. However, my Swahili was never good enough to fully understand conversations held between informants. This, however, has been argued to be the greatest value of learning the local language: “being able to understand what the natives say and how they say it when they are conversing with each other” (Witherspoon quoted in Borchgrevink 2003, 107). This skill however requires a high level of language competency and unfortunately I did not reach that level. I dealt with this limitation in two ways: complementing my access to information through working with interpreters and by making sure to include other ways of accessing information through creative participatory methods.

Hence, for official interviews, more guided participant observation activities and participatory exercises, I worked with interpreters. Rather than working with professional translators, possibly even a Swahili-English translator which would have made things much more convenient for me, I chose to work with PEDER staff as interpreters and later with Celestin, the research assistant introduced in the previous section. Carefully selecting interpreters and/or research assistants and being sensitive about their social position and how this may impact the rapport you try to build with your informants is of crucial importance (Borchgrevink 2003; Bujra 2006). In a classical anthropological work, for instance, Berreman (1962) describes how the social status and religious identity of his interpreters affected his access to information. In this light, we should not forget that data are the product of a dialogical negotiation of knowledge involving at least two, *and usually more*, subjects (Rabinow 1977), of which interpreters are excellent examples. This has helped me to consider the positionality of the interpreter and the impact on the research and to act accordingly. Specifically, in the context of my study, in which I was working with a group of particularly vulnerable children and young people, I found it more important to engage interpreters who were known to the young people and trusted by them, than to have professional skilled interpreters. The PEDER street workers were

extremely experienced in working with street children in a sensitive and respectful way. Most crucial, I noticed from the beginning my informants trusted them completely. Hence, I discovered that the 'interpreter-effect', as Borchgrevink (2003) writes, can work both ways: some interpreters may serve as a gate-opener for the researcher by serving as guarantor of good intentions. This is, I argue, of particular importance when working with a group of vulnerable children who have learnt to not trust any adults (Greene and Hogan 2005; Conticini 2008). A second advantage of working with PEDER street workers was that informants were more comfortable with the French that was spoken by them, a language the children are more were familiar with than English because they are surrounded by it every day.

In contrast, a clear disadvantage of my choice of working with French-Swahili interpreters was not just the additional work it was for me, but the additional translation process it required, transcribing spoken French into an English text. This implied an additional opportunity for the nuances of language to get "lost in translation" (Perez et al. 2009). Because translation is a meaning-making process itself, as Smith (2010) highlights, it was important to be diligent in double-checking information and critically testing interpretations (Borchgrevink 2003). In fact, at times I was grateful for being forced to think about how to translate. It enabled me to think deeper about analysis: each phrase required careful contemplation about how best to transfer its meaning into another language. Ultimately, we should not try to obscure that translation is just another aspect of research in which the researcher has a central, 'executive' role (Clifford and Marcus 1986). In ethnographic fieldwork in particular, it is the ethnographer who is the key sense-making 'device' and the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription than in reconstructing its value. Simon (quoted in Temple and Young 2004, 165) argues: "the solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities". Besides working with interpreters who were experts on these 'local realities', methodological triangulation was another aspect of how I dealt with translation challenges. As Powdermaker (1966) suggested language is not the only form of communication. Through employing participatory and creative methods I offered the children an alternative forum of communication based on visual, artistic or dramaturgical expressions (see also Young and Barrett 2001a).

Finally, the data was analysed and transformed into a written text in English. English is the dominant language in academia, carrying historical and cultural biases in

favour of the particular power holders of the time (Sakho 2003). English is not my native language and, subsequently, I have struggled with issues of language and translation since the start of my studies. This explains, perhaps partially, why it has been less difficult for me to develop a linguistic self-reflexivity in the field as well. Next to French, Swahili and English, there was Dutch and Italian in my mind as well. Dutch is my mother tongue, and it's the language I think *with* and dream in. Interviews were conducted in French, on the spot translated from/into Swahili, later transcribed directly into English, but *thought with* in Dutch. Finally, Italian was the language that was mainly being spoken in the convent which was my home in Bukavu. The congregation of Sisters of Santa Gemma is originally an Italian congregation.

Of course, issues with translation, interpretation and representation are not limited to the period of fieldwork. In section 3.6 I will outline the data analysis process and in section 3.7.6 I will elaborate further on the ethics of representation and writing that became important after coming back from the field. First however, I turn to a third and last aspect that was prominent in the interaction in which data on spirituality were constructed: personal beliefs.

3.5.3 Religion and positionality: data and belief

So far I have reflected on data construction as a collaborative and communicative endeavour. In a study about spirituality, however, there is an additional issue complicating what data are, problematising 'claims to knowledge' (cf. Tremlett 2009) and challenging the researcher-informant relationship: the very topic of spirituality itself. If ethnography is essentially a human endeavour, an intersubjective quest for understanding, this means thinking about how researcher and informant can explore and experience spirituality *together* should be built into the research design. More radically, one could think of ways to approach each other *spiritually* (cf. Latour 2005). When studying religion and spirituality, the age-old question which arises here is the question of whether the researcher would comprehend religious phenomena better if she were to share, in some sense, a belief in the supernatural. Or, in other words: whether religious belief carries with it a certain privilege to understand (other people's) religious experiences. This is a question Engelke refers to as "the problem of belief" (2002, 3). He argues (religious) belief can reduce the distance between the researcher and the people she studies. Engelke (2002) paraphrases Geertz (1974, 223) saying that someone who studies witchcraft should sound "neither like a witch nor like a geometer", meaning the

researcher should neither talk about witchcraft with such a level of detailed (local) knowledge it makes her suspicious of being a witch herself, nor should she talk with complete ignorance or lack of interest. Evans-Pritchard (in Engelke 2002, 6) called “the father of the ethnography of witchcraft” by Favret-Saada (1980), argues that:

“If religion is essentially of the inner life, it follows that it can truly be grasped only from within. But beyond a doubt, this can be better done by one in whose inward consciousness an experience of religion plays a part. There is but too much danger that the other [non- believer] will talk of religion as a blind man might of colours, or one totally devoid of ear, of a beautiful musical composition” (Evans-Pritchard in Engelke 2002, 6).

I think it is no exaggeration that when the aim is to provide a thick description of people’s inner life - representing children’s experiences- we cannot go further astray than talking of religion ‘as a blind man might of colours’. The assumptions of Evans-Pritchard (1965) and others (Ashforth 2000; Turner 1992; Stoller and Olkes 2013) are that for the *religious researcher* of religion, its social fact of existence takes on added meaning and that one’s inner life provides a key to explaining the inner lives of others. And, finally, that religious conviction may function as a way of bridging the distance between researchers and ‘the other’.

I don’t know if I can talk of myself as a *religious researcher*. Before going to Bukavu, I felt supported by the fact that spirituality and religion had never been alien to my personal nor professional biography. I was raised in a Roman Catholic family with a father who was active religiously, as a writer of Christian prayers, songs and books and as the conductor of church choirs. He also worked as a yoga teacher, however, incorporating Hindu, Buddhist and Sufi theologies in his teachings. Since I was a child, I have been fascinated by religion and spirituality, and I undertook my own spiritual journey, which brought me from Catholic to Protestant churches, to spiritual (New Age) and Tibetan Buddhist meditation centres. As an ethnographer, I have done previous research on religious syncretism in the Philippines, Catholic young people in Peru and traditional healing in Ghana. These personal and professional experiences possibly helped me to avoid sounding like a witch or geometer (cf. Geertz 1976). However, I soon discovered there were limitations to how ‘uninvolved’ one could be with religion in the DRC. I learnt for instance, from reactions of informants to other ‘strangers’ who self-identified as atheists, that if I would have openly stated I don’t believe in God or even doubt his existence, this would have made me the most alien of aliens, and alien in such

an awkward way that it would have severely limited opportunities for building rapport. But I wanted more. Afraid as I was to talk of spirituality as a blind man might of colours, I feared that I would only fully understand the lived spirituality of my informants, if I shared, to a large extent, their belief in the supernatural. I thus tried really hard, to seek my own religious conviction - digging into my personal past - and have it functioning as a bridge between our different worlds.

Unfortunately, I achieved quite the opposite: I became completely overwhelmed by the level of religious conviction of people around me in a setting in which religion and witchcraft were not even talked about in terms of ‘belief’ but rather taken as a social reality. After some time of comparing my own faith to the conviction of research participants I finally decided I had to let go the idea of myself as a believer. At the same time, local spirituality remained perplexingly complex for me; talking with informants I saw how they often contradicted themselves, saying one day they saw themselves going to heaven for instance whilst being convicted of a bad spiritual ending another day. Key-informant Pierre had told me he didn’t believe in God “in his life” but nevertheless argued that when he burnt his food one day, this was God’s punishment. A couple of days later, after a particularly tough day, I found myself praying in the chapel that belonged to the convent which was my home in Bukavu. I could not suppress a growing feeling of unease however when I suddenly realised what I was doing: if I didn’t believe in God, as I had finally decided, why would I pray? This is when I started to use not my religious conviction but precisely my religious doubts as a research tool. If I was praying to someone whose existence I had previously denied, how could I judge my informant’s flaws in explaining their inner life and experiences? Hence, instead of bridging distance based on shared perspectives, it worked better to critically explore and discover my own (spiritual) inner life as a way towards understanding theirs. Hence for me, ethnography’s ‘intersubjective quest for understanding’(Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rabinow 1977) implied a need for personal introspective reflection, an explorative journey into my own ‘inner’ self which then allowed me to simultaneously explore and ultimately expose the ‘inner’ selves of my research participants in a joint trajectory with them. Investigating my own beliefs, hopes and fears enabled me to be more open towards understanding the inner life of others, regardless of our different contexts. I became milder for instance in my judgments of the inevitable ambiguities I encountered and I learnt, from analysing my own spiritual quest, that human spiritual beliefs and experiences are bound to be vastly complex, typically ambivalent and utterly confusing. At the same time there were times I

explicitly and openly distanced myself from informant's spiritual intentions in particular. For instance, when children told me they planned to go to *kuzimu* (the underworld) to arrange a pact with the Devil, I felt ethically bounded to actively discourage them, in part because I had learned that these kind of plans could go hand in hand with serious crimes such as murder. In section 3.7, I will turn to a detailed discussion of these and other ethical concerns. Before turning to ethics however, I will first outline my approach to data analysis in the next section (3.6).

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis was a continuous process throughout the fieldwork and afterwards. I transcribed almost all interviews whilst in the field, because I felt it was very useful to reflect on the data as it helped me to prepare for the next research activities, fine-tuning follow-up questions for instance and deciding on the format of the creative participatory methods. Transcribing was certainly not an easy or unproblematic task, as Bloor and Wood (2006) suggest, but rather required my full attention. It was particularly challenging because I translated the French from the recorded audio-files simultaneously into English whilst transcribing. To do this, I used a voice recognition software (Dragon), speaking in English to my computer whilst hearing the French translation of the children's Swahili.

Whereas transcribing ordinary interviews was already a time consuming activity, analysing the data from the theatre activities was extremely laborious because it implied transcribing the dialogues and monologues and in addition writing the total script of each play, paying attention to each individual character and making detailed notes of gestures, movements, fights and other non-verbal communication, but also noticing clothing styles and attributes the children used as well as the way they made use of the space. In addition, I had to transcribe twelve focus groups that were organised at the end of each theatre session before putting all data from one play together before it could be analysed further through coding for instance.

Besides this analysis of these tape/video-recorded data from interviews and indeed the theatre activities, also ethnographic field notes needed to be analysed. As DeWalt and DeWalt argue (2011, 179) the analysis of field notes is an iterative process, demanding: "reading, thinking and writing and rereading, rethinking and rewriting". Each night of the fieldwork, I converted my hand-written 'jot notes' made during participant observation into (typed) extended fieldnotes. Besides descriptive (or ethnographic) notes, these included methodological notes and analytic notes, reflections or discussions

representing the next level of analysis. It was not always possible to make ‘jot notes’ during participant observation. To avoid suspicion for instance, I did not do this when visiting girls in nightclubs, neither did I write things down during church services or prayer sessions because I felt it would have been inappropriate in such settings. Those days, I made sure to transcribe all ‘headnotes’ (see DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 171) into extended fieldnotes as soon as possible.

I used NVivo qualitative data management software to further analyse all textual data, e.g. extended fieldnotes, theatre scripts, interview transcripts etc. In total, I worked with two different NVivo files. After a few weeks in the field, I started analysing data in the first NVivo file. I used a grounded theory approach to my analysis (Glaser and Strauss 2017), coding for emerging themes: ideas that characterize and tie together materials from different participants in different settings. Themes included for instance: ‘food poisoning’, ‘stealing in church’, ‘Devil’, ‘witchcraft’ etc. I worked with both ‘nodes’ and ‘sub-nodes’, for instance, under ‘witchcraft’ I categorized ‘being a witch’, ‘lake’, ‘money and wealth’, ‘*kuzimu*’, etc. Coding for themes also worked iteratively: reading and rereading textual data to look for recurring ideas and patterns of concepts, then turning back to the data to see if the themes can be applied to other individuals and events. I worked with ‘memos’ as well, meta-notes that can be attached to pieces of text.

With the second NVivo file, I moved to the next step of analysis, identifying academic themes and concepts based on the grounded themes that were potentially central to the empirical chapters of this thesis. I also continued working on the first file which meant I was coding all data twice. Interestingly, I worked on this second NVivo file particularly during two breaks from the fieldwork, in April and later in June 2016 when I stayed outside the DRC. As has been suggested by other researchers (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011), I felt I needed the added distance of being away from the field in order to come to this stage of analysis. However, the fact that I went back to the field after those breaks, meant there was enough time to (slightly) re-focus, to change research questions and design and to deepen and explore themes that I had identified as central. From my experience, starting early with (all stages of) data analysis enhanced the validity of the data as there was enough time for verification.

3.7 Ethics

In this section I will reflect on some important ethical considerations inherent to my research with vulnerable young people in a politically unstable environment, studying a

sensitive topic (religion and witchcraft). I start with outlining my approach to ethics which is grounded in a ‘situated ethics’ approach (Fletcher 1966) and inspired by geographical work on the ethics of research with children (Ansell and Van Blerk 2005b; Young and Barrett 2001c; Cloke et al. 2000; Cree, Kay, and Tisdall 2002; Morrow and Richards 1996). Building on these existing considerations, I add two aspects of doing ethical research that emerged from my fieldwork experience: the importance of acknowledging and reflecting on the researcher’s personal moral frameworks and the art of balancing empathy and disaffect. After outlining my approach to ethics (section 3.7.1), I turn to a discussion of the ethics of illegality and danger in section 3.7.2. These ethical concerns were prominent in my research because of the specific survival mechanisms and circumstances of my informants, but also because of the sensitive research topic of witchcraft in particular. In section 3.7.3, I discuss ethical aspects of the creative methods I used, in particular reflecting on the role of emotions. In section 3.7.4, I reflect on the process of obtaining informed consent with street children and ensuring confidentiality. In section 3.7.5 I shed light on the issue of immediate and long-term reciprocity, including questions around the paying of informants and dissemination strategies. Finally, in section 3.7.6 I will outline the ethics of ethnographic writing and representation.

3.7.1 Adding to a situated ethics approach

Researchers generally agree that when undertaking research with children, there are important ethical issues that must be carefully thought through (Abebe and Bessell 2014; Meloni, Vanthuyne, and Rousseau 2015; Skelton 2008). When these children belong to a particularly marginalised group, as in the case of street children, ethical concerns become even more pressing (Young and Barrett 2001c; van Blerk 2006; Thomas de Benítez 2011b; Valentine, Butler, and Skelton 2014). Furthermore, Christensen and Prout (2002) have argued that the new theoretical developments in the Sociology of Childhood, in particular seeing children as social actors, means a more complex field emerges in which there is greater scope for ethical dilemmas and new responsibilities for researchers (see also Panter-Brick 2002).

Often, to ‘do no harm’ or to ‘minimize harm from the research’ is the key ethical imperative across the social sciences. See for instance the Statement on Professional Ethics of the American Association of Geographers (AAG 2009), or the Code of Conduct of the American Association of Anthropology (Robben and Sluka 2012, 326). Consequently, this is something which institutional ethical frameworks try to capture. In

the case of my study, there was more than one institutional ethical framework. First of all, there was the university's ethics committee who managed and agreed on my research proposal (see appendix 3). Being embedded in *Growing Up on the Streets*, my study benefitted from the yet more established ethical guidelines and careful research design. In addition to the University's ethical and guidelines, my study was committed to the 'Specific ethical guidelines for research involving street children and youth' (see appendix 2 for the signed form).

Despite the usefulness of these frameworks in forcing the researcher to start thinking about ethics and to prepare herself for ethical dilemmas to come, it would be fair to argue, as Rodgers (2001) does, that few, if any, ethnographers ever find themselves in circumstances that are as imagined before going to the field. I would not argue, as Dekeyser and Garrett (2017) do, that ethnography and universal ethical frameworks are completely incompatible. I do argue, however, that institutional frameworks are useful as guiding schemes but not as complete recipes for ethical action in the "messy and real world" (Beazley et al. 2009, 365). In Bukavu, I was inevitably confronted with unforeseen ethical issues which required a 'situational' rather than a static and transcendental approach to ethics. 'Situational ethics' emerged in the 1960s and advocated the simplification of moral principles, their stripping down to the most basic axioms so that individual researchers have the freedom, flexibility and responsibility to work out their meaning in a specific set of circumstances (Fletcher 1966).

Recently, this 'situational' approach to ethics or a more general discomfort with universal ethical codes, has been adopted by geographers (Ansell and van Blerk 2005b; Cloke et al. 2000; Cree, Kay, and Tisdall 2002). Cree et al. (2002, 48), for instance, have questioned the usefulness of universal ethical codes for research with children, pointing out that those "offer topics for consideration rather than 'blue-prints' for good practice". In their seminal work, Morrow and Richards (1996) came to similar conclusions, pointing out that broad ethical guidelines are useful as a guide and as a way of helping researchers to consider potential ethical dilemmas that may arise, but that they should allow room for personal ethical choices by the researcher. I agree with their suggestion that "ethical considerations should be *situational* and *context specific*" (Morrow and Richards 1996, 96, emphasis added). In line with Dekeyser and Garrett (2017, 5) I argue for seeing ethics as a "series of complex and situated particularities of individual pieces of research that works less with 'standards' and more with 'specifics', and doesn't end at the point of publication" (Dekeyser and Garrett 2017, 5). Hence, following these scholars, I plead for

a situational approach to ethics. From my own experience, however, I would like to highlight two additional aspects of approaching ethics: the importance of acknowledging and reflecting on personal moral frameworks and the art of balancing empathy and disaffect.

To start with the first, from my experience in Bukavu doing ethical research requires a constant negotiation, a ‘balancing’ so to say, of institutional ethical agendas, the local ethos and personal moral frameworks. It is these personal moral frameworks which generally receive surprisingly little attention in literature, whereas they are, I argue, often decisive in making ethical choices in fieldwork. I realise this may not be a popular stance right now, given the popularity of participatory approaches to research with children, including a call for participatory ethics (Cahill, Sultana, and Pain 2007; Abebe and Bessell 2014). However, I argue we should not obscure the fact that it is the researcher who in the end makes ethical decisions based on largely unforeseen moral dilemmas that arise in the everyday practices of the field. This practice of moral balancing is primarily formed by one’s moral biography: in my case a Roman Catholic upbringing, but also an anthropological training including a sensitivity towards cultural relativism as well as Feminist influences. In this light, thorough and continuous reflexivity on one’s positionality and moral presumptions as well as learning from previous ethical decisions is the primary way of advancing one’s own ethical research.

A second aspect I would like to highlight concerns the paradox of moral involvement and detachment (or empathy and disaffect). Fieldwork in Eastern DRC implied a daily confrontation with conditions and interactions that completely contrasted with my ideas of justice and equality. This resulted in a moral unease which is an inevitable component of fieldwork. It should thus be acknowledged that moral action implies a constant effort to neutralize moral discomfort. This effort revolves around the paramount objective of ‘do no harm’, as well as a commitment to institutional frameworks, but it also draws on a certain ability to balance empathy and disaffect. Being surrounded by grotesque suffering Monday to Saturday and being as empathic as I could, sharing my own lunch with the children, offering a listening ear, occasionally hiding my own tears to them, on Sundays I chose to be as far away as possible from the omnipresence of injustice and suffering, seeking refuge in one of the city’s few fancy hotels, buying the illusion of normality for a few hours.

In sections 3.7.2 – 3.7.6 I will reflect on the ethical side of the intrinsically messy experience of doing research in an alien environment characterised by structural

inequality and conflict, in which I had to constantly ‘balance’ ethics. I will give examples of how I dealt with real and practical ethical issues that emerged. All examples highlight a personal and, most of all, situated approach to ethics which I believe to be inevitable.

3.7.2 Ethics of illegality and danger

A first series of critical ethical dilemmas I was confronted with emerged from issues related to the specific vulnerability and survival mechanisms of street children. Young and Barrett (2001c, 130) already highlighted that researchers studying street children should particularly be prepared to confront “very difficult and complex” ethical issues during the research process. One such example is being confronted with sexual and physical abuse of children. Scholars undertaking research with children and young people in the UK are obliged to inform the authorities when they suspect abuse or when a child divulges that s/he or others are at risk of significant harm (Hiriscau et al. 2014). However, this would not have been such a wise decision in Bukavu since it was mainly the authorities who engaged in severe human rights violations. Many street girls for example shared the horrific experience of being gang-raped by police officers on duty with the (driving) police car being the locus delicti. It should furthermore be acknowledged, as Young and Barrett (2001c) stress, most government and non-governmental organisations know that abuse is a real problem on the streets, but the mechanisms are not in place to deal with this effectively. Hence, when boys and girls told me about abuse they experienced, I chose to not break their confidence by reporting this to anyone (which would not have made things better), but to offer a listening ear. In fact, PEDER was the first and only institution I trusted with sensitive information about the children, and if I would really fear for their well-being or if I thought anything could be done to help them, I would have told PEDER.

Street children are not only victims of violence and abuse however, they can also be perpetrators. Throughout the research, I was trusted with very sensitive information on illegal activities, from drug use to armed robberies, rape and murder. One informant explained how he strangled and killed people at night. Someone else told me that he and his friends often rape very young (nine to 10-year-old) girls. In these situations, I chose to not say anything, for instance showing my disapproval, because I knew it would not make a difference.

In other situations, I felt morally obliged to interfere because I felt I could possibly make a difference and protect the well-being of my informants or others. Two key-

informants told me they considered sacrificing (i.e. killing) a close family member as part of a pact with the Devil. In both situations, I urged the children to re-consider and reflect on (other) options, while being conscious not to openly judge their intentions. I encouraged them to reflect on a future in which they had no brother/grandmother anymore, would they not regret it? I illustrated my concerns by telling them about some of their friends I knew who had indeed sacrificed a family member and who deeply regret it today. Often, they were convinced to consider this path by someone else, a mediator or witchcraft teacher, who charged a lot of money for his ‘teaching’ and ‘advice’. I encouraged them to critically reflect on the motivations of this person; was he/she indeed interested in enhancing their well-being or was he after their money? Was he a charlatan maybe? In these circumstances, informants thanked me for what they saw as “good advice” while at the same time explaining to me why they thought they had good reasons for their choice. In a similar way, I strongly encouraged both boys and girls to use condoms when they engaged in sex (work). This was not an unproblematic piece of advice since it went against the official policy of PEDER, which, as a Catholic organisation, could not accept the use of contraceptives. HIV/AIDS was extremely common among my research population, however, as were unwanted teenage pregnancies. I estimate at least the majority of girls was infected (and their babies too) with the virus. In the light of this suffering, my ‘situated’ ethical decisions thus primarily derived from my personal moral frameworks, consequently rejecting the local ethos of religious frameworks condemning contraceptives.

When working with such sensitive information, it was of crucial importance to keep everything the children had told me extremely confidential. Rape and murder are of course very serious crimes, but even theft, the daily economic activity of all my informants, was serious enough in Bukavu to risk getting killed by an angry crowd, as happened to key-informant Raoul. With witchcraft (accusations), things are even more tricky. Already very vague witchcraft accusations can have tremendous impacts, including torture and murder of the suspect. The dozens of underage girls living in Ek’Abana centre, a religious charity to support victims of witchcraft accusations (see section 3.4.2.2) are the living reminder that one cannot be careful enough when it comes to witchcraft in Bukavu; many of them had their houses burnt down by an angry mob, others were beaten, had cigarettes burned on their skin or had been locked inside ‘Rooms of Prayer’ (see chapter 4, section 4.3.5) without food or water for days before being rescued.

I took a number of precautions to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. First of all, I wrote a combination of mainly Dutch and English in my notebook and was careful not to include real names when sensitive information was provided. I almost never took my laptop with me, but left it locked inside my bedroom within the convent's secured compound. Back-ups (in the cloud) were secured with a password. When talking with informants in public places, I was always wary no-one would be listening to us, which in fact was all too often the case and a reason I did not conduct any official interviews or informal conversations about sensitive topics in public places. Also, I emphasized towards my informants that it was fine to tell me certain things about their lives, but that they should not easily trust anyone outside PEDER (in most cases an unnecessary warning). Most crucially perhaps, I would not talk with anyone about any piece of information my informants had trusted me with. Concerning information on witchcraft, I was particularly reluctant to share it with the nuns at the convent where I stayed, although one of them was the official head of PEDER at the time, because I knew what their reaction would be. Not familiar with the notion of confidentiality at all, they usually insisted I should tell them the name of the child who practises witchcraft or who had made a negative remark about the Pope so they could 'educate' or 'help' him/her better. I never did this although it put pressure on my relationship with them.

3.7.3 Informed consent with street children

Ethical concerns inherent to the process of obtaining informed consent from street children were something I could prepare for. Following Professor van Blerk's 'Specific ethical guidelines for research involving street children and youth' (see appendix 2) and her suggestions in other work (van Blerk 2012), I had decided beforehand to obtain verbal informed consent instead of written informed consent. Van Blerk (2012) argues it is not appropriate to obtain written consent from street children/youth, due to extremely low levels of literacy and the negative associations of 'signing a form'. The majority of street children are only required to 'sign' forms when they are being charged at the police station. In this context it would be detrimental to relationship building and create a feeling of distrust (van Blerk 2012, see also Young and Barrett 2001b; 2001a). Hence, following van Blerk, the process of informed consent in my study took the form of *opting in*.

Nevertheless, even in this process, unexpected challenges emerged that required a situated, 'reactive' approach to ethics. One such challenge was the fact that PEDER, whom I was fully dependent on in particular in this early stage of the research, did not

see any need for obtaining informed consent since they considered this as having already been done under GUOTS. Although I risked putting pressure on my relationship with PEDER, I insisted on organising a meeting with the young people that would revolve around informed consent. In this first meeting with the six research assistants, I started off with an icebreaker. I asked the young people to tell me their name, their age, their favourite colour and something they like. I had not included the topic of religious identification for this first introductory round on purpose. Interestingly enough, however, all young people mentioned something about their religious identity. This immediately provided me with interesting data; for instance, the fact that the young people were differentiating between belief and practice (i.e. “I am a Catholic but I don’t practice anymore”) and their awareness of their fluid identification (“I have no specific religion, but I go where I will find something”). Immediately after this round, I asked them if they had any *personal* questions about me, before I would step right into discussing my research. I encouraged them to ask me anything they liked. Nevertheless, I had to hide my surprise when the very first question was whether I was sexually loyal to my partner or polyamorous/promiscuous instead. Despite a moment of relative unease, I made sure to pretend this was a very normal question for me, and to answer as openly and frankly as I could. After explaining in detail about my research, in particular discussing the way it is embedded in- yet different from- GUOTS, I asked them if they were willing to assist me throughout the research, as research assistants. I didn’t expect a decision about the young people’s participation immediately. I told them they could think about whether they would like to participate in the research, and let me know and that they were in no way obliged to participate.

After this first round of *informing* everyone about my research, I would repeat this each time again before any research activity. Because I had made clear participation was in the form of opting in, I expected only those young people would show up or agree to an interview who were willing to do so. To verify this however, I would explain about my research again each time and then ask everyone if they were indeed *willing* to participate (hence, the consent part) and that if they did not want to, or had changed their mind (or would change their mind during the activity) they could *always* leave without giving any reason and no-one could force them to (continue to) participate.

With key informants with whom I built a close relationship over time, I made sure to repeatedly reminded them of my role as researcher and that everything they told me,

also during the most unofficial activities such as having lunch together, could still end up in the ‘book’.

3.7.4 The ethics of creative methods: dangerous emotional terrain?

A third series of ethical challenges were related to the methods I used to access children’s lived spirituality. The creative methods in particular often evoked an emotional reaction from participants. For instance, when I showed key-informant Rizo a neutral image of a church, his unexpectedly emotional response was in sharp contrast with a nonchalance he showed through words (see section 3.3.3 and chapter 6, section 6.3). Rizo was not the only participant who started crying at some point in the creative methods. This indicates that the pictorial interviews, as well as other creative methods, have the power to stir reflexivity, a moment to contemplate and ‘allow’ feelings that are rather unpractical for a street child: guilt and regret and doubt about one’s moral conduct.

Stimulating children’s reflexivity was, in fact, of essential importance in my research as it was the only way to access children’s spiritual inner life, revealing their moral subjectivities (see chapter 6). As convincingly put forward by Jupp Kina (2012, 207) however, “reflexive processes imply significant emotional demands”. Drawing on Spinoza who goes against a Cartesian separation of mind and body by emphasizing that our emotions are inseparable from our thoughts, Jupp Kina (2012) argues for the importance of (recognizing the) emotions as the basis of people’s reflexive capacities. In her research with children and youth in Brazil, Jupp Kina experienced that the use of participatory methods created an opportunity to make the invisible visible, allowing participants to recognize their own subjectivity, to begin to discuss not just what they think, but why they think this way, and how this relates to what we feel. I had similar experiences, as outlined in the sections above (see sections 3.3.3 – 3.3.5). However, besides these ‘rationale’ benefits (cf. Warshak 2003) of engaging emotions and reflexivity in research methodology it was crucial to reflect on the ethical side of this ‘emotion work’ throughout the research process. Akesson et al. (2014) argue there is need for an ethically responsible means of conducting arts-based research with children affected by global adversity (the ‘arts-based methods’ they discuss are photovoice, drawings and drama). One of the ethical issues they mention is that arts-based methods may plunge into “dangerous emotional terrain” for both the researcher and the researched (Akesson et al. 2014, 82). This is also discussed by Boydel (2012) who stresses that using artistic modes of representation engages our senses in a different way and allows for a different kind of

participation and may thus increase the likelihood of making an impact (whether negative or positive). In my study however, although it certainly seemed informants thought about the topics that were explored in the creative methods until long after the exercise, it never seemed as if they actually suffered emotionally, because of the method's impact. Hence, whereas Boydell (2012, 11, see also Robson 2001) discusses situations in which participants found arts-based methods "troubling, unsettling or disturbing" because of the emotional proximity and persuasiveness of the methods, this did not seem to be the case in my study, although it is difficult to be sure. In their research on the impact of AIDS on children in southern Africa, Ansell and van Blerk (2005b) also chose to talk about sickness and death despite their awareness this may be distressing for some participants. However, as they stress, we should not assume that the expression of negative emotions of our informants is necessarily harmful. In addition, they suggest that as researchers we may not be causing the distress in those interviews, but merely provoke it into the open, and thereby expose ourselves to it and "while this is uncomfortable for the researcher, the interviewee is not necessarily 'harmed' by the experience" (Ansell and van Blerk 2005b, 16). In a very honest reflection on their ethical choices, I think these authors articulate the thoughts of most of us, although we are probably hesitant to write them down: "we did what we sensed to be right", suggesting this implies both "an embodied feeling and the application of rationality" (Ansell and van Blerk 2005b, 19). In my case and besides doing what I sensed to be right, I made sure to consult PEDER about whether they thought certain methods or questions were too persuasive or (would) cause(d) a child distress. Furthermore, the continuing, even growing enthusiasm of children to participate in my study also after emotional moments such as the one by Rizo was a signal for me that children enjoyed participating and did not experience the research as troubling or unsettling.

3.7.5 Reciprocity

Another issue which came to the foreground in my study that illustrates the value and inevitability of a situational approach to ethics was the concern of reciprocity. I differentiate between two kinds of reciprocity here: the first concerns direct reciprocity in the field, hence the question of if/how one should compensate research participants for their time. The second concerns long-term reciprocity: how the research (findings) may give something back to the research participants. Concerning the first point; it is generally seen as most ethical to avoid directly paying young research participants for their

collaboration (Fargas-Malet et al. 2010). In 2001, a EU directive even advised that paying children to take part in research should be illegal (Cree, Kay, and Tisdall 2002). However, this would have certainly not been most ethical in my study, in which I was confronted with key informants who were already used to getting paid as research assistants through the GUOTS project and with good reason expected this to continue (Van Blerk, Shand, and Shanahan 2017). I agree this was completely logical since their task was conceptualised as a job and more generally, seeing the commitment and time spent over the three-year period of the GUOTS project. Hence, it would have been highly unethical to stop paying them this money while assuming they would continue with their responsibilities. I was fortunate enough to benefit from the monthly payments to the six GUOTS-research assistants which continued to be paid by GUOTS also during the course of my study and after GUOTS data collection had officially ended. PEDER continued to organise these monthly payments which meant my key informants were compensated for the work they were doing with me but I was not personally associated with their income. Nevertheless, money remained an important aspect of my relationship with them.

In the beginning of my study, I was reluctant with giving money, even small amounts, to informants. I would rather compensate them with food for instance, a piece of clothing or I would buy powdered milk or other baby products for the girls. Gradually however, I changed this approach and started giving very small amount of money (usually 500 Congolese francs, which is about \$0,50) as a small gift when I visited (key) informants on the streets or I reimbursed travel costs. One of the reasons to do this was the fact that I often chose the wrong kind of food products in the eyes of my informants. Whereas fruits were a healthy choice and something they did not eat often (hence I thought it was a treat) they preferred the usual fufu or beans because it would fill their stomach for a longer time. Hence I started giving small amounts of cash trusting they would spend it on nutritious food and not on drugs. In most cases this proved to be not problematic in any way. In fact, it is not uncommon in African countries to exchange small amounts of money *as* gifts, tokens of appreciation. This was a second motivation to start giving cash: for us (in the West) money signifies a sphere of “economic” relationships which are inherently “impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating” (Parry and Bloch 1989, 9) but there is often no parallel of these thoughts in other societies (see also Krah 2014; Peebles 2010; Maurer 2006). Interestingly, this amount of 500 francs was the standard amount children would ask for as it would be just enough to buy a small portion of beans or a piece of bread, enough to satisfy their immediate needs. They would

usually not ask for more money, except when there was an urgent need such as to cover medical costs. Later, when I started to do longer individual interviews with others than my key informants, I decided on a fixed amount of 3000 Congolese francs as a compensation for an interview. This was meant as reimbursement of travel costs (1000 for a return ticket if they would take the bus), money for a more nutritious meal (1000-1500 for rice/fufu and fish for example) and some compensation for their time investment (500-1000) since it meant loss of income during travel and interview hours. Of course there was always the fear they would spend it on drugs or alcohol (or girls) rather than on the things I thought were good for them. When I discovered 3000,- was the exact price of the minimum quantity of 'sniff' (crack), I reduced my standard 'gift' to 2500,- when I suspected the person was planning to buy drugs. On the other hand, I knew that if I did *not* give them money, in particular when they asked for it, it meant they would directly go on the street and steal it from someone else.

In addition to more official compensation for long interviews I did still bring my informants snacks every now and then or paid for a shared meal or bus ride. When I left the field I organised a good-bye party for my key informants and the PEDER staff, with lots of food and drinks for everyone.

I found it more complicated to deal with (expectations of) more substantial reciprocity in the longer term. From the beginning, I had been clear I could not promise them anything in terms of any improvement of their life circumstances, but that I was of course hoping to contribute through dissemination. As part of the move towards morally responsive research, the inclusion of appropriate dissemination strategies is now an integral aspect of research proposals with an expectation that research will be returned to participants and that dissemination will extend beyond academic outputs (van Blerk and Ansell 2007). Indeed, one of the aims of my study is that an improved understanding of street children's lives, including more in-depth insights into the role of spirituality in their lives, may help to guide advocacy and policy addressing their needs. In the light of this aim, I disseminated my research in Harare, Zimbabwe in December 2017 with a wider network of street workers, NGO's, academics, churches, government officials and policy makers, and in Bukavu in May 2018 with a similar network as well as with the street children who had been my informants. Young and Barrett (2001c) stress that the dissemination of research on street children to "more powerful others such as governments and NGOs" raises great ethical concerns. It was crucial, for instance, to protect the identity of my

informants in the light of sensitive and illegal issues including witchcraft practices. I made sure to not include photographs of any participants and I never used their real names in dissemination practices. With dissemination in Bukavu I aimed to ‘give the research back to the participants’, which is a central theme in participatory research (Young and Barrett 2001c; Morrow and Richards 1996). In fact, already in the field I had offered them (copies of) research material such as the drawings they made, but they were not interested, largely because they have no space where they could store their belongings (see also Young and Barrett 2001c).

3.7.6. *The ethics of writing and representation*

Morrow and Richards (1996, 96) stress that ethical considerations need to be situational and context specific and “above all, ongoing throughout the process of research, from inception to dissemination and findings”. In my case, there continued to be important ethical concerns related to the process of analysis, writing and (visual) representation. Ensuring confidentiality for instance continued to be a main concern. Throughout this thesis I have tried to anonymise my informants as much as possible. First of all, I have created pseudonyms for all of them. These pseudonyms were in some situations chosen by the children themselves. *Growing Up on the Streets* already worked with a set of pseudonyms for all their participants from Bukavu and because my group of informants largely overlapped with theirs, it would have been possible and convenient to adopt the same pseudonyms. However, to minimize the risk that my informants would be recognizable I decided to create my own, distinct pseudonyms. Furthermore, because different groups of street children tend to ‘belong’ to certain places in the city I also anonymised names of places, neighbourhoods, markets etc. in Bukavu to reduce the risk of making children recognizable by mentioning names of their shelters or often-frequented places (see also Young and Barrett 2001c). Still, however, I was confronted with situations in which some children could be recognizable if I were to write about certain events or characteristics. In those situations, I decided to not write about it at all, even if this meant I could not include potentially relevant information in the thesis. Furthermore, I have made sure to blur all photographic material in this thesis as well as in presentations and/or conference papers, to always guarantee the anonymity of informants.

A final ethical issue concerns the *representation*, in a wider sense, of the research material. As discussed at length (see sections 3.1 and 3.3) I aimed for a participatory

approach to research. Through the use of creative, participatory methods I ensured the participation of informants in the process of data collection. It has been pointed out by other scholars that whilst such participatory approaches are increasingly commonplace in data collection, children's involvement in the planning, analysis and dissemination of research is usually more limited. Van Blerk and Ansell (2007) argue research which only involves children in data collection without communicating about the wider aims and objectives of the research and without involving children in other stages such as dissemination should be avoided. To ensure greater participation, a growing body of literature has begun to explore the possibilities of involving children in designing and carrying out their own research projects, thus seeing children as co-researchers or even researchers themselves (van Blerk, Shand, and Shanahan 2017; Cahill 2007; Kellett et al. 2004; Alderson 2000; Alderson 2001). I agree it is important to ensure participation beyond data collection to go beyond a mere 'tokenistic' use of participatory methods (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Ansell et al. 2012), but I also acknowledge serious complexities, challenges and even impossibilities, which I will address here.

In my case, street children were involved in the design of my study in a unique way: through their participation in *Growing Up on the Streets*, they had, indirectly, suggested the research topic of my study. Hence, the urge and relevance of studying street children's spiritual lives had emerged out of another truly participatory study. With the participatory diagramming exercise (see section 3.1.1) in an early phase of my fieldwork, I tried to further include their ideas and suggestions about what research on street spirituality should entail. Although some things came out of this exercise (such as the immediate division into the divine/dark spiritual sphere) I also encountered important limitations at this stage, most notably the completely logical difficulties the young people faced with abstract/conceptual thinking. Finally, I managed with ensuring children's participation in data collection, particularly through the use of participatory, creative methods, but it was not possible to enable participation in data analysis and, most clearly, writing. Regarding the 'textual embodiment of authority', the question thus remains "who is the author of field notes?" (Clifford 1983, 488). Of course, there have been experiments in Anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s and later in Children's Geographies with 'polyphonic ethnography', to enable the authorial presences of informants (Clifford 1983, see also Crapanzo 1980, Favret-Saada 1997 and Kellett 2004). Despite these interesting contemporary attempts, however, I agree with Clifford (1983, 490) who concluded that real plural authorship is an illusion for two reasons: 1) It is the ethnographer who in the

end assumes an executive, editorial position. The authoritative stance of ‘giving voice’ to the other is not fully transcended; 2) The idea of plural authorship challenges a deep Western identification of any text’s order with the intention of a single authorship (ibid. 491). Indeed, my university would not accept anything but a single-authored PhD thesis. Besides such practical impossibilities, however, it should not be obscured that street children lack the practical and intellectual skills as well as academic experience to participate formally in analysis and writing (i.e. illiteracy). However, through constant verification of findings and (parts of my) analysis with the children and throughout the research process, I tried to include as best as possible their views on the research and on the data, constantly asking them for verification and to identify gaps in the knowledge I was gaining. With this scientific triangulation and by using participatory creative methods embedded in a wider ethnographic design I believe I have included children’s own perspectives and have represented to the best of my knowledge their lived experiences. However, I do not wish to deny my own important role as manager and editor of field notes nor do I wish to claim, as James (2007) warns against, that my representation of these children’s voices was ‘authentic’.

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have outlined my methodological, epistemological and ethical approach to studying the spiritual practice of street children in Bukavu. Throughout the research process I was confronted with various challenges; from approaching a hard-to-reach and extremely vulnerable group of research participants, to working in a war-torn and highly unstable environment, managing multiple languages, and, finally, accessing and making sense of children’s deep-seated feelings and experiences, exposing their inner selves. To address these challenges, I opted for a multi-method approach, designed to be flexible, with room for continuous adaptation and ‘trial-and-error’ to make it stronger and better able to explore and explain the lived spirituality of street children as I learnt more about it on the streets of Bukavu. At the heart of this multi-method approach were creative participatory methods, meant to stir reflexivity, creativity and imagination and designed to put children’s lived experiences - not just their lives - at the centre of the analysis. These creative tools were combined with more ‘classic’ ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews which served to build the necessary trust and rapport, to allow for triangulation and serendipity and to gain a more ‘embedded’ and holistic understanding of lived spirituality in context. I have referred to

my approach as a ‘synergetic’ approach, instead of adopting the term ‘mosaic’ for instance (Clark and Moss 2001), because I experienced the use of multiple methods leads to a ‘stronger’ and richer methodology in which the particular strength of each method was ‘boosted’ because of the layering of methods. This synergetic approach was firmly embedded in an ethnographic epistemology, to which notions of reflexivity and flexibility are central, as well as problematising the construction of ‘data’ and power relations in the field. By using participatory and ‘child-friendly’ methods, it has been my intention not necessarily to ‘give voice’ to children - a popular aim among sociologists of childhood in particular (see James 2007 for a critical discussion) - but rather to *facilitate a dialogue* in which their voices are represented, acknowledging that data are the product of a dialogical negotiation of knowledge, emerging from *interaction*. This interaction is not limited to the researcher-researched relationship; other actors equally contribute to the dialogue. Examples include the NGO that supported my research, as well as Celestin, my research assistant, but also other interpreters. In section 3.4 I reflected on the construction of data as a collaborative, but also communicative venture, arguing for the importance of paying attention to questions of language and translation as methodological issues. Religious belief was a third aspect influencing the dialogical negotiation of knowledge in Bukavu. After trying to be religiously the ‘same’ as my informants, I only made progress after accepting the ambivalence of my own religiosity. This made me more understanding towards the spiritual ambiguities that surfaced in the thoughts and practices of the children.

Reflecting on the effectiveness of my methodology, I consider the success of the creative methods in generating exceptionally ‘rich’ and multi-layered data the most noteworthy outcome. These kind of methods (including though not limited to arts-based and visual methods) have already been praised as useful in working with vulnerable groups and young people (Lee and Finney 2005; Ho, Rochelle, and Yuen 2011), said to enrich traditional qualitative approaches and able to facilitate richer reflection and dialogue (Coemans and Hannes 2017). Recognizing all these benefits from my use of creative methods, I would like to stress that in my case the prime advantage was that they encouraged self-reflection among the participants, a contemplation of the children’s positioned self, which was a pre-requisite of being able to access their inner lives. Other scholars have already pointed at the effectiveness of creative methods to explore complex or sensitive issues such as youth experiences (Conrad 2008), and difficult to verbalize topics such as identity or community (Noor 2007; Coemans and Hannes 2017). To my

knowledge however, these methods have rarely been used in qualitative studies of religion and spirituality. My study illustrates the unique value of creative methods to explore children's (and arguably adults') lived spirituality cross-culturally, hence also in settings that are unfamiliar to the researcher, 'exposing' people's inner lives and revealing their positioned subjectivity.

However, the need to combine and embed creative methods in a solid ethnographic framework, and thus the value of a multi-method or what I call synergetic approach, cannot be overemphasized. I only introduced methods like theatre and drawings in the last two-to-three months of my fieldwork. Ethnographic explorations were essential to first establish enough trust and mutual understanding, ensuring children were familiar with me and that they would feel comfortable and safe enough to undertake the introspective and often emotional journey a method like drawings implied. Also, participant observation and interviews were important to discover themes that were relevant to participants and that could be further assessed in creative methods. The very design of the creative tasks, from choosing scripts for the drawings to deciding on the props for the theatre, derived from insights from participant observation and interviews. Finally, ethnographic methods served to cross-check, validate and explain results from creative methods. The drawings would for instance have been completely useless analytically without interviews in which the children explained what they had drawn and theatre would have been utterly confusing without focus groups in which participants reflected on their joint performance, connecting it to their lived experiences on the streets.

Nevertheless, I agree with Harper that creative methods produce "a different kind of information" compared with ordinary interviews for example (Harper 2002, 13, see also Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008; Coemans and Hannes 2017). In my study this information proved 'richer' and more insightful in different ways. Examples can be found in, but are not limited to, the pictorial interviews and theatre methods. The pictorial interviews provided rich and multi-layered insights because they triggered an intense embodied and affective response. In line with the argument of Harper (2002), I experienced that these interviews somehow evoked deeper layers of consciousness, jolting informants into re-thinking their moral existence. An additional advantage of the pictorial interviews was that they prompted responses related to times and places that were not the 'here and now' and which I would otherwise not have access to. In this way, this method helped to solve limitations of participant observation (see section 3.2.2.1). In a different way also the theatre method resulted in exceptionally rich data. Arguably it

was the most powerful tool in my study to learn about the lived spirituality of street children. It induced great reflexivity by offering a moment and a space to take a step back and see one's life from a more detached perspective. Nevertheless, all plays were about everyday life, narrating actual experiences of marginalization and illustrating social positionings in a wider field of power. As such, the theatre resulted in *a specific kind of knowledge* as has been pointed out by Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2008): embodied, dialogical and illustrative.

Besides these benefits, there were some -mostly practical- limitations and challenges to using these creative methods. Designing them was a true process of 'trial-and-error' which required a substantial amount of time. In future research, or in other scholar's research with children there may be less time for experimentation. Clearly, the participatory diagramming and mapping exercises were less effective compared to theatre, drawings and pictorial interviews. Yet those too had to be designed and organised, materials had to be bought and intensive support from PEDER was required. Sadly, some of the materials, such as crayons and pencils, ended up being stolen by participants, which complicated doing the exercise with the next group of participants. Finally, on a critical note, I ask myself the question whether I provided too much guidance with these methods which may have led to a bias while leaving less room for children's own ideas, particularly about the design of these tasks. As outlined above, my inspiration for designing the creative methods and deciding on scripts derived from insights from ethnography. This was at the same time an advantage however; knowing what I was interested in and being able to directly 'target' that specific part of knowledge increased the effectiveness of the creative methods. Yet at the same time this implied opportunities for the children to participate in designing the methods and thinking about the scripts were limited. Of course, due to their very nature, these creative methods still allowed the children as 'artists' some freedom of expression (i.e. often ignoring the task I had given them and choosing their own themes), but in future it might be interesting to discuss the design of creative methods with the participants and ask for their feedback.

Designing and adapting my synergetic approach raised specific, sometimes unanticipated ethical concerns. An example can be found in the often emotional responses triggered by the personal creative methods (pictorial interviews and drawings). I thus realised that the reflexive processes I sought implied significant emotional demands (see Jupp-Kina 2012). It was difficult to determine whether interviews were "worth the tears" (see Robson 2001) and whether I was still not doing any harm; the core ethical imperative.

In general, there were only few ethical issues that I could have prepared for before going to the field. With the exception of (preparing) processes of obtaining informed consent from street children (see van Blerk 2012) other situations demanded a situational, ‘responsive’ approach to ethics. Examples include the ‘ethics of illegality and danger’; being confronted with informants who share their plans to murder someone, reveal their experiences with physical and sexual abuse by the authorities or discuss their intentions of making a pact with the Devil. Furthermore, studying spirituality, particularly the domain of witchcraft, heightened the importance of confidentiality. Disclosing information about an informant’s witchcraft practices could have had disastrous consequences for him/her. In the light of these issues, and following other scholars (Dekeyser and Garrett 2017; Ansell and van Blerk 2005b; Cloke et al. 2000; Morrow and Richards 1996; Fletcher 1966), I have argued for a ‘situated’ rather than a static and universal approach to ethics in cross-cultural research with children. Acknowledging the relevance of institutional ethical frameworks as *guidelines* I argue that true ethical considerations should be seen as situational, ‘responsive’ and context-specific and that researchers should have the freedom, flexibility and responsibility to make their own ethical choices in social scientific research. Such a situated and rather personal approach to ethics implies a re-thinking of the position of the researcher, because it is she who in the end makes ethical decisions based on moral dilemmas that arise in the everyday of the field. Hence, from my experience, ethical research requires a constant ‘balancing’ of institutional ethical agendas, the local ethos and personal moral frameworks. Regarding the latter, I have argued for the importance of acknowledging and reflecting on the researcher’s personal moral frameworks, an aspect which often remains underexplored. In this light, I acknowledge continuous reflexivity on one’s positionality, background and moral presumptions as the primary way of advancing one’s ethical research.

SKETCHING THE SPIRITUAL FIELD

Diversity, Competition and Power in Bukavu's Spiritual Context

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to sketching what I call the 'Spiritual Field' of Bukavu. The notion of 'field' is borrowed from Bourdieu (see chapter 2, section 2.5.1) and I use it here as an analytical tool to contemplate the context in which Eastern Congolese 'street spirituality' unfolds. Before coming to an analysis of the spiritual practice of survival (chapter 5) and the moral subjectivities of street children (chapter 6), a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which behaviour 'becomes' is essential to contextualize children's experiences. As Bourdieu has emphasized "individuals exist as *agents* [...] who are socially constituted and active and acting in the field under consideration [...] and it is knowledge of the field itself in which they evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their *point of view* or position (in the field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 107, emphasis in the original). The field should thus be understood as the contextual determinant of opportunities and constraints and, in the case of the Spiritual Field, it shapes the specific manifestation of lived spirituality. This chapter does not (yet) place street children's thoughts and practices at the centre of analysis, but it depicts the complex and highly challenging (spiritual) setting in which they struggle for survival and seek meaning. It draws on ethnographic observations, informal conversations, local literature research and sixteen 'expert' interviews with religious leaders, witchcraft and culture expert as well as professionals working with street children as well as with young people accused of witchcraft. Furthermore, scholarly literature on religion and witchcraft in Africa is used to place the dynamics of Bukavu's Spiritual Field in a larger context.

In chapter 2 (section 2.5.1), I used Bourdieu's metaphor of a 'game'. In this metaphor, the field is conceptualised by Bourdieu as the game's playing board or battlefield: the local context which determines pre-conditions and rules. On the one hand there are practical restraints and opportunities that come with the organization of spirituality in Bukavu. On the other hand, however, the notion of the field sheds light on 'rules' that are *internalized* by people as a result of growing up in a particular place and time. This is knowledge that helps one to determine options, define strategies, 'sense' limitations and experience threat and anxiety. So, in a nutshell, the field explains the socialization of people into a local cultural system which helps to explain people's practices as they link to the experience (and reality) of opportunities, constraints, and threats.

I will start with sketching Bukavu's fascinating Spiritual Field in four ethnographic vignettes (sections 4.1.1 – 4.1.4) to introduce the this-worldly and other-worldly places, times, actors and institutions that constitute the field, to demonstrate the field's characteristics and to lift a corner of the veil of the complex positioning of street children as actors within the field. Then, in section 4.2, I draw on these vignettes and on the work of Bourdieu to define the Spiritual Field. Specifically, I complement the two general traits of the Bourdieusian field - the notion of power and an economic logic - (Bourdieu 1977, also chapter 2, section 2.5.1) with four traits I identify as distinctive of Bukavu's Spiritual Field: the centrality of the supernatural, porous boundaries, diversity and a division into two opposing subfields of religion and witchcraft. The sections 4.3 and 4.4. are then dedicated to exploring the anatomy of the Spiritual Field in detail, discussing the subfield of religion (section 4.3) and the subfield of witchcraft (4.4). I show how the constitution of the Spiritual Field is largely determined by this dichotomous division between the subfield of religion and witchcraft, revealing a relationship that is highly *competitive* and *reactive* and that frames power plays and competition between the subfields but also within them. In a final section, 4.5, I draw some conclusions about the Spiritual Field, summarizing its essence and reflecting on the implications for determining opportunities and threats for the survival of street children.

4.1.1 The Site of Ideas

It's a small grassy lane and some rocks near the lake. It's a tiny peninsula, the very end of the busy Ksaveria market with its daily chaos bringing hundreds of people together. Ksaveria is primarily a fish market where sambaza, small lake sardines, are being sold.

Besides fish however, one can find any other object that can be sold; from car wheels to children's clothes, from brooms and radios, to machetes. Ksaveria can be quite overwhelming to unexpected visitors. Today is a typical weekday and as early as 10 a.m. two drunken women are lying passed out on the muddy grass while other people step over their limp bodies with seeming indifference. Young boys and girls are visibly stealing, and publicly punished for it. Two seven or eight year old boys with torn clothes and swollen bellies are wandering barefoot. Both are inhaling glue from a plastic bottle hidden up their sleeve.²⁸ The street children are at home in this busy, noisy and smelly environment. Ksaveria feeds them during the day, when they manage to earn a handful of fish by helping the fishermen with bringing in the nets or if they are lucky with stealing. Once they have a few coins in their pockets and after having found something to put in their bellies they resign from their business of survival for a couple of hours to rest and think at the very dead end of the market where only people who seek it out come. The children have named this peninsula the 'Site of Ideas' because they have noticed that this particular place 'increases their ideas'. In particular, it makes them think about the deeper questions of life: "Is there sense in this suffering?" "Is this all a punishment from God?" "Will there be an end to it?" "Can I ever go back to God?" and "What can we do to change our lives and find money?".²⁹ The inspiration to contemplate these and other mainly spiritual questions is said to have two sources: first of all the scenic and peaceful location of the place, at the shore of Lake Kivu, overlooking the water and second, the drugs, mostly marijuana, they take at this place which also 'extends' their thoughts. Before coming to this place you might be convinced of a certain thing, but after your visit, your ideas may have radically changed as if by a miracle, say the boys.³⁰

Whereas the Site of Ideas serves this relative peaceful function during the day, as a place of leisure, relaxation and inspiration, after dark it reveals a second meaning. It becomes a spot for 'evoking': calling the spirits that inhabit the lake. The Site of Ideas then forms a gateway to a macabre nocturnal truth, a sinister Second World located underneath the lake's surface.

²⁸ Data from observations, 03-03-2016.

²⁹ Informal conversations during participant observation, 01-04-2016.

³⁰ Informal conversation during participant observation, 15-03-2016.

4.1.2 The Second World

The Second World, Le Deuxième Monde, or kuzimu, is a nocturnal reality with the physical appearance of a city consisting of several neighbourhoods. It is inhabited by a variety of obscure and satanic creatures: the dead 'live' here, together with magical beings such as the Devil's angels and mermaids and other undefinable creatures who can be half-human, half-animal or half-ghost for instance. Besides these permanent inhabitants, The Second World is frequently visited by witches, witch-doctors and members of Freemason³¹ who have the freedom to travel back and forth between the First and the Second World. Regardless of their different objectives and job descriptions all these beings are loyal to and obey Satan who is the King and ruler of the Second World. He has appointed several 'sub-kings' called 'chefs' to help him. These are 'members' of the Second World who have been rewarded for their outstanding (sacrificial) performance with their own throne in kuzimu. The Second World is the epicentre of all witchcraft activity: the place where witches prepare and consume the meat of their victims. For this purpose, there are large kitchens with big ovens. It is also a place of excessive wealth where you can spot beautiful villas with swimming pools and the newest sports cars imported from the US. All this abundance is tempting but considered conditional and temporary. Satan is not to be trusted and only short-term happiness awaits those who sell their soul to him before they will pay a very high price. Through God only, it is said, can one reach the Fountain of Eternal Life.

4.1.3 The Fountain of Eternal Life

If it wasn't for all the other people going there it would be difficult to locate the place. There are no signs telling visitors where to leave the main road circling further uphill to the neighbourhood of Malenka. A small, easily overlooked set of steps leads downhill, passing left and right between the small trees, wooden huts with corrugated roofs and windows covered with colourful plastic bags. This is one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Bukavu where an estimated 90% of people are unemployed. If you ask the residents about their professional life they usually answer with "je me débrouille" which means "I am getting by". This getting by can be either an engagement in illegal activities, often stealing or, occasional opportunities in the city's informal economy such as carrying

³¹ This word does not have the connotations in Bukavu that it has in the Europe. I will explore its local meaning in detail in section 4.4.4.

luggage at the harbour or roaming the entire city in an effort to sell a handful of onions from one's own garden.³²

*This neighbourhood is the perfect location for a *Chambre de Prière*, a Room of Prayer, with great potential. At any moment of the day, starting before sunrise and continuing until long after sunset, neighbours can hear the music, loud singing, the screams and the heated voice of Baba Chance, 'Father Fortune', yelling into his microphone. The room itself is in fact a basic, empty living room, perhaps three times the size of a normal house. It has a flat roof and a door which is closed. One needs permission to enter and leave the place. The large pile of flip-flops and sandals on the doormat outside reveals the number of visitors. It is incredibly hot inside. The room is completely packed with nearly a hundred women of all ages, wearing beautiful long dresses, many small children enthusiastically clapping along and a handful of men. There are no chairs; everybody is standing to allow more people to fit in. In the middle of the room a woman is lying down, her ridden up skirt revealing too much of her upper leg. She must have come straight from the hospital because the infusion is still in her arm and parts of her face are covered with a bandage. In the corner, a full band, including drums, is playing.*

Baba Chance, who calls himself a prophet, is the owner of the Room of Prayer. He is shouting at the top of his lungs, his nice suit soaked in sweat. During his hours-long preaching he jumps around and softly touches the heads of certain people. His assistant, a man of about the same age - around forty - then summons those people forward, often in small groups of three to four people to the front of the room, where they have to kneel down. The prophet and his helper then move in quick circles around them, loudly proclaiming the problems and sins of the people. Baba Chance directly addresses the public here shouting "What does this woman have?" To which the whole group responds in choir: "Diabetes! Diabetes!" When he repeats the question about a second woman the response is: "Witchcraft! Witchcraft!". Most people in this room do not stay here for just a couple of hours. They may stay from sunrise to sunset, carrying small, dehydrated children on their backs and between their skirts, only to return the morning of the next day, for weeks on end...until their problems have been solved. On the white wall behind the prophet's back is written in a childish hand-writing style "Ministère de prier" - "Ministry of praying" and on the next line: "Kisima cha uzima wa milele" (Jean 17:3), - "The Fountain of Eternal Life" (John 17:3).

³² All data in this vignette is based on my visit to this Room of Prayer and its neighbourhood on 16-03-16.

4.1.4 *The Mirror of Sin*

Far away from the Fountain of Eternal Life, young girls are dancing in a room full of mirrors. The entrance to this place is hidden between the stalls of a market which is half-indoors. One moment you can be amidst the liveliness of an effervescent market, negotiating over the price of tomatoes and then, if you set one step in the wrong direction, you may find yourself in a place structurally devoid of daylight: an inauspicious labyrinth consisting of small, dark rooms at different levels, connected by little stairs and narrow stone corridors where you have to bow your head in order to get through.

The place is open 24 hours, with each hour breathing the same everlasting night. The DJ plays the latest Tanzanian pop music. Lonely men are sitting on low sofas in dark corners, balancing a bottle of Primus beer on one knee. At the heart of the place, in a slightly bigger room upstairs, young girls wearing few clothes are dancing exuberantly, holding large bottles of beer or energy drink. A girl with colourful dreadlocks is emptying a baby food pouch with chocolate flavour into her mouth. Her face is hidden behind a mask of heavy make-up. A few young boys and men sitting on chairs and couches against the walls are watching them. The girls don't pay attention though, they are closely monitoring themselves in the large mirrors stretching from floor to ceiling: dancing and flirting with their own mirror image. When a man shows serious interest, he negotiates a price on the dancefloor after which he can take the girl to yet another small room, with just a bed wedged between four walls and a torn, filthy curtain functioning as a door.³³ This is the place where, as a girl herself explained; "we commit our sins".³⁴

With more girls than (potential) clients, competition is killing. An outsider might assume a girl's attractiveness and price are the determining factors in this. The girls themselves know better however: a lucrative night stands and falls by the power of their feticheur, witchdoctor, vis-à-vis the power of the other girls' witchdoctors. The nightclub is the décor of an invisible battlefield of witchcraft. The witchdoctors provide the girls with a fetish, a charm, to attract men. Such a fetish usually takes the form of a herbal powder which is either applied together with beauty products but more often engraved into their skins; a procedure that leaves multiple scars on their necks, their arms or their

³³ Data based on observations, 21-05-16.

³⁴ Gloria, *bile*, interview after drawing exercise, 25-06-16.

bellies. The Mirror of Sin³⁵ is a drawing board full of representations of the Devil and the number that belongs to him: 666. In this playing field of occult forces non-participation is no option. Jealous colleagues with more power than you, can 'send' evil spirits from the Site of Ideas (section 4.1.1) to possess you. A client who takes you to the small room may turn out to be a ghost. And one day, one of the girls woke up the next day with her vagina changed into a penis. She flew to a Room of Prayer where, according to the story, she had to stay for months.³⁶

4.2 Conceptualising the Spiritual Field

The Site of Ideas, the Second World, the Fountain of Eternal Life and the Mirror of Sin are places in Bukavu that belong to what I will analyse here as the 'Spiritual Field'. The essence of this Spiritual Field is that it is a conceptual field. It covers geographical and non-physical spaces, culture and discourse. It is thus a field of action *and* of thought. Furthermore, I distinguish six important characteristics of the Spiritual Field: the first two are general traits put forward by Bourdieu as central to all fields. In addition, I identify four traits that are distinctive of Bukavu's Spiritual Field. I will start with outlining the two general traits: the notion of power and the field's economic logic (see chapter 2, section 2.5.1 for a more detailed discussion).

The first general trait of the field emanates from the word itself: in contrast to the English word 'field', the French word *champ* is already associated with the notions of 'force field' and 'battlefield', as was already explored in chapter 2 (section 2.5.1), which is clearly highlighted by Bourdieu's own definition of 'field': "a structured space of social forces and struggles" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 243). The field is also defined as a "competitive arena of social relations wherein variously positioned agents and institutions struggle over [...] forms of capital" (Rey 2007, 41). When writing specifically about 'the religious field' and drawing on Weber, Bourdieu also outlined the competition for religious power between priests, prophets and magicians as the central principle informing the dynamics of the religious field (Bourdieu 1987; Verter 2003). He argues religious power is measured by the authority to "modify, in a deep and lasting fashion, the practice and world-view of lay-people" through the "absolutizing of the relative and the legitimation of the arbitrary" (Bourdieu 1991, 14). In the field's "structured space of

³⁵ In contrast to the 'Site of Ideas', 'Second World' and 'Fountain of Eternal Life', the 'Mirror of Sin' is my term.

³⁶ Gloria, *bile*, interview, 29-03-2016.

social forces and struggles” street children clearly occupy the most marginal positions. Their awareness of this marginal positioning vis-à-vis others in the field and their ‘reading’ of the opportunities and threats that come with their positioning is, as I will argue in chapter 5, what ultimately determines these children’s survival strategies. This essence of the field as a “competitive arena of social relations” and, consequentially, the need for street children to develop survival strategies based on their (awareness of their) position is illustrated by my description of ‘The Mirror of Sin’ (section 4.1.4): a space in which girls compete for few available clients. Interestingly, it is not just the relations among girls and between girls and clients that determines the competition here. The nightclub is the imperceptible battlefield of wider relations of (spiritual) power, such as between the girls and their witchdoctors which, in its turn, depends on competition among witchdoctors. Ultimately, the goal for everyone is financing individual survival. This brings me to the second general notion of the field: its economic logic.

Building on Bourdieu’s metaphor of the ‘game’ (see section 2.5.1), in which the field is the game’s playing board, this emphasis on economics adds to our understanding of the nature of the field as not just competitive, but as existing of interest-oriented competition in which players oppose each other in their attempts to pursue their own (economic) interests. Also this economic logic shows in the opening vignettes, albeit more implicitly and more background information is required to recognize it. I will address the power and economic dynamics of the Spiritual Field in much detail later in this chapter (e.g. sections 4.3.5 and 4.3.7). It will then become clear that ‘Baba Chance’ is actually making an impressive amount of money with his Fountain of Eternal Life (section 4.1.3) and that people speak about Rooms of Prayer as a “booming business” and as “a way to make money” (Mosi, streetworker, expert interview, 20-06-16). Another example concerns the occult Second World (section 4.1.2): as will be explained later (section 4.4.4), the risky journeys some children embark on going into *kuzimu* are *only* driven by economic interests.

The centrality of power, competition and the economic logic are general traits of a wide range of social fields. In order to truly delimit the Spiritual Field however, and to locate its porous borders it is also necessary to discuss the field’s distinct traits that give it coherence and make it unique. I identify four distinct traits of Bukavu’s Spiritual Field: its ‘spiritual essence’, its porous boundaries, its great diversity and its division into two opposing subfields of religion and witchcraft.

The most important feature that gives the Spiritual Field coherence is its ‘spiritual essence’. What this essence exactly entails, depends, of course, on a definition of spirituality. Settling on a (universal) definition of spirituality - as well as ‘religion’ - has proved exasperatingly troublesome. I argued (chapter 2, section 2.6) that the nonetheless universal inclination towards sense-making takes local shapes in congruence with other forms of local societal organization, leading to what I call *culturally patterned externalizations* of spirituality. These culturally patterned externalizations in the DRC seem broadly concerned with ‘religion’ and ‘witchcraft’. It is based on this understanding that I came formulate my own ‘working definition’ of spirituality in the DRC which is based on my knowledge of Bukavu’s Spiritual Field most of all. Contemplating the Spiritual Field of Bukavu, and notwithstanding its great diversity, it is possible to cautiously detect a common denominator. Concretely, the Spiritual Field concerns (interactions with/actors of/places of/times of /discourse about/practices regarding/thoughts about and belief in) the ‘supernatural’ and its worldly institutions and representatives (e.g. churches/religious leaders). By ‘supernatural’ I mean anything that is above or beyond what is ‘natural’, with ‘natural’ being everything that can be explained by science or the laws of nature. To repeat my own short definition of spirituality: by spirituality I mean: “people’s thoughts and practices related to (interactions with) the ‘supernatural’. Hence, the spiritual essence of the Spiritual Field is that everything - relations, networks, actors, capital - within it relates in some way or another to the ‘supernatural’ and/or its worldly representations.

A second distinctive characteristic of the Spiritual Field are its flexible and porous boundaries. With regards to the interrelation of different fields, Bourdieu argues there are no trans-historic laws of the relations between fields, that each case should be investigated separately (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 109) and that the boundaries of any field can only be determined by empirical investigation (ibid, 100). In the case of the Spiritual Field, it may have become clear from the vignettes above that our field is very closely connected to and overlaps with other fields in Bukavu, such as social, economic or moral/cultural fields. Often, for instance, the boundaries between mundane and spiritual spaces become blurred such as in the example of the Mirror of Sin (section 4.1.4); a place fulfilling a ‘secular’, commercial purpose (a nightclub) acquires a spiritual dimension due to the presence of spiritual actors and forces (invited to be) involved in quintessentially ‘secular’ activities. In the case of the Site of Ideas (section 4.1.1), time determines the unfolding of particular manifestations of spirituality (e.g. a place for

spiritual contemplation during the day and a place for entering *kuzimu* after dark). Hence, a highly distinctive essence of the Spiritual Field shows in its situatedness in time and space. Concretely: the Spiritual field is distinctively trans-spatial and trans-temporal. It includes multiple dimensions of both transcendental and geographical spaces and it stretches beyond time, uniting the past with the present and the future.

A third important characteristic of the Spiritual Field that becomes clear from the vignettes above is its great diversity. It is a highly eclectic field, a patchwork in which different and diverse aspects of spirituality become manifest. It accounts for formal institutionalised religions such as Christianity and Islam, semi-institutionalized bodies such as Rooms of Prayer and non-institutionalised organising principles such as witchcraft, Freemason and fetishism.

Finally, a fourth distinctive feature of the Spiritual Field concerns its division into two opposing spheres of religion and witchcraft. It is important to stress that this division is emic, coming from the street children themselves, as well as any other person I have spoken to in Bukavu. This division of the Spiritual Field into two opposing 'subfields' of religion and witchcraft - or what I sometimes call 'the Divine' (the Kingdom of God) and 'the Dark' (The Kingdom of the Devil) - is made intuitively and is undisputedly accepted by anyone. It is an unquestioned truth, a reality which is self-evident and self-explanatory for the children. In chapter 5 (section 5.2) I will explore this and other 'uncontested truths' further, analysing them as *doxa*; Bourdieu's term for people's unquestioned, total commitment to the fundamental presuppositions of the game, of which this intuitive division is one example. What is important in this chapter, however, is to gain a comprehensive understanding of these two subfields as both enablers and restrictors of street children's agency, carrying opportunities and threats for everyday survival. It is important to note that they are interrelated and their relationship should be seen as *competitive* and *reactive*. They share the distinctive traits discussed above which causes them to belong, at the end of the day, to the same wider Spiritual Field but their differences are significant and should be acknowledged. Whereas the 'supernatural' is central in each subfield, its precise manifestation differs. The subfield of religion is ultimately united by its actors' claim to be concerned with God whereas the subfield of witchcraft is said to rather revolve around ambivalent occult forces and the Devil. Furthermore, the subfield of religion is institutionalized to various degrees. Religious denominations have a central representation and their religious leaders have a formal religious education. In contrast, the subfield of witchcraft is an arena which is not just

more informal but also more concealed. It should be noted however that despite these important differences between the fields this does not imply there is no intra-field diversity. Both subfields are highly eclectic. In the remainder of this chapter I will empirically access these two subfields as they constitute the wider Spiritual Field. I will start with the subfield of religion (section 4.3) and end with the subfield of witchcraft (section 4.4).

4.3 The subfield of religion

The subfield of religion in Bukavu is dominated by different formal religious institutions such as the Catholic church and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. It also includes informal religious initiatives however, manifest in the numerous Rooms of Prayer which are stand-alone mini-institutions usually governed by just one individual. These institutions and their representatives co-exist and react to each other in an increasingly complex and highly dynamic field. The actors, organized in inter-dependent networks, engage in diverse sets of relations and ongoing dialogue. Depending on particularities of time and place they may temporarily pursue the same goals in the game, for instance when they collaborate in a joint spiritual battle against the subfield of witchcraft (section 4.4). At the same time, the subfield of religion is torn by internal competition and conflict as well: there is always latent competition between Catholicism and Protestantism and, more visibly, various Protestant denominations fiercely compete for adherents. In this religious competition and denominational battle for power and social influence there lurk both opportunities and threats for street children. Hence, this subfield should be seen as being in constant movement, reacting to sociocultural, spiritual, economic and political developments within and outside the field, shaping its actors while being shaped by them. In this section I outline the most important actors and institutions that constitute the subfield of religion. As such, Catholicism (4.3.2), Pentecostalism (4.3.3), Islam (4.3.4) and the Rooms of Prayer (4.3.5) will be outlined below. I will start however by examining the cultural historical roots of the religious subfield (4.3.1), because a solid understanding of its history contributes to a better comprehension of the field's contemporary dynamics.

4.3.1 *The self as a gift of God: cultural historical perspectives on the religious subfield*

Emâna ehâna, ci erhagulirwa

(On reçoit de la providence, on ne lui achète rien. Les dons de Dieu sont gratuits)

We receive from Providence, we don't buy it. The gifts of God are free.

(Bashi proverb, my translation. Kugaragu Ntabaza 1976)

The Spiritual Field in general and the religious subfield in particular should be understood as historically and culturally constituted. Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 102) emphasizes “struggles and thus historicity!” as an essence that differentiates the notion of field from the idea of a system or apparatus for instance. Recognizing the transformative impact of past developments on the field's current environment allows us to gain a deeper understanding of how the field has significantly contributed to shaping the worldview of today's actors and, consequently, how this way of being-in-the-world relates to the everyday strategies (chapter 5) and sense-making (chapter 6) of street children. I will thus analyse here how the religious history of the South Kivu province shows in contemporary syncretic practice and thought in a way most people might not be aware of.

When studying religion in eastern Congo, the region's colonial history is an obvious example indicating the contested historical connections between religion, power, (foreign) domination and struggle. When I started to explore Bukavu, roaming the entire city, it struck me how, right up to the present day, the Roman Catholic church quite literally shows the European face of Christianity, with dozens of European priests, monks and nuns visible in the city's public spaces. This does not mean however that eastern Congolese Catholicism (or indeed Protestantism) does not differ from South American or European Catholicism in its everyday manifestations. Formal religion in contemporary Bukavu has acquired its local appearance partly through the syncretic merging with pre-colonial religious beliefs and systems.

According to different cultural and religious ‘experts’ from Bukavu that I interviewed in the course of the fieldwork, the Catholic church in particular has incorporated elements of pre-colonial traditions. For instance, Asante, an old man known to be very wise and respected as a distinguished ‘Bashi expert’, explained that through

“enculturation” Jesus was introduced into their “culture”. The traditional³⁷ way of sacrificing (animals, plants) was actively discouraged by the colonial Catholic church while certain traditional rituals, including birth and marriage continue to be performed today (Asante, cultural expert, expert interview, 01-07-2016). The sisters of the Congregation of Santa Gemma, whom I stayed with during my stay in Bukavu, argued likewise and even told me about a traditional ritual which is performed annually in church. Another very clear example of syncretism in the Catholic church is the incorporation of bride wealth into religious wedding ceremonies. Before blessing each marriage, the priest assures that the bride wealth - from the family of the groom to the family of the bride - has been fully paid.

Besides these syncretic *practices*, the region’s pre-colonial religion has taken root in people’s religious *subjectivities* (see chapter 6 for an in-depth analysis of street children’s religious subjectivities). Before the Belgians arrived in the 19th century, Bukavu was the centre of the Bashi (singular: Mushi) Kingdom. The Bashi are said to be a very religious people. When I asked Asante what characterized the Bashi people in his view he said “It’s a people that loves God. They believe in one God” (interview, 01-07-2016). Indeed, the Bashi believed in one God whom they called *Nyamuzinda*³⁸. In particular, the Bashi believed that everything comes from God, that the whole of life is a ‘gift’ of God. What is especially interesting is the notion among people that they too are a “gift of God”. Father Emanuel, a Catholic Congolese priest, explained that the current image people have of God is a product of religious syncretism. “From our cultural perspective” he stresses, “the human person is a gift (*don*) of God” (interview 04-03-2016). Although this idea has been strengthened by the colonial Catholic church, it is an understanding that derives from the “African tradition” [sic] that the person comes from God through ancestral lineage: “[the relationship people have with God should be seen as:] I am a gift, a present. Everything comes from You [God]. Everything is a blessing”

³⁷ I am aware of the contested nature of the term ‘traditional’, ‘traditional religion’, ‘traditional medicine’ and/or ‘traditional healer’. I choose to use it nevertheless however in the first place because my informants used these terms. Of course, the argument that “tradition is dynamic” has become a tired cliché among social scientists by now. Drawing on Luedke and West (2006) I argue it is important to distinguish between ‘traditional (religion, medicine etc)’ as a failed analytical category and ‘traditional’ as a resilient, polyvalent ‘folk category’ deployed by a multiplicity of people. With ‘traditional’ I refer in this thesis to elements or aspects that are pre-colonial or non-colonial according from the perspective of my informants.

³⁸ In fact, multiple names are given to God of which *Nyamuzinda* is the most common one. This name is indicative here: *Nya* means ‘Him who, He who is’, *mu* means ‘there’ and *zinda* means ‘at the end’ (Colle 1971, 117). According to the literature (Colle 1971) *Nyamuzinda* was seen as the ultimate creator. He who constructed everything and He who created humankind. He is the dispenser of life. It is through his power (only) that children are born, animals can see the daylight and plants reproduce (ibid).

(Fr. Emmanuel, priest, expert interview, 04-03-16). This perspectival residue of the spiritual self as ‘God’s gift’ is important because it surfaced strongly in the explanations and in particular in the inclinations towards sense-making of the street children and as such it sheds light on the formation of their religious subjectivities: the way they see themselves in relation to God (see chapter 6). It should be seen, I argue, as fundamental to people’s notion of and relationship with God. It clearly shows the structuring role of the Spiritual Field in determining people’s thoughts in such a way that it seems to have become ‘natural’ and taken-for-granted by them. In this case it reveals the (historicity of the) field can be seen as a site of socialization into a particular notion of God.

A final observation to outline here is Fr. Emanuel’s critical note on this collective belief that human beings are a gift of God. Although it is a positive, reassuring belief in essence, he argues, an unconstructive consequence can be found in a certain passivity that some people fall back to when they are convinced they are an instrument in the hands of God. “As an instrument”, Fr. Emanuel says, “if you want to do something, you can’t do it yourself, the hammer cannot work himself, he needs to be in the hands of God, to work” (Fr. Emmanuel, priest, expert interview, 04-03-2016). While being very cautious to avoid generalization, this idea of the hammer in God’s hand is a strong metaphor for a common perspective on life I recognise from the expressions of the *Biles*. I will elaborate more on this notion and implications for action as well as non-action of street children in chapters 5 and 6.

Having briefly outlined what I see as an important aspect of people’s perspective on the relationship with God I now proceed in the next section to discussing the most important formal religions and denominations in Bukavu: Roman Catholicism (section 4.3.2), Protestantism, particularly Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity (section 4.3.3) and Islam (section 4.3.4). I will end with a discussion of the informal religious practice of the Rooms of Prayer (section 4.3.5).

4.3.2 Catholicism



Figure 4.1. People sitting outside Bukavu's Catholic Cathedral on a busy Sunday (Source: author)

Although they are quickly losing ground in favour of a multiplicity of Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic church remains the largest, most established and particularly powerful player in the subfield of religion, firmly embedded in the history and culture of the DRC. In the city of Bukavu alone, there were 39 parishes in 2014. Of a total population of 1.981.925 there were 1.037.065 Catholics, excluding catechumens (see Figure 4.1 showing the large number of visitors to one - out of five - weekly Sunday masses).³⁹ In line with these general statistics, 60% of my informants self-identified as Catholic (Survey, June 2016). The impact of the Catholic church reaches far beyond the religious subfield and indeed the Spiritual Field however, in particular in the context of a declining state. It should be acknowledged that the Catholic church penetrates the country's social and political life (Prunier 2001; Titeca and de Herdt 2011). This influence is a product of colonialism as the Belgian colonial state subsidized the Belgian Roman Catholic church to establish parishes, hospitals and schools, giving a near monopoly to

³⁹ This statistical information was provided to me by the Archbishopric of Bukavu (personal correspondence, June 2016). Catechumens are people receiving instruction in the principles of the Catholic religion with a view to baptism.

organize the education sector (Titeca and de Herdt 2011). Still now, most public schools in Bukavu are Catholic schools. This means that a large majority of street children, who usually have a few years of primary school attendance (Survey, June 2016), have been taught about Catholicism at school. Furthermore, the church is the head of numerous smaller and larger NGOs of which PEDER and Centre Ek'Abana are good examples. Hence, street children who seek support from these NGOs, or indeed my informants who participated in *Growing Up on the Streets*, will face Catholic norms and values again after having left school and home. PEDER, for instance, organises a monthly mass, led by a white priest, for the children from their centres. However, my informants - children and youth living and working on the street - would not usually visit this monthly mass. Yet an important implication of PEDER's Catholic management for them can be found in the NGOs official policy against contraceptives (see chapter 3, section 3.6.2 for an ethical discussion). Although some individual staff members from PEDER may take a personal decision to advocate the use of condoms, they cannot distribute them to the girls who work as sex workers or to the boys who pay for sex.

Hence, the Catholic church is an established and prominent player in the subfield of religion. With a power that is grounded in colonial history, it nicely illustrates the centrality of "struggles and thus historicity!" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 102) for the constitution of the field. With its diffuse influence, however, it also reveals how the Spiritual Field is connected to other fields, in particular political and social (educational) fields. Over the last couple of decades, however, the monopoly of the Catholic church has increasingly been challenged by new religious movements, in particular the rise of Pentecostal-charismatic churches. According to some, the Catholic church is losing adherents precisely because of their (post)colonial connections. According to others, it is because they abandoned exorcist rites. In sharp contrast to the various Protestant denominations, the Catholic church does not take a clear stance concerning the city's flourishing witchcraft discourse and practices, including those that are popular among the *Biles* (see section 4.4). To a large extent, it recognizes the existence of witchcraft, but it does not engage in witchcraft accusations nor public exorcism (*délivrances*) and witchcraft discourse does not have a very prominent place in sermons and preaching. In contrast, the various Protestant denominations, in particular Pentecostal churches, come with a very powerful response to witchcraft. As I will argue later in this chapter (section 4.4.3), this implies significant threats to street children and youth who are particularly vulnerable to being accused of witchcraft. I will elaborate on this and other relevant

aspects of Pentecostal churches in the next section (4.3.3).

4.3.3 Pentecostalism

Despite the lasting impact of the Catholic church, the Spiritual Field has seen the increasing expansion of a new, particularly powerful player: Pentecostalism. As explained in chapter 2, section 2.6.1, Pentecostalism is a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity which places specific emphasis on a personal relationship with God through receiving ‘the gifts of the Holy Spirit’ through ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesy (Csordas 2009b, Anderson 2014). The extraordinary rise of Pentecostal in Bukavu is a relatively recent phenomenon, which shows the pace of changes in the religious subfield. Simeon, a PEDER street worker in his early fifties, remembers that a few decades ago, there existed only four ‘religions’ in Bukavu: The Catholic church, the mainline Protestant church, the Kimbangist church⁴⁰ and Islam (PEDER streetworker, expert interview, 18-06-16). Today, informants refer to an “immense multiplicity of churches” (expert focus group centre Ek’Abana, 16-06-16). Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to speak of a ‘mushrooming’ of Pentecostal churches throughout the city over the course of just a few years. Importantly, the rise of Pentecostal-charismatic denominations has brought new challenges as well as opportunities for the lives of street children. To gain an understanding of the underlying dynamics that shape these opportunities and threats, I will outline three important aspects that are characteristic of (the success of) Pentecostalism in Bukavu and reflect on their implications for everyday survival on the streets. Section 4.3.3.1 focuses on the anti-witchcraft battle of Pentecostal churches, section 4.3.3.2 explores the Pentecostal promise of prosperity highlighting an economic, almost consumerist attitude towards religion and section 4.3.3.3 explores the presence of Pentecostalism in the public sphere, in particular exploring the ‘street evangelisation missions’ in which pastors try to win the souls of those in “urgent need of salvation” (Juma, pastor, expert interview 19-04-16) and, above all, street children and youth.

⁴⁰ Kimbanguism is a branch of Christianity founded by Simon Kimbangu in the DRC in 1921. The Belgian colonial authorities treated the faith with suspicion and imprisoned Kimbangu until his death in 1951. Today, Kimbanguism is said to be the largest of the African-initiated churches, claiming to have seventeen million followers worldwide (Gampiot 2017). Because only one of my informants indicated he attends a Kimbanguist church in Bukavu, this thesis does not explore this Christian branch in detail.

4.3.3.1 *The spiritual war: anti-witchcraft practices of Pentecostal churches*

Scholars of religion often stress Pentecostalism's remarkable ability to adapt itself to the cultures in which it is introduced (Robbins 2014; Engelke 2004). In particular, Engelke (2004) argues that the key to its success in Africa is that it takes the idea of witchcraft seriously (see also Meyer 1998; Robbins 2004; Daswani 2013). In Bukavu indeed, Pentecostal churches take witchcraft very seriously. In fact, I argue, their strategic positioning vis-à-vis the subfield of witchcraft, dichotomising the differences and openly declaring a "spiritual war", as pastor Juma for instance does (Juma, pastor, expert interview 19-04-16), links to the very essence of the religion's identity and is used as a legitimization of (the urgency of) their emergence. I say "strategic" because their anti-witchcraft battle seems inspired by current social needs and dynamics. In the light of sociocultural transformations in the DRC (see section 4.4.1), the social fear of witchcraft has risen sharply (de Boeck 2005) and Pentecostal churches respond to this fear, first of all by acknowledging that it is real, and second, by publicly showing their power is stronger than those of evil forces. According to Olivier, a PEDER street worker, the fact that these churches "believe strongly in witchcraft" is a "strategy to attract believers" (Olivier, PEDER streetworker, expert interview, 15-06-16). One such way of showing that they are stronger than witchcraft can be found in public exorcist practices called *délivrances*, deliverances, during services. Deliverances are, to borrow Maxwell's (1998, 361) expression, a "process, a drama acted out on the body", in which demons are chased out of someone's body, which often implies the person falling to the ground and/or losing consciousness. Describing such "spiritual purification" in a Congolese migrant church in the Netherlands, Ndaya Tshiteku (2016) describes how 'patients' roll on the floor, vomit, cry or shout out loud while shaking their heads violently. All these movement enhance the belief there is a real struggling going on: "a battle in [her] body between the Holy Ghost and the spirits, as the latter - the demons - refuse to leave the body" (Ndaya Tshiteku 2016, 5). Pastor Juma, of one of the Pentecostal churches, explained likewise in an interview that the possession by a demon should be seen as a spirit, sent by Satan (but possibly *through* a witch) which enters the human body. When "men of God" are there, pastor Juma continues: "there is the presence of God, the bad spirit will start to talk through the [possessed] man [...] I have the power to chase away all demons. It is really a spiritual combat [...] basically between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Devil" (Juma, pastor, expert interview, 19-04-16). Although the *Chambres des Prière*, Rooms of Prayer, are most associated with witchcraft accusations, including child

witchcraft accusations, official Pentecostal churches also engage in these. The centrality of deliverances in most Pentecostal churches and the prevalence of a witchcraft discourse is another factor highlighting the fact that the success and indeed survival of these churches partially depends on their effectiveness in proving the existence and danger of malicious forces (i.e. witchcraft), while at the same time showing their spiritual superiority and power to overcome those. It is this battle for (recognition of) spiritual superiority that carries significant threats for street children as they are an easy and in a way obvious victim for witchcraft accusations, in the first place because often no-one is there to defend their rights in the case of an accusation and in the second place because young people in general and street children in particular have become increasingly associated with witchcraft in the popular imaginary in the DRC (e.g. de Boeck 2008; de Boeck 2005). I will elaborate more on this argument in section 4.4 where I will discuss the subfield of witchcraft. In the next section, 4.3.3.2, I will explore a second characteristic of Pentecostalism in Bukavu; the promise of prosperity.

4.3.3.2 The promise of prosperity: the Pentecostal emphasis on the material

In line with scholarly work from across Africa (see chapter 2, section 2.6.1 and see Anderson 2014, Daswani 2013, Haynes 2012, Meyer 1998, Maxwell 1998, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), the allure of material gain is also in Bukavu an important aspect that helps to explain the popularity of Pentecostalism. To convince people that God rewards true believers with wealth, the most famous Pentecostal pastor in Bukavu, pastor Abbé, preaches on the radio that “poverty is a sin, God did not create us poor”. Pastor Abbé is an important public figure in Bukavu, who owns his own radio station. You can hear his voice every moment of every day if you want to (and sometimes if you don’t want too either). He is known for his smart, expensive style of dressing, and abundant consumerism. I tried several time to arrange an interview or even just a meeting with him, but after months he finally informed me, via a note passed through a mutual acquaintance, that he “did not need any journalists”. When I confronted pastor Juma with this idea - that poverty is a sin - however, he argued this: “Yes. [Sins are] the roots of poverty. Because God guarantees us richness... he guarantees us richness!! I even think there in your country you are rich because of evangelisation” (Juma, pastor, expert interview 19-04-16).

In sharp contrast to the Catholic-syncretic idea that the self is a gift of God for which one ought to be grateful (section 4.3.1) the Pentecostal promise of prosperity

through spiritual devotion rather manifests in a consumerist perspective on one's relationship with God. Interestingly, this difference between Catholic and Pentecostalist perspectives on (the self vs.) God is manifest for instance in the use of different Swahili words for 'praying'. Generally, Catholics (and Muslims) speak of *kusali* and Protestants refer to *kuomba*. Both words mean 'to pray', but the word *kuomba* also means 'to ask (for)'. A Room of Prayer is called *chumba cha maombi* in which *maombi*, prayers, comes from the verb *kuomba*. Whereas *kusali* only has spiritual connotations, *kuomba* is common in secular discourse as well; for instance, *kuomba* is used for 'begging'. When I asked my Swahili teacher, an elderly Catholic man, about this difference he said:

“*Kusali* means praying in a broad sense, for instance giving grace, asking for forgiveness etc. *Kuomba* just means 'to ask'. The difference is that the Protestants, in their churches and especially in their Room of Prayer, they demand immediate aid, for instance, they will say 'God, please give me five dollars today, please please I need it to eat please'. It is... [a style of] rapid intervention [they aspire] haha. While we, the Catholics, we go to church and we pray "please God, make sure we may always live in peace, we will be fine in the house, please take care of our family" etc.” (Oscar, Swahili teacher, informal conversation, 02-04-16).

Similarly, one of the Sisters I lived with explained *kusali* as “a way to lift ourselves to the Lord, to abandon ourselves for Him, to communicate with Him, it is really reflects the interior state. You really offer yourself to the Lord”. In contrast, she described *kuomba* as : “this comes from the idea that God can resolve our problems. It is a way of praying through asking for direct help” (Sophia, nun, informal conversation, 19-04-16). Different Catholic priests and lay-people confirmed this. When I asked Pentecostal pastor Juma about this terminology he said: “*Kuomba* means to ask. *Demandar*. Praying, well... *kuomba* is also praying in Swahili. Praying has many branches. There is a prayer of asking, there is a praying of asking for someone else. I can pray for you, you can pray in tongues...(speaking in tongues here, inaudible)” Interestingly, he differentiates only two types of prayer here and both fall under his category of “a prayer of asking”: asking something for oneself and asking something for someone else (as pastor Juma prayed for my salvation for example). When asked to define *kusali* he laughs: “That is praying. But this *kusali* is almost the same thing [yet] *kusali* is often used by witches and Muslims...” (Juma, pastor, expert interview 19-04-16).

The effectiveness of the Protestant *kuomba*-style of praying is materialized in the (public display of) wealth of the pastors themselves, who are the living example that

through God, one can indeed find the desires of one's heart. As mentioned above, the famous pastor Abbé is known for his expressive clothing style and excessive consumerism. His financial success and of other Pentecostal pastors triggers interest as well as fierce critique among the laity. Indeed, when people talked about Bukavu's "multiplicity of [Pentecostal] churches" this was almost always part of a rhetoric of critique. This critical stance was, unsurprisingly, most manifest among Catholics (who formed the majority of my research population), but even Protestants expressed always at least moderate suspicion regarding the integrity of the majority of Pentecostal churches. When asked about the popularity of Pentecostal denominations, Simeon, a Catholic, answered: "Those churches come, the initiators know what they are looking for. First of all, they work to have money... They start with their own family members, and then family members attract new people, they do exorcism, [...] they make propaganda, 'come to this place, we're going to pray for you, you suffer from this sickness, you will be healed' [...] they are really looking for money" (Simeon, PEDER streetworker, expert interview 18-06-16). The view that those who establish new Pentecostal churches are primarily looking for money is widespread. Also Simeon's interpretation that "they start with their own family members" corresponds to what other people told me about how this kind of churches starts as a small congregation (often in someone's living room) and, if successful in attracting adherents, can quickly grow. "Churches make business" says also Mosi, another PEDER worker who is even more critical. According to him:

"What characterises religion is the material. If I find myself with no means [but if I am] respected in the neighbourhood, I can go to [invite] three women who can sing, I can link up with one men who can speak well, we can create our church. Our objective is to steal money from the believers. So materiality. You need to make a church, count the number of believers [that] is the amount of money that you will have. I will quickly construct a house, buy a car..." (Mosi, PEDER streetworker, expert interview 20-06-16).

Along the same line of thought, father Emanuel explains the "multiplicity of churches" as a "parameter of poverty" (Fr. Emmanuel, priest, expert interview 06-07-16). In this religious marketplace money can be gained by successful ministers or pastors by asking for money from adherents during each service and also more unofficially, through network and exchange relations that extend beyond church. Maxwell (1998) describes a comparable situations in Zimbabwe, where pastors ask for "love-offerings" from their

believers while those pastors gifted in raising money are quickly promoted by the church.

In this fundamental business aspect of Pentecostalism, the subfield's economic logic surfaces strongly. Pentecostalism creates a spiritual market functioning along the economic logic of supply and demand in which actor's competition is fuelled by the pursuit of money, status and success.

Although subject to critique, this business aspect of Pentecostalism is at the same time alluring because of the opportunities it entails, even, arguably, for those living at the edges of society. Following capitalist assumptions, there is an almost equal chance for everyone in the business model of Pentecostalism. Regardless of socioeconomic background, level of education or age all males (not easily women) can 'break through' and become successful in the spiritual realm. In fact, in a city characterized by wrenching poverty and structural unemployment, Pentecostalism offers rare and unexpected career opportunities for those without any education at all. For my informants, such a spiritual career path is genuinely more realistic than a career in most other fields. According to the *Biles* as well as to my own observations, becoming a pastor is the third most likely future for street boys in particular, after simply maturing into 'street adults' or joining (any of) the armed forces. Several of the (male) street children had (part of their) hopes on such a career and there is one former street child known to my key-informants and to PEDER who actually succeeded in becoming quite a successful pastor. To my informants, this young man truly symbolized the hope that is a central message of Pentecostal teachings: that everyone, despite the gravity of one's sins or the hopelessness of one's situation, can be 'born-again' to become God's prosperous child. Scholars studying Pentecostal conversion, in the form of adult baptism, argue it is the most radical form of conversion, a total "rupture" (Daswani 2013, 468) or a "complete break with the past" (Meyer 1998, 326) (see chapter 2, section 2.6.1). This possibility of a total rupture is particularly appealing to street children who struggle with their moral consciousness on a daily basis because of the way their survival strategies conflict with their religious upbringing and personal spirituality, as I will argue in chapter 6. However, the only path to becoming a pastor oneself is by building a personal relationship with an existing pastor, following him and becoming his apprentice. This process is a possibility for street children due to the evangelist character of most Pentecostal churches, sending their pastors to actively roam the streets of Bukavu to win souls for their parishes. I will reflect on the religion's interesting engagement with the public realm in the next section, 4.3.3.3, discussing the consequent interactions between pastors and street children.

4.3.3.3 *Winning souls on the streets: Pentecostal churches conquering the public sphere*

Whereas Catholicism is firmly embedded in the city's institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, Pentecostalism is trying to conquer a place in the public realm. Like the religion's active engagement with witchcraft and its promise of prosperity, this third characteristic is reflected in literature from across the continent (Hopkins, Kong, and Olson 2013; De Boeck 2014; Meyer 2006; Meyer and Moors 2005). As outlined in chapter 2, section 2.6.1, one of the forms in which Pentecostalism is increasingly present in public spaces in Africa is through its adoption of audio-visual mass media. In Bukavu in 2016 the most popular conventional mass media is still the radio. Yet this medium clearly facilitated pastor Abbé, who owned his own radio station and broadcast all day, to become a popular public figure with a lot of influence. Radio, and sometimes television, was the only medium street children have access to. In the absence of any formal education in schools and given the severely limited familial socialization, radio programs such as pastor Abbé's show were one of the few means through which street children had access to information about spirituality after having left home and school and outside the (often Catholic) NGOs that support them.

Besides pastor Abbé and some others using the media to broadcast their message, there is another way in which pastors are very visible in Bukavu's public spaces. I mentioned above (section 4.3.1) that in the city's centre, white priests or nuns are a daily reminder of Catholicism's colonial roots. People noticed however that in recent years their presence in the public sphere has reduced while the streets have increasingly become the terrain of Pentecostal pastors who, in the spirit of evangelisation, aim to reach out to and save the masses. Either alone or with a colleague, these pastors roam the streets, going "there where the Lord sends them" (Juma, pastor, expert interview 19-04-16). Often, they look for individuals in "urgent need of salvation" (ibid), including prostitutes, drug addicts and street children. Pastor Juma describes his venture with the following words: "[with] evangelisation we seek those who don't believe yet, [those] who are still tested by the Devil, [that is] notably the street children. Everywhere in town, we go to preach the good news. We tell them they shouldn't take drugs [we tell them] 'you should not go to prostitutes, you should stop with sins and believe in Jesus and come to the church'. Sometimes we can find something to give them because if we give them something it motivates them a little bit" (interview 19-04-16). This way of reaching out is one of the two pillars of pastor Juma's Pentecostal church (the second one is educating those who are already converted). It is an important task he and his colleagues carry out several days

a week. And they are not the only ones; often, street children are in daily contact with a variety of pastors visiting them at the places where they sleep or rest. A large majority of the children reported being approached by pastors at least once or twice a week (Survey, May 2016). Interactions between pastors and street children will be discussed in full detail in chapter 5 (and 6). Here, however I would like to illustrate these relatively novel ‘street evangelisation missions’ by describing one such venture I participated in, following pastor Juma on the streets. It provides important insights into the constitution of the Spiritual Field, in particular its distinctive engagement with time and space, as I mentioned in section 4.2. The following is an extract from my fieldnotes (17-06-16):

We walk under a merciless sun on the road leading downhill to the Freedom Square. With each step, more dust accumulates on the pastor’s shiny black shoes. It takes some time before we can cross the road, we have to sprint between dozens of minibuses - it is rush hour - but then we leave the urban chaos, entering the small forest that stretches between downtown and the neighbourhoods uphill. When we are approaching our destination, the pastor stresses again: “Don’t be afraid, I am with the Holy Ghost”. His words do not completely reassure me. This forest is too often the scene of crime in people’s stories of violent robberies and rape. Soon, we see, hidden between the trees, a very mixed group of people carrying out diverse tasks. Closest to us, three men aged between 30 and 45 are sitting under a shelter comprising of just some sticks stuck in the earth with no plastic whatsoever (they would surely get wet when it rains). They are fabricating something that looks like white candles from a distance, but when we come closer I can distinguish the heap of weed lying on a white plastic bag on the floor, and the white candles turn out to be joints, diligently rolled and put away in Tupperware boxes. The men are smoking their own joints while working. Scattered across the muddy terrain there are dozens of empty Simba bottles; local strong alcohol.

When they notice us, the men politely greet the pastor with “Jambo Pasteur”. More men gather around us now, some of them look enthusiastic to see the pastor back. One of them shakes his hand. After a few minutes we have an audience of about nine males ranging in age from 11 to 50. The youngest is very thin but with a swollen belly and intelligent-looking eyes. He takes his cap off his head and nervously fumbles it in his hands while walking towards us. The men that have gathered are shouting to their colleagues that they should also join, at which some stop with their work and look at us with an expectant glance. The majority of them still continue their businesses however:

most of them sit and smoke and drink, but some younger boys sit on top of a heap of rocks while chopping them into smaller stones with a pickaxe. Behind this 'inner circle' of nine men standing around us there is an 'outer circle' with men who seem curious but maintain distance. I notice there are no females at all. The men look very poor and unhealthy, their old clothes are torn, some of them hobble and others have visible open wounds. They have a particularly unhappy appearance. My empathy would have been stronger than my unease had it not been the case that they are all armed. Everyone carries at least a pickaxe, a machete or a large knife.

The pastor hands his bag over to me so he can hold the Bible with both hands. Someone empties his Simba in his mouth and aggressively throws away the empty bottle. The pastor then shouts to everyone present: "Who needs Jesus in their lives?". Some raise their hand. Then he starts to preach, skilfully transforming his voice into a typical preacher's voice: loud, low, impressive. By now, people have stopped with their activities, only smoking and drinking continues, and listen to the preaching which has a strong moralist tone. Almost every sentence starts with "acha", which means: stop!. "Acha zambi": stop sinning! Our inner circle has grown. To my surprise, people have joined who were not at this place when we arrived. One motor taxi driver who saw us entering the forest had followed us by foot, leaving his motorbike at the roadside. One young man who looks like a college student was passing by through the forest (a risky shortcut to go to downtown, more often taken by men than by women) and has interrupted his journey to listen to the pastor. His new bag and nice shoes give away that he does not belong to the group of men who pass their day (and night) in this forest.

After telling success stories of conversion the pastor asks if someone is sick. Four men, including the young boy come forward and kneel down in front the pastor. While he is holding his hand on their heads his words change from Swahili safi, proper Swahili, into the inaudible language of the Holy Ghost: he is speaking in tongues. At the end, we pray together. The pastor says one sentence and we repeat after him. Everyone from the 'inner circle' participates. This includes, by now, also the motor taxi driver and the college student, and me. Everyone is standing side by side, united, it seems for a moment, in prayer. We are raising our hands, eyes closed. Some of us can only raise one hand as they are holding a bottle or a joint in the other hand, but their conviction does not seem to be less for it.

After praying, when the pastor wants to leave, some older men push forward the small child. Recognising him, the pastor says slightly defensively "but I already prayed

for him!” But the boy’s colleagues emphasise that the child is very sick, that he has diabetes and that he is, in fact, dying. The pastor prays again, but seems in a sudden hurry to leave now. When two men are approaching who were not part of the ‘inner circle’, both carrying a knife, he hastily takes his bag from my arms and hurries his way out of the forest. Behind my back I hear the sound of steel on stone as the men return to the chopping of rocks.

This vignette narrates a moment in time in which a place with a particularly bad reputation, home to illegal drugs and delinquency, acquires a strong spiritual connotation as soon as a pastor enters the scene. Besides the four vignettes I started this chapter with, this *moment* belongs to and constitutes the Spiritual Field because it is a conceptual and not a geographical field. The example from the vignette carries relevant insights into the fluid boundaries between what constitutes the spiritual and the non-spiritual. According to Bourdieu “the limits of the field are situated at the point where the effects of the field cease” (1992, 100). In the vignette it is the traveling *actor*, in this case a spiritual expert, who determines the limits and reach of the Spiritual Field. This was not the only time I followed a pastor on a ‘street evangelisation mission’ and each time, a quintessentially secular place with people engaged in secular, amoral, even anti-religious activities (i.e. sins), transformed into a temporal place of worship with the arrival of a pastor but changed back into what it was prior to the pastor’s appearance. I argue the forest from the vignette should not be seen as a spiritual space, but the time of the pastor visit should be recognized and analysed as a spiritual moment that transcends space. What can be seen as a ‘popup church’ in time transcends space also by the merging of transcendental realms with an essentially this-worldly site. In the popup church I was amazed by the depth of devotion I witnessed of people who had enough reasons to be utterly disappointed with God. Instead of dark sarcasm, they showed a humbling piety that was not staged. Furthermore it illustrates how such a spiritual moment manages to overcome differences between social class. For a short moment, street children and college students, a motor taxi driver, a pastor wearing suit and tie and a foreign researcher can be united in one common activity without it feeling awkward.

Having discussed Catholicism and novel Protestant movements, I will now turn to a last formal religious institution present in Bukavu’s religious subfield: Islam.

4.3.4 Islam

Muslims constitute a very small religious minority in Bukavu. How small exactly is subject to debate. According to pastor Juma there is “no Islam in Bukavu”, or perhaps “0.1%” (Juma, pastor, expert interview 19-04-16). According to Sheik Al-Hameed Muslims form 2-3% of the population in Bukavu (expert interview, interview 25-05-16). The statistics of the Catholic church speak of 1% Muslims in Bukavu. Sheikh Issah Mohammed, who runs the city’s oldest mosque, built in the 1950s, estimates there are 15.000 or even 24.000 Muslims in Bukavu (informal conversation, 21-06-16) while his colleague of the largest mosque, Sheikh Zafarullah estimates this number at 7000 Muslims (informal conversation, 30-06-15). In total, there may be eleven small mosques, but only five larger ones where the Friday prayer is organised (see figure 4.2). The biggest mosque, close the city’s main market, is said to host 50-80 people every day but “up to one thousand” on Fridays, according to the Sheikh (Zafarullah, expert interview, 20-06-16). On the second floor of this building there is an Islamic primary school where female teachers in full niqab teach small children to recite the Koran and to write in Arabic.



Figure 4.2. The Mosque in Ludja, Bukavu (source: author).

Despite their relatively small numbers, Islam is visible in the public space. The large Nduge mosque in down-town has transformed the landscape not just with its architecture but also with its small local market right at the mosque's entrance selling Islamic clothes, copies of the Koran and other religious objects. Long Islamic dresses are hanging high from the building, a true 'eye-catcher'; visible for commuters. Five times a day, the call for prayer overrules traffic noise. Islam is also visible due to its relationship with charity. During Ramadan in particular, the mosques are known to provide free food for everyone. This offers important opportunities for street children, who indeed profit from a month of free food as I will show in chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.4). Furthermore, according to most, Islam is currently growing due to the presence of thousands of MONUSCO soldiers from Islamic countries. MONUSCO is the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the DRC. Their peace-keepers come largely from Islamic countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Egypt. Partly because of MONUSCO-soldier's involvement with Islam, sometimes donating money or food to local mosques for instance, pragmatic conversions to Islam have become increasingly popular among the *Biles* who are hoping to benefit from the aid of foreign Muslims (see chapter 5, section 5.3.1.5)

What is most striking about Islam in Bukavu however, is the very dubious reputation of Muslims in the eyes of non-Muslims. Unfortunately this is not something unique in today's world but the nature of this reputation in Bukavu is quite different from that in the Global North. According to my non-Muslim research participants, almost unanimously, Muslims are witches or 'Freemasons' (see section 4.4.4). This belief is linked to the idea that Muslims are rich. As one boy explained to me: "There are no poor Muslims. If you are poor, for instance you are not from this church [mosque] but if you become a Muslim you accept doing Freemason, you will have to be rich" (Rizo, *bile*, interview 23-05-16). Although Islam does not explicitly adopt a materialist discourse like Pentecostal Christianity, it is nevertheless equally associated with prosperity in people's imaginations. Furthermore, key-informant Rizo made a comparison between the clothing style of Muslims and the clothes that people were wearing when he visited the Second World. Indeed, a ritual of evoking I observed included Islamic religious gestures and movements (participant observation, 03-07-16). Showing one girl an image of a mosque she directly said: "everybody who enters there is a witch" (Esther, *bile*, pictorial interview, 24-05-16, see appendix 1 for the images). At the end of a focus group, I took a photo of Abdul Qadir, a boy who recently converted to Islam. He was wearing an

Islamic thobe and, posing for the picture, he put up the hood. The other boys who had gathered to watch recoiled, whispering in disbelief, and full of awe: “ah, ah, ah, *mulozi*, *mulozi* (witch, witch)! (see figure 4.3)”.



Figure 4.3. Abdul Qadir after a focus group session at PEDER’s centre, posing in his Islamic thobe before putting up the hood. The other boys from his group are watching with awe and whisper “*mulozi, mulozi*” (source: author).

Also for (highly educated) adults. The relationship between witchcraft and Islam is ambiguous. Two PEDER workers refer to the marabouts from Bujumbura who arrived with powerful *fetish* and their *majini*; ‘spirits’ (called *mapepo* by Christians). One of the Sheikhs argued that according to him, people’s ideas about *fetish* use among Muslims is

rooted in the phenomenon of the marabouts from West Africa (Sheikhs Zafarullah, expert interview, 30-06-16).⁴¹

One possible explanation of this fear of Muslims is simple xenophobia. According to Father Emanuel (priest, expert interview, 06-07-15), the Muslims in Bukavu are “badly seen” first of all because most of them are not originally from Bukavu and few Muslims are *Bashi*, the local ethnic group. Many of those who are Muslims by birth have forefathers from Burundi or Tanzania. Furthermore, according to Father Emanuel’s definition of witchcraft (see section 4.4.1) everything we don’t understand becomes witchcraft. Sheikh Al-Hameed, who did his religious training in Uvira (The DRC) and Bujunbura (Burundi) and has worked in Zambia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, argues along the same line of thought that it is out of fear that people accuse them of being witches (Sheikh, expert interview, 25-05-16). With respect to the belief that Muslims are always rich, the Sheikh explains that this may be related to the fact that Muslims are always *clean*. Islam demands hygiene from its followers. Even those who have just one set of clothes, need to appear in the mosque with clean clothes and a washed, clean body. Perhaps this is what is causing a misunderstanding with people confusing cleanliness for richness, he says.

Muslims’ reputation of being seen as witches illustrates the interlinkages between religion and witchcraft in people’s minds, highlighting the centrality of competition (the spiritual battle) for shaping both inter-field and intra-field dynamics. It reveals for instance the contested nature of the boundary dividing the subfield of religion from the subfield of witchcraft. The next section, section 4.3.5, also narrates the interconnections of the two subfields. Whereas Islam is often perceived as being a close ally of witchcraft however, or even conceptually lumped together with it, the Rooms of Prayer are evidently seen as witchcraft’s most serious enemy. Despite the fact that Rooms of Prayer and witchcraft are perceived as straight opposites in the battle however, this does not result in antithetical moral evaluations. Although witchcraft is pure evilness in people’s minds, the Rooms of Prayer enjoy a very questionable reputation at best.

4.3.5 *The Rooms of Prayer*

Les chambres de prier, Rooms of Prayer, are a fascinating phenomenon in contemporary Bukavu. The fact that they belong to the religious subfield is illustrative of the field’s

⁴¹ Marabouts are religious leaders and teachers in West Africa, often scholars of the Koran. See the book of Mommersteeg (2011) for more information.

great diversity particularly because the Rooms of Prayer, unlike Catholic or Pentecostal churches, have no central representation and their leaders do not necessarily have any formal religious education. Each Room of Prayer is a stand-alone initiative and independent of any church or other Rooms of Prayer. Nevertheless, they are often established by pastors who, in an argument with their church, have left their denomination to found their own Room of Prayer over which they have full authority. There is even one story of a Catholic nun who, having fallen into disgrace with the Catholic church, has started her own Room of Prayer in town. Notwithstanding a clear categorical distinction between a Room of Prayer and a Pentecostal church, in practice the boundaries can still be blurry, not least because, according to many, each Room of Prayer *wants* to become a Pentecostal church. Establishing a Room of Prayer is often seen as a first step towards a successful career in spirituality. In a similar way as with the many Pentecostal churches, the strong materialist connotations of the Rooms of Prayer, and particularly of their leaders, makes them suspicious in the eyes of many people. Pastor Juma for instance argues that the presence of God *can potentially* be in a Room of Prayer...but that a lot of mistakes are made and that there are also false teachings around: “For instance in a room of prayer you can start profiting from the people, this is just an example, someone may say to you: ‘you are going to die!’ and then people have to give you money and the pastor delivers him. This is false” (Juma, pastor, expert interview 19-04-16).

A Room of Prayer is quite literally what the term says: it is a room, often someone’s living room, where people come together to pray under the guidance of a ‘prophet’, ‘pastor’ or ‘minister’ (see section 4.1.4 on the Fountain of Eternal Life). Only a proper sound system and a microphone is needed to start one’s own Room of Prayer. Its success depends on the charisma of the leader and on the success stories of terminally-ill people who were healed, poor people who found money, barren women who got pregnant and even dead people who were resurrected inside the walls of a certain Room of Prayer. I estimate there must be over one hundred Rooms of Prayer in Bukavu, but probably much more - perhaps hundreds - since the majority are not visible from main roads because they are inside living rooms in neighbourhoods.

Rooms of Prayer are visited by people from all layers of society, including devoted Catholics and Protestants. I visited the Room of Prayer ‘Fountain of Eternal Life’, from the vignette at the start of this chapter, with a Catholic worker from centre Ek’ Abana who was shocked to recognize many of his fellow Catholics inside the room. Similarly, Father Emanuel lamented: “Even the Catholics go there [which is] a dissatisfaction for me.

Where does it come from? It's temptation, you have heard something and you didn't get it like you thought. It's a solution for problems. Many people believe that 'if I pray to God, I can solve my problems'. It's false [...]" (Fr. Emmanuel, priest, expert interview 06-07-17). Everyone seemed to agree about *why* people go to a Room of Prayer: they have a problem and they are looking for a solution. Mosi, a worker from PEDER, spoke critically of a *structure* of Prayer Rooms in Bukavu, which he explained as: "This means, from the moment they are born, [people] expect God to give them everything. Instead of working, they pray. There are people who can spend an entire day praying inside a Room of Prayer, in the evening they go back home and find that they don't have nothing. That's when they go on asking neighbours" (Mosi, PEDER streetworker, informal conversation, 03-03-16).

It is evident that the 'prayer of asking' (cf. Pastor Juma) is central in a Room of Prayer. This pragmatic and direct way of interacting with God may appeal to street children. One street girl explains to me why she prefers going to a Room of prayer instead of attending a regular Pentecostal church service: "Because in a Room of Prayer...we are there to pray only, and to ask things from God, *what we want Him to do*. But in the church, everybody is there, we are not really concentrated on praying. In the church you don't have time to pray and give everything that is in your heart" (Belle, *bile*, informal conversation, 17-06-16, emphasis added). The fact that Rooms of Prayer have become a popular 'hangout' visited by people of various religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, including for instance Catholics and street children, shows how this relatively novel phenomenon meets people's contemporary spiritual needs to a significant degree. In a way, Rooms of Prayer can be argued to have 'informalized' religion. Its principle translates to enhanced access to an affordable everyday religion that shows in practice more than teaching or even conviction as it revolves solely around praying in a most straightforward fashion. I say 'affordable' here because this is in contrast to official Catholic services for instance which people tend to attend in their most expensive and beautiful clothes and jewellery and soaked in perfume. In contrast, Rooms of Prayer are much more low-key, also because its audience is in fact supposed to be confronted with significant problems hence nobody is surprised to encounter very poor or sick people or indeed street children inside a Room of Prayer. For Belle, who would not easily visit a regular church service, a Room of Prayer is a comfortable place where one can 'give everything that is in your heart'. It is also a place where Belle can 'ask things [directly] from God'. A plain person-centred religious practice thus centred around 'asking',

(almost) without hierarchy or intermediaries and devoid of unnecessary rituals. For street children indeed, a Room of Prayer offers an affordable and accessible alternative to church attendance. But there is much more to it. It provides cheap deliverances in case they are possessed by Demons or bewitched by angry market vendors from whom they have stolen. Rooms of Prayer are very strongly associated with practices of deliverance; exorcism. It is common practice, across the city, that if an individual is suddenly acting as if he or she is ‘possessed by the Devil’, whether in the private sphere or public space, he or she is rushed to a nearby Room of Prayer to be ‘delivered’ by its leader. The street girls in particular all had multiple stories of how they were brought to a Room of Prayer because they had suddenly fallen down while dancing on a table in a bar for instance, or because they suddenly started to see ‘visions’ or ‘spirits’. One girl narrates: “We were in Co-cocos, [that is] a nightclub, a bar. We were dancing and I started having some visions, I was seeing snakes...and I fell down, I fainted, and Linda, a fellow [colleague/friend] also fainted. We were brought to a Room of Prayer where they prayed for us [...]” (Christelle, *bile*, participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-16).

Besides these interesting opportunities however, Rooms of Prayer can also mean a one-way ticket to hell. They play a key role in witchcraft accusations to which street children are particularly vulnerable. Basically all stories of child witchcraft accusations start here and ministers of Rooms of Prayer are credited by a large part of the population with the power to recognize evil forces and witchcraft powers. One street boy recounts how he was accused of witchcraft by a Room of Prayer after which an angry mob rolled him in a duvet, doused it in gasoline and aimed to burn him alive. He managed to escape while they were searching for matches (Buduge, *bile*, interview 22-06-16). To understand better these and other dynamics of witchcraft (accusations) including the phenomenon of child witches we will now enter the subfield of witchcraft.

4.4 The subfield of witchcraft

The subfield of witchcraft is, like the subfield of religion, characterized by the (dark side of the) supernatural, heterogeneity, power, competition, fluid boundaries and an economic logic. I distinguish three related yet distinct spiritual categories of witchcraft that together constitute the subfield. The first is the art of ‘witchcraft-to-kill’ imagined as mastered by adult or child witches. The second is Freemason, a slightly more exclusive spiritual association whose members sacrifice relatives in exchange for material wealth. The third is Fetishism - i.e. all the things from the *feticheur*; witchdoctor - the ambiguous

realm of anti-witchcraft as well as the business of good-luck charms. Whereas I only use the concrete word witchcraft to analyse the first category, witchcraft-to-kill, I nevertheless employ the term as the overarching identity of the subfield. The reason for this is because all three categories are grouped, at times, under the more general term of ‘witchcraft’ in the explanation of my informants. This lumping together is validated by emphasizing the ultimate source enabling witchcraft -in its broadest sense- to function on earth and fuelling its continuing power: the Devil himself. As such, this ultimate creator unites witchcraft-to-kill, Freemason and Fetishism in the logic of the subfield.

Nonetheless, the very notion of ‘witchcraft’ in Bukavu has been significantly altered over the course of the last decades. The dynamics of these developments are insightful in themselves. I therefore contemplate the cultural and historical embeddedness of Congolese witchcraft in the first section, 4.4.1, before arriving at the modern urban understanding of witchcraft as witchcraft-to-kill in section 4.4.2. The related rise of the child witch will be further discussed in section 4.4.3 while sections 4.4.4 and 4.4.5 focus on Freemason and Fetishism respectively.

4.4.1 Continuity and change in witchcraft: cultural historical perspectives

In a similar way to the subfield of religion, the subfield of witchcraft should be perceived as culturally and historically constituted. To understand the dynamics in the contemporary subfield it is necessary to have an understanding of its history. The very notion of witchcraft has changed significantly over the years and in the light of sociocultural transformations in the DRC. Still, we need to understand not just witchcraft’s contemporary meaning but also its past connotations not least because in the way witchcraft surfaces today there are important traces of ‘traditional’ witchcraft. We know from anthropological literature that witchcraft is extremely malleable and rather than disappearing in the light of modernizing forces, it adapts itself to changing sociocultural and economic contexts and actually flourishes in contemporary Africa (Mills 2013; Armstrong 2011; Birgit. Meyer and Pels 2003; Moore and Sanders 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Geschiere 1997). As emphasized in chapter 2, section 6.2.2, the centrality and ‘normality’ of witchcraft in Africa cannot be overstated. Ethnographers argue witchcraft is best understood as a matter of social diagnostics rather than belief because for many people in Africa, witchcraft is “not so much a ‘belief’ about the world as it is a patent feature of it, a force that is “both self-evident and solemnly real” (Moore and Sanders 2001, 4). This phenomenon of a thriving witchcraft which has taken on new

dimensions to fit novel realities is clearly visible in the DRC. If we take a closer look however, these ‘new’ dimensions show clear traces of ‘older’ modes of witchcraft to various extents. Contemporary witchcraft should therefore be seen as a syncretic set of dynamics rooted in cultural traditions yet ‘modified’ in the light of rapid sociocultural change. Some days witchcraft shows its ancient roots while other days it is manifest in modern variations. In this section I will discuss both ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ witchcraft and discuss their interconnections constituting the subfield of witchcraft.

My young research participants unanimously agreed on the definition of witchcraft. They used the French word *nuire* to explain the term, which means ‘to harm’. They meant not just a little harm; witchcraft, they say, is ‘to kill’, ‘to destroy’. As Mosi also stressed: “the true sense of the word is to kill” (Mosi, PEDER streetworker, expert interview 20-06-16). Indeed, this has become the common understanding of witchcraft in the contemporary city of Bukavu. Two experts however, Dr. Ndaya Tshiteku, an anthropology professor from the University of Kinshasa and Father Emanuel, a Catholic priest, emphasized that ‘to kill’ has not always been the common perspective on witchcraft. According to Dr. Ndaya Tshiteku witchcraft should be understood as an euphemism for everything which is abnormal: “like a child without a father” (expert interview, 14-01-2016). She recounts a recent experience teaching an anthropology class to students in the DRC. She told her students the story of a goat eating plastic instead of grass and she asked the students to explain this phenomenon. The students all agreed that this was witchcraft. According to her, spirituality in the DRC is based on a principle of social order, with everything ‘outside the established social order’ seen as witchcraft.

Father Emanuel acknowledges a similar principle. He differentiates between witchcraft as ‘institution’ and witchcraft as ‘evilness’ (cf. ‘witchcraft-to-kill’). Regarding the first category, he argues “witchcraft in society is everything that is incomprehensible”. He gives the example of a village in which women usually leave their house early to go to the farm to be able to return early, by 10AM, to take care of their children. When there is a woman who stays on the farm until 7PM this woman is a witch, having done something ‘outside the normal’. However, traditionally and in rural areas in particular, Father Emanuel continues, there was always someone who was an actual ‘witch’ in each village and this was usually a man (not a woman). This witch was a secret adviser of the village chief. It was his task to ‘solve impossible things’, hence to bring back social order where there is disorder. Father Emanuel gives the example of incest. When this happens in a community, the witch will first ‘kindly advise’ the person committing incest to not

do this. But if this doesn't work, the witch will kill this person with poison, "either directly or indirectly" (meaning through actual poison in food for instance or through occult means). Father Emanuel explains the rationale for this: "[when] there is an element which is not in favour of the community, you have to get rid of this person. Like when you are in your house and you find bad herbs, you have to remove them. It's that [same principle]. We need to eliminate everything which is dangerous" (interview, 04-03-16).

The notion of witchcraft being 'everything which is abnormal' and the figure of the witch as someone who works for the village chief to do his community a favour are 'traditional' notions of witchcraft, which, albeit still more common in rural areas, are not entirely absent in contemporary Bukavu either.

Both Father Emanuel and Dr. Ndaya Tshiteku argue that in the DRC's urban areas witchcraft is manifest in more explicit (visible) and novel ways. This is where Fr. Emanuel's second understanding of witchcraft as 'evilness' comes to the foreground. According to Fr. Emanuel, contemporary witchcraft discourse in the bigger cities derives from the immense urban problems people are confronted with. Dr. Ndaya Tshiteku argues likewise that urbanization has made witchcraft more 'visible'. In particular, she points to pressing inter-generational struggles or a 'generational gap' in urban areas. This observation is in line with the work of de Boeck (2005; 2008) who discusses a profound de- and re-structuration of kinship in the capital of DRC, Kinshasa. Specifically, the erosion of traditional elderly authority implies an often unharmonious renegotiation of the social position of youth vis-à-vis elderly family members. This "social crisis" (de Boeck 2005) is linked to the increasing phenomenon of child witchcraft accusations (section 4.4.3).

Yet despite recognizing these new manifestations of witchcraft Dr. Ndaya Tshiteku stresses continuity rather than rupture with regards to Congolese witchcraft. As an example she argues that whereas contemporary witchcraft is strongly associated with the pursuit of the material and money (see also Geschiere 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), before, witchcraft (cf. 'witchcraft as institution') was used to obtain a good harvest. Both manifestations in fact boil down to the same purpose of ensuring (material) survival. As an example of something which has changed, Dr. Ndaya Tshiteku points to the way people deal with the 'purification' of a bewitched person (i.e. a victim of witchcraft-to-kill). Before this happened through medicinal plants of the traditional healer or via the witchdoctor (see section 4.4.4). Today, Pentecostal churches or prayer groups

position themselves as the ultimate “de-witchers” through their deliverance rituals (Dr. Ndaya Tshiteku, expert interview 14-01-2016, see also Ndaya Tshiteku 2016).

Nevertheless, in Bukavu I discovered that the role of the witch-doctor for de-witching has certainly not vanished. What happened is that he (very rarely a she) got some serious competition from the deliverances offered by the emerging Pentecostal churches. Hence, whereas the subfield of witchcraft was characterized by strong intra-field competition before, this has now extended beyond the level of the subfield, creating inter-field competition. In a similar way, the typically strong fear of the street children of being given poisoned food can be seen as an example of a syncretic understanding of witchcraft in which classical and contemporary notions are blurred. This fear of poison is first of all a remnant of the classical notion of witchcraft as poison as used by the traditional witch working in service of the community. This is combined however with the contemporary understanding of witchcraft with the objective to kill. In fact, it should be noticed both classic and new situations revolve around killing, but the difference lies in their moral evaluation. Whereas the first one is seen more as a defensive act, a community-favour compared to weeding one’s garden, the second one is condemned as offensive, evil murder out of self-interests. What is furthermore interesting is that when I asked the children *why* they thought someone would want to poison and kill them they always replied they did not know (but had heard stories about it). The notion of witchcraft as poison and the deep-seated almost unconscious sense for inherent dangers is indicative of the structuring role of the subfield of witchcraft, as any other social (sub)field in which individuals are ‘born into’ certain (tacit) knowledge, as Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1990, 68) says: *connaitre c’est naitre avec*: knowing is being born with it.

4.4.2 *The contemporary witch*

Omulozi ye njoka y’ebulungu

(le sorcier, c’est le serpent du voisinage)

“The witch is the snake of the neighbourhood” (Bashi proverb, my translation.

Kugaragu Ntabaza 1976, 2274).

Regardless of its concrete manifestation, everybody I spoke to in Bukavu agreed that witchcraft is more present today than ever before. This can be explained by the fact that contemporary witchcraft is strongly associated with poverty, overall misery and a general decay of values, which are aspects seen as highly characteristic of today’s urban reality.

Concretely: the contemporary witch is someone who uses occult powers to harm others. The motivation to do so is said to be rooted in one's own miserable existence in combination with a confrontation with someone else's fortune, in other words: jealousy. Mosi, a PEDER street worker, emphasized that it is mostly poor people who use witchcraft: "[that is] people who are worried about filling their stomachs every day, [hunger has] affected their minds and they can think of nothing else but food...when they see someone else who can eat every day... that's when they start to do it [witchcraft]. Because of jealousy. It is a weapon of the poor" (expert interview 07-03-16). Victor, another PEDER worker, elaborates further explaining that a witch is of course not sure that she (nowadays rarely a he) will see her own situation improved after killing someone, but nevertheless her first reaction will be to destroy the person who has something she would like to have. Of course jealousy has always existed and will always be there, explains Victor further, but the fact that people in Bukavu commit murder out of jealousy is "a new manifestation of witchcraft" which should be linked to 1) the increase of misery impacting a mentality change combined with 2) a fundamental lack of moral values (Victor, PEDER worker, expert interview 18-06-16).

Like Freemason (section 4.4.4) but to a slightly lesser extent, witchcraft is also associated with the desire for rapid enrichment. In contrast to Freemason however, it is a subject of public debate, whether witches are indeed enriched. Most people I consulted stress that witches are, and are to remain, poor. This perspective was confirmed by various testimonies I collected of self-proclaimed (former) witches in which the desire for power and the ability to take revenge on one's miserable existence by harming others featured with more relevance than the pursuit of material wealth. During one of our meetings, Esther, a 17-year old street girl who practiced witchcraft for a couple of years, made a strong reference to the importance of power in witchcraft, although admitting she earned some money too: "There was no advantage [practicing witchcraft]; only power, no one would [dare to] talk to me. Power! The force of my spirit, you would know that my spirit was strong, when you would see me, you would immediately become afraid. You would know 'this is someone who is very strong'" (Esther, *bile*, interview 07-03-16). Later, she recounted how she felt a strong urge to kill many people during last year's Christmas, when she was still a practicing witch: "Yes it's that [jealousy] what pushes us [witches] most. Especially...we don't eat anything, we don't have a party [while] the others in our family... there is happiness, they organise a party and they eat so I need to take revenge so the family continues to suffer" (Esther, *bile*, interview 01-04-16). The practice of

witchcraft from an actor-centred perspective will be further discussed in chapter 5 but what is relevant here are insights that enhance our understanding of the constitution of the subfield of witchcraft. As has hopefully become clearer, it is a highly dynamic subfield in which the role of witches and the meaning of witchcraft have acquired new connotations over time. Without doubt, this subfield revolves around very serious games made possible by spiritual power. In a time of enhanced suffering for the urban poor, witchcraft has become an ultimate solace - a weapon of the poor - an immoral yet impactful way to re-position oneself on the playing board in such a way that no other player can ignore you any longer. As Esther said: “if you would see me, you would immediately become afraid”. For all the other players, becoming a victim of witchcraft-to-kill is a serious, every-day risk.

Furthermore, we have seen the traditional witch, rural, male and providing altruistic community services, changing into the contemporary witch who is more often female, urban and pictured as driven by emotions, in particular jealousy. Besides this interesting gender shift, and inherent changing moral evaluations, also the imagined age of witches has been subject to change in contemporary Bukavu. In the next section, 4.4.3, I will turn the attention to the emergence of the child witch.

4.4.3 *The child witch*

“Today there are child witches, you should not deny that! Maybe a child thinks that when he kills his father, he can gain something with it. But those ideas don’t come from here. One child tells the other ‘I have killed my father to have ...(something)’ another child may get the same idea. They copy anti-values. That’s what defines our new generation!” (Asante, cultural expert, interview 01-07-16).

A large majority of the people I spoke to in Bukavu would agree with the words of Asante, the local cultural expert discussing the existence of child-witches. Both Catholics and Protestants, young people as much as adults - including PEDER streetworkers and pastors as well as other religious leaders - emphasized the existence of child witches. In fact, their conviction was not based on some abstract idea but rather they all had close, first-hand experiences with child witches. One PEDER worker told me he had to chase away his niece whom he cared for because he discovered the child was a witch. I met one pastor whose own daughter was accused of witchcraft and chased away (she now lives in an NGO shelter). At the same time it was generally argued that child witches are indeed a

relatively novel manifestation of witchcraft or, at least, that child witchcraft shows a sharp rise. This observation is reflected in scholarly literature, for instance in the work of De Boeck (2005; 2008) who argues that child witchcraft accusations throughout the country have increased. According to De Boeck, this phenomenon is a drastic break with the country's traditional moral and cultural matrix that defines children in terms of intrinsic wealth and as a social good.

As outlined in section 4.4.1, witches are believed to be able to cause harm, typically moved by jealousy over someone else's fortune. Due to this assumption most people directly associate any kind of misfortune with witchcraft, and, consequently, with a witch being around their household. Increasingly, children are pointed out as the witch guilty of the household's bad luck. The child witch's motivation to harm remains largely obscure. In general though and in contrast to the adult witch, the child witch seems to be perceived as being less motivated by jealousy and more by the pursuit of material gains. This perspective is reflected in the explanation of Asante: "a child thinks that when he kills his father, he can gain something" (cultural expert, interview 01-07-16). *What* exactly is to be gained, however, remains vague. Nonetheless, people's reasons for child witchcraft accusations clearly relate to their pursuit of explanations of misfortune. This is illustrated for instance by Simeon, a PEDER street worker with over 30 years of experience with child witchcraft accusations:

"Today, with the Pentecostals... a child who is badly seen in the family, maybe he is in a host family, with his stepmother who doesn't want him, she will start to call him a witch: 'Why have you done that? You must be a witch'. And the word starts to make propaganda.... When we see a brat in the house, we will say 'that's him [the child], witch!' And the neighbours are going to say: 'that child, he is a witch!'. If someone falls sick, they will immediately say that '[it is] this child who did it; bring him to the Room of Prayer!!' And that's how it starts. When they bring a child to a Room of Prayer, they intimidate him there, [saying] 'isn't it true that you have done this and this?' The frightened child accepts the accusation. And the pastor confirms he is a witch" (Simeon, interview, 18-06-16).

Simeon illustrates here not just the relation between explaining misfortune and child witchcraft accusations ("If someone falls sick, they will immediately say that '[it is] this child who did it!"). He also mentions a stepmother who 'does not want the child' and who 'starts to make propaganda [against him]'. Furthermore he refers to the role of Pentecostalism, in particular the Rooms of Prayer and pastors for confirming the accusation.

Child witchcraft accusations led by stepparents, particularly stepmothers, is something I came across very often. One example concerns the story of Elisabeth, a 14-year old girl who was transferred, alone, from living with her mother's family in the countryside to living with her father and her stepmother in a very impoverished neighbourhood on the outskirts of Bukavu. Elisabeth had difficulties adapting to her new life. When a woman from the neighbourhood died a sudden death, Elisabeth, together with two other girls, was pointed out as the witch who had killed the woman. A simple test, involving a water bottle filled with blood, was organised in the neighbourhood and the test, being positive, was later affirmed in a nearby Room of Prayer: all three girls were indeed witches. An angry mob turned against the girls and started to beat and torture them. The police interfered and saved their lives. Whereas the families of the two other girls welcomed their daughters back after negotiation sessions, Elisabeth's stepmother, convinced about the accusation, refused to have the girl living with her again. When I met Elisabeth she lived in centre Ek'Abana, the NGO for children who are accused of witchcraft (discussed in chapter 3, section 3.4.2.2). A week later, I had the opportunity of visiting Elisabeth's father and stepmother together with Victor from centre Ek'Abana. The young stepmother had just given birth to a baby girl herself. The young parents were delighted since she suffered multiple miscarriages in the past. In their simple house I was rocking the new-born baby to sleep while the NGO worker Victor tried to persuade the woman to accept Elisabeth back into the family but the stepmother insisted the girl would have to be brought back to a Room of Prayer to check whether she still possessed those witchcraft powers. She claimed: "Only they [Room of Prayer] can see how things really are. They tell the truth." When both Victor and her husband tried to persuade her further, she argued: "You cannot believe in God without believing in the Rooms of Prayer. When Elisabeth comes here for a weekend or holiday, the first thing I will do is take her to a Room of Prayer" (Rosana, stepmother of an accused girl, informal conversation, 16-03-16).

Centre Ek'Abana, where Elisabeth currently resides, is a small Catholic NGO that offers shelter and education to children, mostly girls, who are accused of witchcraft. During my fieldwork there were between fifteen and twenty girls and a few boys of all ages but including quite a number of toddlers, who permanently lived in the centre because they could not safely return home after having been accused of witchcraft. Many of them were severely traumatised and had suffered physical abuse following the accusation. A large majority had their witchcraft accusations confirmed by a Room of

Prayer. According to the centre's staff, child witchcraft accusations may have always existed in Bukavu, but not with the depth and spread of today. They point to the "multiplicity of churches" as well as the extreme misery of life today which has led to more accusations. In line with Simeon, they argue: "It is an explication of bad luck, something to explain the 'misery of the household', people always want to find someone who is responsible" (expert focus group with Ek'Abana staff, 16-06-16).

The question remains however why children are among those most frequently accused. According to the workers of Ek'Abana children are accused because they, as a category, are most vulnerable. Then, also within this category those children who are even more vulnerable than others often become victim. Among the accused children the Ek'Abana centre takes care of there are many orphans for instance, without parents - or with just one parent - to defend them. Often, the accused children are "not loved. Perhaps they are naughty" says the head of Ek'Abana (Quirina, expert interview 16-06-16). In this line of argument, the story of Elisabeth recounts how the girl had "difficulties adapting to her new setting" (Victor, NGO worker, informal conversation 16-03-16). Elisabeth, as a teenager, was too old to be 'naughty' but instead she showed what was perceived to be deviant behaviour. This argument that it is often these kind of children who become the victims of witchcraft accusations is congruent with my own observations. PEDER took also care of accused child witches and some of them lived in the same compound as I. In most cases these children either had a visible handicap or showed deviant, often aggressive behaviour.⁴² The realisation that it is often children that are 'different' or 'abnormal' that are accused of witchcraft is an odd reminder of the traditional witch concerned with 'eliminating bad herbs' from the community. In the contemporary reversed version then the 'bad herbs' themselves are no longer passive victims but have been granted spiritual, in this case witchcraft agency. This echoes de Boeck's (2008) analysis about the relationship between children and witchcraft in the DRC I outlined in chapter 2, section 2.6.3.

In conclusion, the birth of the child witch in a changing and, to some, frightening, 'modernizing' social order has deeply affected the subfield of witchcraft. First of all it implies a heightened risk for all children who are actors in the field to become victims of witchcraft accusations. The increase in such accusations is explicitly linked to growing numbers of street children in the DRC (de Boeck 2013; 2008; 2005) as well as in Africa

⁴² On a critical note it should be said that in the case of such deviant behaviour this can also be explained as trauma as a result of the accusation itself. Most children also showed visible signs of physical abuse.

in general (Cimpric 2010; Adinkrah 2011; Foxcraft 2007). In Bukavu, there were significant numbers of accused witches among street-connected children in shelters such as PEDER and Ek'Abana and also among the street children. Street children however are confronted with additional risks. Even when their reasons for being on the streets are not witchcraft-related in the first place, they are prone to witchcraft accusations *because* they are on the streets. First of all because they are generally thought of as possessing an amount of witchcraft knowledge and experience which is above average. Second, with their dirty and sometimes rather 'crazy' appearance, solitary life styles with associated drug use, delinquency and engagement in prostitution they are seen as going against the established social and moral order in various ways. They are seen, by some, as society's 'bad herbs' who should be eliminated to 'clear up' the streets. In this traditional way they are thus the passive victims who are 'to be eliminated'. However in a relatively new, perverse and reversed system they have acquired new connotations in the social imaginary as active agents who may possess the spiritual power to eliminate other players in the field.

4.4.4 *Freemason*

'Freemason' in Bukavu does not have the same meaning as it has in other parts of the world, although its local conceptualisation shows ambiguous linkages to how we understand it in the Global North. Although the English word Freemasonry comes from the French *frère-maçons*, which literally means 'brother-builder', in Bukavu the English word 'Freemason' was used to refer to the organization itself as well as to its members. Among my Congolese informants, 'Freemason' was known as either 'the practice of Freemason' which is seen as similar to regular witchcraft or as the secret, spiritual organization of elite people engaged with this practice. According to Olivier, a Catholic PEDER worker, Freemason revolves around three principles: domination, sacrifice and wealth. He explains:

“[Freemason] is a movement of initiation to which people adhere to practice Freemason. It is the initiation into a 'practice of demanding', you can ask for a house, ask for money. To become their believer, their member, you have to live by those principles [domination, sacrifice, wealth]. You will need to find wealth, okay, you need to know how to kill, you need to know how to dominate, you need to know how to sacrifice people. And you will have everything you want” (Olivier, PEDER worker, expert interview 15-06-16).

The boundary between witchcraft and this Congolese version of Freemason should be understood as fluid and ambiguous, denied to exist by some yet emphasized by others. I have come across some similarities and differences however. Like witchcraft, Freemason is strongly associated with (the pursuit of) power. Furthermore Freemason is also associated with killing or, a word more commonly used, 'sacrifice'. In contrast to witchcraft however, the purpose of killing is less vague here: the ultimate goal of Freemason is always material wealth/money. The Freemason 'practice of demanding' Olivier refers to in the quotation above reminds us of the 'prayer of asking', *kuomba*, of Pastor Juma and is thus indicative of important correlations between the subfield of witchcraft and the subfield of religion. There are however significant inter-field as well as intra-field differences in the nature of the reciprocal relationship here. Whereas in a Room of Prayer one just needs to pray to God to be able to 'demand', in witchcraft and Freemason a much higher price is required in the form of a human sacrifice. However, within the subfield of witchcraft there is still a subtle difference between the kind of human sacrifice required. According to an actual 'Freemason teacher' I had the honour to interview, in Freemason the first requirement is to sacrifice a close family member (parents or children) whereas witches can sometimes get away with sacrificing a friend (Ludo, Freemason teacher, expert interview 05-07-16). Indeed, in the story of Esther, a former witch, she narrates how she killed many random people whereas Freemason is unequivocal in their demand for a close family member. One street girl who was considering starting practicing Freemason had bought a \$50 book teaching the principles of this occult practice. On the first page it was written that before reading any further she had to sacrifice either her father or her mother. She told me this had scared her a bit and she had put away the book to give herself time for contemplation (Francine, *bile*, interview 12-05-16). Another difference relating to the process of exchange in witchcraft and Freemason concerns the 'conditions' by which successful witches and Freemasons have to abide. These will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. The very fact that engagement in both witchcraft and Freemason implies a complex and continuing process of exchange highlights the functioning of the field according to an economic logic.

Both witchcraft and Freemason require initiation, both are highly hierarchical and members of both groups recognize Satan as their ultimate leader. A difference seems to lie in the (in)equality of the relationship they have with him. According to one boy practicing Freemason: "[with] Freemason you are Satan's collaborator, you can exchange ideas with him, you are already his friend. Witchcraft is the military of Satan, he is their

commander [he will tell them]: ‘you are going to kill!’” (Nuru, *bile*, interview 31-03-16). This hierarchical difference in status between a witch and a Freemason is indicative of the competitive, power-laden dynamics and hierarchy of the subfield of witchcraft.

It can be argued, perhaps, that whereas witchcraft is a ‘weapon of the poor’ Freemason is a ‘strategy of the rich’. Among the Freemason adherents are supposedly a lot of “white people from (international) NGOs” (Simeon, expert interview 18-06-16). In a similar line of thought, the staff of centre Ek’Abana explained Freemason exclusively serves a “high society” group, where children do not belong (expert focus group, 16-06-17). At the time, however, I already knew from my experience that their assumption that children do not belong in Freemason was wrong, as I will show in chapter 5.

4.4.5 *Fetishism*

In a similar way as ‘Freemason’, also the local term *fétichisme*, ‘fetishism’, does not refer to its common understanding. With ‘fetishism’, informants meant ‘all the things related to the *feticheur* (*mufumu* in Mashi): the witchdoctor. Besides priests, pastors, sheikhs, witchcraft- and Freemason teachers, witchdoctors are a final category of spiritual leaders who occupy a central and historical position in the field. They are, in fact, the most ambiguous ones; a figure on the crossroads of God and the Devil, ‘good’ and ‘evil’, between enemy and friend and tradition and modernity. The word *mufumu* is not Swahili but Mashi. It comes from the verb *kufumia* which means ‘to heal’. Especially elderly people referred to the *mufumu* as a ‘healer’. The Bashi expert explained the role of a witchdoctor as follows: “The witch is who gives negative things. The witchdoctor is he who contradicts bad luck. He is capable of finding a medicine to correct the bad luck you are going through. There is a big difference. He [witchdoctor] is the one who always gives a solution to problems, by making use of medicinal plants” (Asante, cultural expert interview 01-07-17). Yet most other people nowadays make at least some distinction between the *mganga wa asili*, the traditional healer and the *mufumu*. The traditional healer is able to cure sickness with medicinal plants combined with the invocation of the ancestors. The contemporary witchdoctor however is (even) more associated with spirituality. As the Bashi expert outlines, he is the one capable of ‘countering witchcraft’; hence he is a ‘de-witcher’ solving spiritual problems such as delivering people who are possessed by the Demon (sent through witchcraft) or ‘evil spirits’, *mapepo*, and refuting misfortune inflicted by witches. Yet it is precisely these impressive powers to counter witchcraft, revealing superior occult knowledge and expertise, that makes the role of a

witchdoctor highly ambivalent. The art of anti-witchcraft involves witchcraft, arguably goes beyond it, and witchdoctors are supposed to be able to heal only because they truly master their witchcraft.

Like witches and Freemasons witchdoctors are said to ultimately obey Satan as their highest leader and to visit *kuzimu*, the Second World, regularly (see section 4.1.2). Usually their position is seen as that of the anti-witch, situated directly opposite witches. As outlined before (section 4.4.1) witchdoctors used to be the only cultural remedy against witchcraft. Nowadays however they are confronted with serious competition from Pentecostal pastors. Notwithstanding this professional competition, I have heard rare cases of a pastor and a witchdoctor joining forces in a spiritual combat against a witch. Although pastors committed to the ‘deliverance’ business are certainly not perceived without suspicion, witchdoctors have an even more dubious status, not least because they are said to sometimes collaborate with the very witches they pretend to fight. People seemed to agree that, ultimately, witchdoctors can never be fully trusted, not even by their own clients. An important reason for this mistrust can be found in the opportunistic financial interests of witchdoctors. Trying to make a living and aiming for success in the highly competitive spiritual field, they are definitely not picky when it comes to offering their (anti-)witchcraft services. Their clientele includes witches, Freemasons, other witchdoctors, pastors, thieves, prostitutes, businessmen, politicians, children, lovers and basically everyone else who desires something. Analysing the figure of the witchdoctor in Cameroon, Geschiere (2003) writes they should be seen as “beyond good and evil” (2003, 166). A similar argument can be made for the Congolese *feticheur*. They are literally a-moral in the sense that in the morning they may provide a witch with a poison to kill her neighbour’s child while working hard in the evening to counter the poison when the victim shows up. They thus sell their services to the highest bidder, also when this implies working against oneself, without showing any sign of moral distress.

Most ordinary people consult witchdoctors when they are faced with inexplicable bad luck and, more commonly, if they are looking for ‘spiritual support’ to be more successful with the activities in their own lives. In this latter case the witchdoctor provides them with a ‘fetish’. A fetish is also called *dawa*, Swahili for ‘medicine, remedy’. In contrast to a medicine however which functions defensively, a fetish has a more offensive power in actively helping its owner to succeed in a particular thing. Thieves for instance can buy a ‘fetish’ from a witchdoctor which helps them to not get caught while stealing or to distract the person whom they want to steal from at the right time. As I will show at

length in chapter 5, this kind of fetish is highly popular among street children who depend on stealing for their day-to-day survival. Another popular kind of fetish among the *Biles* is the one used to attract women, with the aim of having casual sex. Such a fetish can be manifest either as a charm, for instance a small bundle containing dried herbs or plants, or as lotion which should be applied on specific body parts or - as in the example of the girls in the Mirror of Sin (section 4.1.4) - as scars where plants/herbs have been rubbed under one's skin. The use of fetish will be subject of detailed analysis in chapter 5. Usually quite a high monetary price is paid for such a fetish. As in the case of Freemason, a fetish increases someone's opportunities while making him/her extra vulnerable at the same time because of specific 'conditions' of use. This paradox of power and vulnerability is a fundamental essence of the subfield of witchcraft and will be further explored in chapter 5.

4.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have used Bourdieu's notion of field to explore the local setting that gives form and meaning to how spirituality is lived by street children. I have shown that this concept offers a powerful analytical tool to explore and explain the complex and multifaceted 'spiritual arena of Bukavu'. In particular, Bourdieu's understanding of a field as a competitive site of social relations that follows an economic logic has been useful to make sense of the intense competition and struggle between the subfields of religion and witchcraft in what sometimes seems best described as a 'spiritual marketplace'. It can be argued this struggle is what determines the structure of the Spiritual Field, framing dynamics of power between the subfields but also within, unfolding on many levels and among a series of polar oppositions.

Depicting the subfield of religion, I have first discussed the field's historical roots, analysing the perspectival residue of the spiritual self as 'God's gift'. I have argued this syncretic mix of pre-colonial and Catholic views is not something people are necessarily aware of yet is it fundamental to the formation of their religious subjectivities. This illustrates how the field can be seen as a site of socialization, in this case into a particular notion of (the self vs.) God. Furthermore I have pointed out the Catholic church, Pentecostal-charismatic churches, Islam and the Rooms of Prayer as important institutions that are opposite each other in the efforts to market their respective "goods of salvation" (cf. Rey 2004). In this battlefield, the Catholic church occupies the most established position, firmly embedded in the country's colonial history and with a

continuing pervasive influence over political and social life. However, in line with developments across Africa (and beyond), Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity has seen a spectacularly rise and effectively competes with the Catholic church for adherents. Part of this competition is clearly played out in the context of the wider competition of the subfield of religion as a whole with the opposing subfield of witchcraft since Pentecostalism's success has been partially explained by its offensive stance towards witchcraft and public display of their power to overcome evil forces through deliverances. A third institution in the subfield is Islam, a minority religion which is nevertheless growing in Bukavu in particular in the context of the local presence of UN peacekeepers from Islamic countries. This illustrates the dynamic nature of the Spiritual Field and the way it reacts to wider (global) sociocultural, political and economic developments. Finally, I have described Rooms of Prayers as stand-alone spiritual enterprises, offering a low-key and person-centred religious platform centred around a prayer of 'asking'.

In the subfield of witchcraft, I have identified witchcraft-to-kill, Freemason and fetishism as important actors/institutions. Like the subfield of religion, the sphere of witchcraft also reveals the importance of context and historicity. In this light I have argued contemporary witchcraft should be understood as a syncretic set of dynamics rooted in cultural traditions yet 'modified' in the light of rapid sociocultural change. The emergence of the child witch, for instance, has been explained in the light of the current ambivalent societal status of children in the DRC as powerful (and potentially dangerous) social actors involved in shaping new urban realities (de Boeck 2008). Furthermore, I have explored witchcraft-to-kill as a 'weapon of the poor', rooted in urban misery and driven by personal dissatisfaction and jealousy. In contrast, Freemason is rather seen as a 'strategy of the rich', believed to offer the ultimate opportunity for rapid enrichment to those who are willing to sacrifice human lives. Finally, I have discussed witchdoctors as highly ambivalent and typically a-moral figures on the crossroads of good and evil and tradition and modernity. They are historical players in the field but have transformed their profession and status to suit novel realities such as the (urban) increase of witchcraft in response to which they position themselves as skilful 'de-witchers', competing with Pentecostal pastors in the process.

It is in this deeply complex, constantly changing and rather confusing socio-spiritual reality that we should understand children's engagement with religion and witchcraft. As in any other field, someone's engagement highly depends on the way they

are positioned in a field. Extending his metaphor of the game, Bourdieu explains this vividly:

“We can picture each player as having in front of her a pile of tokens of different colours, its colour corresponding to a given species of capital she holds, so that her *relative force in the game*, her *position* in the space of play and also her *strategic orientation toward the game* [...], the moves that she makes, more or less risky or cautious, subversive or conservative, depend both on the total number of tokens and on the composition of the piles of tokens she retains, that is, on the volume and structure of her capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 99, emphasis in the original)”.

Street children who are struggling to survive at the edge of society, occupy marginal positions in Bukavu’s Spiritual Field (as well as in other fields). This awareness of their marginal position results in a particular orientation towards the game, it determines the ‘reading’ of options based on their knowledge of the rules of the game that are relevant *to them* given their specific positioning. However, as I have pointed out throughout this chapter, one distinctive trait of the Spiritual Field is that it does offer an extended range of opportunities for street children’s everyday survival. Thinking of Bourdieu’s economic analysis of the field, these opportunities can be explained in the context of the over-supply that characterises this particular field. With a “multiplicity of churches”, hundreds of Rooms of Prayers and an abundance of witchdoctors and Freemason teachers, competition in the field is centred around the awareness of scarcity: there is only that much spirituality that can be marketed before the point of satisfaction is reached, i.e. there is a restricted number of available ‘souls’. In this market of over-supply, street children are not only subjects in other people’s spiritual practices, falling victim to witchcraft accusations for instance, they have also become desired *consumers* of spiritual goods and services. In this role, children are able to make choices, define strategies and express agency. In the next chapter, I will explore the way street children capitalize on these opportunities for survival, working around threats and negotiating with the field’s institutions and actors, traversing the field on a day-to-day basis. I will demonstrate for instance, how knowledge of ‘the rules of the game’ results in an awareness of the way children (as survivors) can exploit the competition of the field’s institutions, make use of it for instance to strategically shop around, adapting denominational loyalty to be able to profit from material benefits that come with conversion. Also, such knowledge implies an understanding of exchange or bartering, such as exchange with the Second World and

the kind of negotiation they can engage in considering their position in the field. Having thus sketched the Spiritual Field as a constellation of competitive relations in this chapter, the remainder of this thesis will explore how street children survive and makes sense of the field, hence taking as a point of departure their lived experiences.

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF MATERIAL SURVIVAL

The Strategy of Relationality

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 was dedicated to sketching the Spiritual Field as the historical, heterogeneous social-spatial arena that determines (often) implicit rules for conduct and in which people struggle for desired resources. I have shown how the field should be seen as heavily contextualized and as playing a crucial role in determining structural constraints as well as opportunities for street children. Besides indicating practical limitations, the notion of the field is used to shed light on the way these children, as everyone else, are ‘socialized’ into a certain cultural system which thus shapes the way they internalize rules and principles that come with traversing the field. Having sketched the Spiritual Field, I will now move on to explore street children’s manoeuvrings in the field. These manoeuvrings should be seen as highly oriented towards the goal of day-to-day survival. This survival is twofold: children struggle to get by physically, in terms of meeting basic material needs such as food, shelter and safety, but they also struggle to survive morally. In this chapter I focus on the first kind of survival, exploring how spirituality is employed to facilitate the quest for everyday *material* survival on the streets (the second kind of survival, moral survival, will be explored in chapter 6). Specifically, the way spirituality is lived by street children in the context of grave existential uncertainty reveals what I perceive as a ‘spiritual practice of material survival’.

I will use empirical data to unravel this spiritual practice of survival, which I will argue is essentially a *relational* practice. Street children engage in relationships with spiritual entities such as God and the Devil and spiritual representatives including pastors and witchdoctors with the aim of easing everyday survival. Instead of employing the Bourdieusian concept of ‘social capital’ to interpret these relationships, I choose to work with the term ‘relational practice’ to emphasize the process of (engaging in and maintaining) relationships. Whereas ‘social capital’ can be seen as those relationships that

are established and through which valuable resources can be found, taking children's relational practices as the point of departure will allow an in-depth exploration of attempts to establish relationships and children's strategic reasoning, feelings and reflections behind them.

Children's relational practices have received increasing attention from geographers looking at geographies of age (Hopkins and Pain 2007), intergenerational relations (Hopkins et al. 2011) and child-adult relationships (Smith et al. 2016; Punch 2002c) for example. Building on Lee's (2013) sociological conception of relational agency, Blazek (2015, 8) argues that children's actions depend on the capacities of their bodies and minds, but also on the presence of and relations with other people, objects or environments. This current interest in relationality and networks is not meant to doubt the position of children as social agents, but rather to explore their lives in relation to wider influences in society (Jamieson and Milne 2012) and as part of friendships, families, communities and wider societal networks (see also Punch 2002c; Hopkins et al. 2011; Bordonaro 2012). Also in street children studies, there has been a call to explore street children's lives relationally in wider social and political contexts (van Blerk 2012; Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Proposing "assemblage thinking" to consider the lives of African street youth, Shand (2018) takes this call even further by unravelling street youth's survival techniques based on engagements with space and social relations, but also with the city's material fabric. He explores for instance street youth's creative (re)use of 'things' such as waste materials to meet basic needs (Shand 2018). Van Blerk (2012, 332) argues that although childhood studies has done much to reinvigorate theoretical interest in the inter-relations between children's agency and society, "the often over-celebration of children's competencies has marginalised interest in the way in which children are connected to others". Relationships such as friendships (Conticini and Hulme 2007; Evans 2006; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010) and subcultures (Beazley 2003a) have been explored as important aspects of street life. In fact, relationality has been argued to relate to well-being (Conticini 2005), survival strategies (Shand 2018; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010) or coping mechanisms (Catterson 2016). Adding to these insights on the nexus between children's relational practices and survival/coping on the streets, in this chapter I explore the relational nature of the 'spiritual practice of material survival' and reflect on its implications for understanding children's agency in difficult circumstances. According to Jamieson and Milne (2012, 266), the concept of relational processes suggest "a focus on the interactive practices that build relationships' quality". In line with this definition,

I choose to work with the term ‘relational practice’ to shed light on the spiritual practice of material survival, seeing relationality as an intersubjective *process* that is prone to change and susceptible to dynamics of power and position as well as particularities of time and place.

When analysing the spiritual practice of material survival, data reveal a clear separation between practice in the subfield of religion versus the subfield of witchcraft. As outlined in chapter 4 (section 4.2), research participants pre-reflexively juxtapose the ‘Kingdom of God’ versus the ‘Kingdom of the Devil’ and each sphere is believed to come with its own principles and rules. Of particular importance here is that each subfield carries its own rules that structure (the kind of) relationships children can engage in. I will therefore start, in section 5.2, with a discussion of the rules of relationality in the field and the way children fully commit to them. Section 5.3 will then move to an exploration of children’s strategies for survival that are based on their knowledge of and unquestioned commitment to the rules of the field. In specific, in section 5.3.1 I will explore the spiritual practice of material survival in the subfield of religion, investigating children’s relationships with religious institutions and representatives as well as God Himself. These explorations will indicate children’s pragmatic and goal-oriented approach to their engagements with spiritual others and the logic of reciprocity on which these engagements are based. Another aspect of the relational practice is its eclectic character: children mix and match opportunities across subfields to maximise chances of survival. Besides clear benefits that can be gained from relations with spiritual beings and experts, however, there are also risks. In the subfield of religion these risks are relatively limited, but entering the subfield of witchcraft, they tend to increase significantly. In section 5.3.2, I will discuss the spiritual practice of material survival in the Dark Kingdom, where children negotiate with witchdoctors, Freemason teachers and even the Devil himself, for which they need to travel to his sinister underworld. Here, the practice of survival reveals itself as an intrinsically precarious practice in which reciprocity is organized at a different level. In general, there are much higher investment costs, risks, and perilous ‘conditions’ that regulate such relationships. Nevertheless, these relations are alluring in particular because, in contrast to the Kingdom of God where one ought to be patient, there is an immediate return on investment in deals with the Dark Kingdom.

Finally, in a conclusion in section 5.4, I will reflect on the way ‘agency-as-power’, the first modality of Ortner’s (2006) dual conceptualization of agency (see chapter 2, section 2.5.2), manifests in children’s spiritual practice of survival. I will argue that in a

challenging context of extreme marginality in which street children *generally* have limited options, in particular with regards to economic practices, spirituality opens up an alternative framework with opportunities for survival. Specifically, in the spiritual practice of material survival, hence in the way children engage in relationships with spiritual others, we can witness the emergence of specific kind of agency that I will call ‘alternative agency’. What makes this agency alternative are the kind of relationships that belong to a social realm that expands beyond the conventional, narrow confines of a street child’s social stratum.

5.2 The rules of the field

In chapter 4 I outlined the Spiritual Field as the contextual determinant of behaviour. Traversing the spiritual field, as with any other field, fully depends on knowing the logic, rules and regularities of the specific field. In other words, successfully dealing with (the opportunities and threats of) the field - what I in this chapter call the spiritual practice of survival - stands and falls by one’s knowledge of the rules of the field. Before turning the attention to street children’s practices (section 5.3), I will therefore shortly contemplate the (often implicit) rules that structure practice in general, and relationality in particular across the Spiritual Field.

Sometimes, the rules of Bukavu’s Spiritual Field are made explicit; when a witchdoctor provides a street girl with a fetish to attract men, he will emphasize some crucial rules she will have to obey in order for the fetish to function. In most situations however, people’s knowledge of the rules is implicit, even taken for granted; the product of embodied history, internalized as a second nature. This kind of internalized knowledge is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*. In chapter 2 (section 2.5.1) I have explained *doxa* as the unquestioned truths of the field to which people unanimously and undisputedly comply. A first example of *doxa* in the Spiritual Field is the way people intuitively juxtapose the subfield of religion and the subfield of witchcraft. This oppositional division was the point of departure in chapter 4 where I outlined the anatomy of the Spiritual Field. This acknowledgement of the division between the “Kingdom of God” and the “Kingdom of the Devil”, as Pastor Juma referred to it (expert interview, 19-04-16), is *doxa* in the sense that it is an unquestioned truth of the field. A second example of *doxa* is the spiritual power which is unanimously attributed by everyone to both subfields. The game is worth playing only because the players commit themselves to the game’s most fundamental presuppositions: God exists, the Devil exists, and both have spiritual power. It should be

acknowledged that religious conviction is truly *doxic* in the context of Bukavu (as well as in many other places and countries); it is self-evident and something which penetrates social life as a whole. The director of a large NGO in Bukavu told me: “To say honestly, here [in the DRC] I have never met an atheist. Our nature is to believe, here in Africa. If there is a person who doesn’t believe in God, who doesn’t believe in His power....this person will be marginalized in society. Because it is something that connects to our identity” (Victor, NGO director, expert interview 01-07-2016). In fact, countless practices would be meaningless without an a priori commitment to these rudimentary rules. For instance, there is no sense in praying to God when one does not believe in His existence. In a similar way it would be useless to pay a lot of money for a fetish if one were to doubt the object’s functioning power. Hence, I regard as *doxa* the undisputed acceptance of the division of the Spiritual Field into two opposing sites and the taken-for-granted assumption that there is spiritual power in both sub-fields (yet different types of power).

From these fundamental presuppositions, we can distil other *doxic* rules that revolve around the (kind of) relationships that children can engage within these two opposing spheres. Data indicate a clear division between street children’s relations with spiritual beings from the Kingdom of God, or what I call “the Divine”, such as saints and angels and spiritual representatives of this Kingdom, such as pastors and priests versus relations with the spiritual beings from the Kingdom of Satan, or what I call “the Dark”, such as evil spirits, mermaids and satanic angels and representatives such as witches, witchdoctors and Freemasons. Relations in both spheres serve the ultimate goal of facilitating the everyday survival of street children. In short, the children’s assumption is that there is usually more to be achieved *in the short term* from relations with the Dark but this has a significant higher price and poses much higher risks than help from the Divine realm. Although immediately available, this Dark provision is always limited and conditional. In contrast, to achieve Divine blessings significantly more patience is required, but Divine provisions are then durable, solid and unconditional. There is just one piece of Divine blessing which is immediately available upon request: God’s protection. Hence whereas God is helpful for providing immediate protection which may help street children get through the day, short term radical intervention can be provided by the Dark side only. This unquestioned principle is nicely summarized by the following statement which was repeatedly made by research participants: “The Devil answers quickly and easily, but God answers slowly but steady” (e.g. Denis, *bile*, interview 16-05-16). This is a clear example of *doxa*, which will be further evidenced throughout this

chapter. Opportunities that come with relations in the subfield of religion and witchcraft are thus imagined as radically different. Not only does the Devil respond fast, but his provisions are structurally unsustainable and conditional, hence providing rapid solutions to which “conditions apply” (Raoul, *bile*, interview 29-03-16). In contrast, God is argued to answer “slowly but surely” (Louise, female vendor Ksaveria market, informal conversation, 25-03-16) which means one might have to wait a few years but His provisions are then eternal and without conditions. The following interview extract (Raoul, *bile*, interview 29-03-16) reflects clear associations with God as a protector and enabler of unrestricted eternal blessing and the Devil as a provider of immediate yet limited goods.

Author: “Who is more powerful, God or the Devil?”

Raoul: “God is good, [it is him] who protects the people”.

Author: “Who answers your prayers?”

Raoul: “It is the devil who answers fast, but despite of all this, it is God who is still good”.

Author: “What is the difference between things that come from God and things that come from Satan?”

Raoul: “For the things that the Devil gives, there are always conditions, and they end quickly...sometimes they disappear fast.”

Author: “All the things that people have, is that not a fruit of their own work?”

Raoul: “You can have a small boutique, if it is God who has given it to you, you will find yourself ending up with a big shop, but if it is [a gift] from Satan it will disappear. Everything that you can do, outside of God, has no importance. Even if you work hard, put a lot of effort, it is God who gives it to you”.

As these quotes indicate, the rules and regularities pointed out clearly revolve around the (kind of) relationships children can foster across the two opposing subfields of religion and witchcraft. More precisely: they address the ways in which children (think they) can profit from these relationships: e.g. ‘God answers slowly’, ‘gifts from the Devil quickly fade’, ‘immediate solace comes from the dark side’ etc. This reveals a pragmatic stance towards relationality in the field which is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s emphasis on a field’s economic logic. However, I argue that although street children clearly have economic interests, we cannot speak about those in terms of (the pursuit of) economic capital, as Bourdieu would. I argue that in the context of the particular positionality of street children in the field, their “*relative force in the game*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 99,

emphasis in the original), the term ‘economic *capital*’ does not adequately reflect their struggle. Capital has clear accumulative associations yet there is almost none of this manifest in the life of a street child; the food she ‘accumulates’ is barely enough to keep herself from starving, the clothes she ‘accumulates’ is just one set at the time etc. etc. hence there is no surplus, as you would expect when referring to something as ‘capital’. Hence, instead of chasing economic capital, they aim for ‘coins’, or, using a Biblical term- ‘daily bread’. There are however, some noteworthy exceptions, situations in which we can indeed cautiously speak of (the accumulation of) economic capital (see section 5.3.2.2).

To sum up: *doxa* in Bukavu’s Spiritual Field reveals itself in the unquestioned belief in the oppositional existence of both God and the Devil and in the undisputed way power is ascribed to both realms of spirituality. Street children relate to both God and the Devil directly in their quest for everyday survival and they are pre-reflexively aware of the inherent rules determining opportunities and limitations of the power of both spiritual beings and, consequently, of how these beings and their earthly representatives can facilitate (the financing of) daily survival. Then, when spirituality is employed for survival we can speak of a spiritual practice of survival, which is structured by (the limitations of) the field while knowledge on how to participate derives from one’s awareness of the (internalized) rules of the field. In the next section, section 5.3, I will turn to a discussion of street children’s spiritual practice of material survival.

5.3 The spiritual practice of material survival

In this section I will explore how street children employ spirituality in their everyday quest for material survival. I will demonstrate how this ‘spiritual practice of material survival’ is quintessentially a relational practice as it is structured around relations with spiritual beings such as God and the Devil and experts (mundane representatives), including pastors, Islamic sheikhs and witchdoctors. Through these relations, street children (hope to) gain access to required resources that enable their daily survival. In this light, Bourdieu would surely analyse these relations as ‘social capital’. Social capital is defined by Bourdieu as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of [...] relationships” (Bourdieu 1986, 1). Bourdieu thus defines social capital in functional terms, as a means to an end, this end often expressed as material or economic gain (see Guest 2007). Indeed, whereas I argued above that the term economic capital does not fit the modest material resources that enable

street children to get by, their relationships with spiritual actors (beings and representatives) can be interpreted as Bourdieusian social capital. However, although I recognize the (desired) outcome of children's relationships as social capital, the analytical focus in this chapter will be on the *process* in which children seek, establish and maintain valuable relationships with spiritual others as well as their strategic reasoning and reflections behind it.

The different rules and principles that determine the respective structures of the opposing subfields of religion and witchcraft imply implications for relationality, shaping opportunities and limitations to how street children can relate to spiritual actors from both fields. I will therefore distinguish between the spiritual practice of survival in the subfield of religion (section 5.3.1) and the subfield of witchcraft (section 5.3.2). I will start with discussing relationality in the Divine subfield.

5.3.1 Fostering relations with the Divine

Discussing the spiritual, relational practice of material survival in the Divine domain, I will first discuss the way children relate to religious institutions in section 5.3.1.1, revealing their strategic shifting of denominational loyalties to maximise chances of receiving material benefits. In section 5.3.1.2 I will then explore children's more or less durable relationships with 'travelling pastors', in which they allow the 'salvation' of their souls in return for food, clothes and cash but also enjoying (fatherly) protection and care. Besides being beneficial however, section 5.3.1.3 will demonstrate that this relational practice is also a precarious practice. In the chaos of a confusing religious market place with an abundance of supply, street children have to consciously distinguish 'real' pastors from 'false' and potentially dangerous pastors. Finally, in section 5.3.1.4, I will explore children's pragmatic conversions to Islam as a way to extend their wider social network, carrying immediate material and social opportunities.

5.3.1.1 Seeking daily bread: shifting denominational loyalties

Seeking their 'daily bread', street children turn to religious, Christian institutions. Here, as in the Bible,⁴³ the word 'bread' should be interpreted not literally but as a symbol of the rudimentary basis of provision for our needs: food, shelter, clothes etc.⁴⁴ Out of 75

⁴³ See <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/6-11.htm>, accessed 28-02-2018.

⁴⁴ In our language too, bread is a metaphor for money. In a household, we call the partner who earns the bulk of the wages "the breadwinner".

research participants only 18 indicated they never attended any church (Survey, June 2016). The majority of research participants visited at least one church a week - often more - with quite a large number visiting various churches on a daily basis. Three different reasons were given for church attendance: to receive material benefits, to pray and to (be able to) steal during services. In the majority of the cases, these three reasons were put forward by each individual thus showing an interesting and quite ambiguous combination of factors motivating church attendance. When I started visiting religious institutions together with research participants, however, their relations with these institutions and their representatives (e.g. pastors, Islamic sheikhs) proved to be even more ambiguous than data from the survey, as well as interview data, had suggested. The following is an extract of my fieldnotes describing two consecutive Sundays in June (2016) on which I tried to join Batumike, a key informant, going to a service in his church.

Sunday June 19th. Today is my first attempt to join Batumike at a service in his church. Celestin, my research assistant, and I are waiting for the 19-year old street boy at the large RAW bank office in town from where we will walk together to the church. It is 7 AM and in the hour that we are waiting several other street children pass by and greet us. I recognise some of them being from Batumike's group, but Batumike himself is not showing up. Perhaps he forgot that this is where we would meet and already went to the church himself. From his descriptions during interviews I have some idea about where this particular church might be and we decide to look for it ourselves. We easily find the place as some other members of Batumike's group are sitting opposite the church on the pavement in the shadow of a mango tree, their heads close together while sitting in a circle. A hopeful sign: perhaps they are all waiting for the service to begin... When we approach the kids however I see they are bent over a sandwich bag with glue. We ask them for Batumike and according to them he is still sleeping after a heavy night.

We decide to enter the Pentecostal church, on the second floor of a story building, and wait for him inside. The church service has only just begun and people are slowly dropping in. Everybody looks extremely well-dressed... men wear suits and ties, carefully shaved and carrying the smell of perfume. Each time a new family enters, everybody turns their heads around to inspect them critically by 'scanning' their bodies from head to toe as if they were participants in a fashion show. Ushers wearing a badge with the church's name are standing on both sides of the entrance to accompany incoming members to their seat. It might be a coincidence, but the prettiest and best-dressed people

are consequently guided to the front rows, while others get a seat at the back. With growing unease I am waiting for the moment Batumike will enter, in his torn jeans and wearing flip-flops, accompanying his mother in law and his girlfriend carrying their child in her arms, as he had told me he would. Will he wear a shirt? Will they be allowed to enter? On which row will they be seated? I imagine people's high-hearted looks the moment a street kid with his illegitimate family enters the divine house of God.

Because I am keeping my eyes fixed on the door, I haven't noticed that the churches' window overlooks the opposite side of the street where Batumike has just joined his friends, sitting on the pavement, smoking and inhaling glue. When Celestin jogs me and points at this scene, I almost feel relief Batumike will be spared a confrontation with this exclusive party held in the name of religion. As soon as the believers raise a new song, we quickly leave the scene, descend the stairs and walk towards Batumike. When he sees us, the boy jumps up in surprise and for a moment it looks like he intends to run away, but when Celestin calls his name he stands still. He is visibly stoned. Sweat drops glisten on his nose; his hallmark. He starts making excuses, of course, explaining that this is not the right church. Apparently, this is the church he and his friends used to go to in the past, when they were still receiving food inside, but now the church has stopped distributing food they have changed to attend another parish. He adds he has been waiting for us at the RAW bank for hours, which I doubt.

10 minutes later Batumike accompanies us to the right church, several blocks away. He points at a large multiple story building which looks empty. There are no signs indicating we can find any church inside and the front door is locked. Batumike hastily explains the service already finished but that if we come early next week he can be here and we can meet his girlfriend and mother in law. In fact, he stresses, the pastor is already informed about our visit and everybody is looking forward to meeting me. Then he repeats what he has told me in our last interview; that the pastor said that if he, Batumike, continues to frequently attend the church like he has been doing recently, he can "even" become a singer in the church's choir. At this point, exactly like last time he told me this, an open, honest and unexpectedly innocent smile breaks through on his generally troubled face. It is fascinating to observe his whole face can be smiling the way I thought only a small child's face can express nothing but pure, spontaneous happiness. I am touched and although I question almost all the other things Batumike has told me that day I do not doubt this idea of becoming a singer in church seriously appeals to him and fills him with pride.

On my way back home, I happen to pass by the first church again, the one we wrongly visited and where the street boys still are. Then, something happens that puts everything in place. This church is located next to a party centre where workers have been cleaning the whole morning after last night's party and now they are about to throw away the left-over foods. Right at the moment I am passing, one of the workers carries a large trash bag downstairs to throw it away. The street boys, who have been waiting for this moment for hours, jump up and fight their way towards the blue garbage bag. In the battle that follows they tear the bag and a bunch of chicken bones and other meat waste scatters over the street (see figure 5.1). I suddenly realise it was nothing but a coincidence to have met Batumike this morning. The reason he was surprised to see me and even tried to run away was because he had not come to go to church with me but to await his breakfast which happened to be available right next to the church.



Figure 5.1. A street boy (not Batumike) showing the left-over foods he got hold of when the party centre next to a Pentecostal church disposed it. 19-06-16 (Source: author).

Sunday June 26th, one week later. Today is my second attempt to join Batumike at the right church. Again, he does not show up. This time however, nobody shows up, not even the usual well-groomed and well-dressed audience. The church door remains closed. When I finally start to ask people around if they know at what time the service begins everyone assures me there is no church inside this building at all. I search for another half an hour but I am pretty sure I am standing at Batumike's church. On my way home, staring through the bus's window, I can only see the boy's radiant, child-like smile when proudly telling me that one day, he might be a singer in a real church choir (data from participant observation, retrieved from field notes, June 19th and June 26th 2016).

These two Sunday mornings were very insightful. There are many things from this vignette that deserve in-depth discussion and analysis, such as the reason why Batumike lied to me about his church attendance and why the prospect of becoming a singer in church appeals so much to him. However, I will have to leave some of this to chapter 6 where I will explore the role of spirituality for children's emotional/moral survival. What I would like to focus on here are Batumike's pragmatic reasons for church attendance, seeking daily bread, as exemplary for other street children's motivations as well. In the vignette, Batumike explains he and his friends used to attend a particular Pentecostal church because food was distributed after the service. As soon as there was no more food available, the boys stayed away and looked for another church where they would receive new benefits. Furthermore, on the first Sunday described in the vignette, no church at all was visited by the children simply because they reckoned that day, the chance of acquiring food was higher at the party centre than in a church. This pragmatic and flexible approach towards church membership is further evidenced by this quote from the participatory diagramming exercise with key-informants:

“On the Street, there are many churches that come to us, proposing that we become their members... but for us, the street children, what counts are the benefits: What do we benefit from the church? We can only go to a certain church, if there is something we gain from it. We can go pray... thinking that we will get something, and when this thing [getting something] comes to an end, we will leave the church” (participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-2016).

The “gains” the children talk about here are usually a transportation fee (a small amount of money), clothes or food that is given as an “incentive” to stimulate church attendance, and, ultimately, church membership (Juma, pastor, expert interview 16-04-16). It is

stressed by the children they will leave the church as soon as these material incentives come to an end, which happens regularly, for instance when churches face financial limitations. This kind of church-hopping with the aim of maximising material benefits is widespread in Bukavu as well as in Accra and Harare, as shown from the wider GUOTS project data (Krah et al. 2016). In all three cities, it is mostly Pentecostal-charismatic churches who engage in such kinds of ‘charity’, but a few Catholic parishes have similar practices. In Bukavu in particular, the abundance of such church aid should be understood in the context of the intense competition for adherents between the numerous Pentecostal denominations within the religious subfield (see chapter 4, section 4.3.3).

Hence this calculated church-hopping of Batumike and his friends demonstrates a way in which street children profit from local denominational competition. The way they flexibly change and adapt their denominational loyalty, negotiating fluid church memberships, highlights a highly strategic and pragmatic, goal-oriented logic of the spiritual practice of material survival as a relational practice.

Next to these independent church-hopping practices in which children directly relate to churches as institutions, a second relational practice concerns children’s engagement with what I will here call ‘travelling pastors’, individuals such as Pastor Juma who embark on ‘street evangelisation missions’ (see chapter 4, section 4.3.3.3). This is what my key informants referred to in the quote above, stating that “on the street, there are many churches that *come to us*”. In the next section, 5.3.1.2, I will explore these relationships further.

5.3.1.2 Exchanging favours: befriending travelling pastors

Engaging in interpersonal relationships with ‘travelling pastors’ street children can extend their social network while at the same time expanding their possibilities for material aid. In fact, street children’s relations with this kind of spiritual actors are among their strongest and most enduring interpersonal relationships in which the children put relatively high levels of trust. Out of the total group of 75 street children, 39 responded to have regular contact with a Protestant pastor. The average number of contact was two to three times a week while some mentioned having daily contact with ‘their’ pastor (survey, June 2016). Often, these pastors visit the same group of street children every day or several days a week. They familiarize themselves with the fluid lifestyle of street children and the loose rhythm of their days, for instance visiting them as early as 5AM before the children leave their night shelters to walk to the lake-side morning markets for

their breakfast. The following is an extract of an interview (31-03-16) with Boniem, a key-informant, who gives valuable insights into his relationship with the pastor visiting them at least weekly on the streets, usually on Sundays:

Boniem: “He [this pastor] always finds us in the [abandoned] vehicles where we pass the night. When he arrives there in the morning, he starts to preach to us that we should not take drugs and we ask ourselves the question: ‘what can we do to leave drugs?’ The only condition, solution he gives us is just going to [his] church, and the name of the church is LDF, it is in Nduge (Bukavu)”⁴⁵.

Author: “Is it always the same pastor who visits you?”

Boniem: “There are many, but there is one who loves us and who approaches us”.

This interview abstract reveals that the pastor apparently knows where and when he can meet this particular group of street boys. As in the vignette in which I described my experience of an evangelisation mission in the forest in chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.3), Boniem equally emphasises the moralist tone of the pastor’s discourse, preaching here against drug use (see figure 5.2).

⁴⁵ Names of people, institutions and locations are anonymised to protect the identity of my informants. Often, Pentecostal churches have a long name which is abbreviated. Street children are then often familiar with the abbreviation only without knowing what it stands for. In this interview, Boniem mentioned the abbreviation of a particular church consisting of three letters and to remain as close as possible to the original interview, I have chosen a different abbreviation as well as a pseudonym for the church’s location which is a place inside Bukavu.



Figure 5.2. Pastor Juma preaching to Boniem and his friends on the streets (source: author).

Interestingly, Boniem discloses that this moralist preaching effects at least some contemplation, as the boys ask themselves the question what they can do to stop taking drugs. Also the spirit of evangelisation (see chapter 4, 4.3.3.3) is evident here since the pastor’s “only solution” is for the boys to attend his church. What is furthermore interesting however, despite, or arguably because of this, is Boniem’s conviction that there are many pastors but only “one who loves us and approaches us”. This should be seen as an indication of a relationship of trust which is valued by the children for whom feeling loved is the exception rather than the rule in life. Because Boniem spoke about church attendance as the only “solution” the pastor gives them, my next question revolved around the effectiveness of this solution:

Author: “So, is going to church indeed a good solution?”

Boniem: “We don’t like to go there but we force ourselves”.

Author: “Why?”

Boniem: “Often when he comes on Sundays we have ‘crisis’ [meaning: we have no money/food]; we don’t have anything, so we reflect a lot on how we are going to survive this day, because there are no activities...no commercial activities on

Sundays...and when we are about to reflect on this, the pastor arrives, and we accept [to follow him], and especially when he gives us money and he gives us a shirt, and because of the money and the shirt we go [to church], to satisfy him”.

Hence going to church for Boniem is a way to “satisfy the pastor”, to return a favour and to maintain a favourable relation and, as such, to guarantee access to clothes and money in the future. This practice of following a pastor to his respective church in return for material “incentives” (a word the pastors use) is very common among street children. Especially on Sundays when there are few viable options for ‘getting by’ this is a popular alternative to ensure one’s income for the day. These Sunday tactics are even more widespread because there is a related, second opportunity that comes with church attendance which is the possibility of stealing from the devotees. This is an even more common practice which is also done on one’s own initiative, hence without the motivation of a pastor, when street children attend church services in which a packed crowd and their concentration on the Divine word forms the perfect environment for pickpocketing. As another street boy, Rizo, explains his tactic for stealing in a Catholic church: “In the church, especially during the first mass there are old papas, old people who do not have force, when they sing, they pray, they are concentrated very much in prayer and when they dance they do not think about other things, and then it is easy [to steal]... because they pray seriously” (Rizo, *bile*, pictorial interview, 18-04-2016).⁴⁶ Being aware of the common practice of stealing in church yet uncertain how to picture this when constantly being monitored by the pastor who personally invited the children to his church and of whom they know he will give them money and clothes afterwards, I asked Boniem whether he and his friends can steal in the LDF church after being brought there by the pastor.

Boniem: “Yes because when we enter there, when the believers are going to pray, and we can steal a telephone....[or if] we take a woman’s bag to see if there is money... if there is money we take it and leave”.

⁴⁶ Although this practice of stealing in church can be exercised within the context of an interpersonal relationship with a pastor, or in the context of independent church-hopping, it is important to notice that this practice in itself is *not* a spiritual practice. As Rizo’s and Boniem’s explanations demonstrate, for the children there is no essential difference between stealing in church or stealing on a busy market, what matters are the favourable conditions of a packed, distracted crowd. Hence the fact that the church is a spiritual place is thus not enough to make stealing in this place into a *spiritual* practice of survival, although it certainly is a practice of survival.

Author: “And the pastor, does he know you are doing this?”

Boniem: “The pastor knows...in fact he knows us well. He knows our activity and he knows that we are street children and he knows where we spend the night. After having seen us stealing, the pastor knows... but he will only say to us: ‘well, it is not today that you are going to stop this activity, but little by little God is going to help you to change’” (Boniem, *bile*, interview 31-03-16).

Apparently this pastor is so dedicated to his evangelization missions he even tolerates the boys stealing in his church. Interestingly, Boniem emphasises the pastor knows them well, which is evidenced by summing up the pastor’s awareness of three things: Boniem says the pastor knows “our activity”, the pastor knows “we are street children” and he says the pastor knows “where we spend the night”. All three phrases in fact boil down to one essence which is emphasized here and that is (recognition of) the boys’ street identity that shows in a particular practice of survival (stealing) and a particular place for sleeping (not in a home). Despite the pastor’s indistinct wish for the boys to change their behaviour and convert, he demonstrates a relatively unjudgmental attitude towards their identity and lifestyle which is exceptional in Bukavu. This unprejudiced approach coupled with his continuous attempts to guide the boys to what he sees as the right path makes Boniem to argue the pastor loves him. This reveals elements of mutual trust, tolerance and respect, moral guidance, which is appreciated by the children, and arguably love and affection in children’s relations with travelling pastors. After switching off the recorder at the end of this particular interview, Boniem looked up to me and added: “you know, this pastor he really loves us a lot. When we smoke, he demands our cigarettes and he destroys them under his shoe and he says: ‘a man of God doesn’t do that’”. Hence, based on this initial interview with Boniem alone, I would have been tempted to describe his relationship with pastor Juma as a father-child-like relationship. Namely, Boniem seems to relate to this pastor as a father-figure who ‘knows him well’, who tolerates his anti-social and anti-moral behaviour whilst patiently guiding him towards salvation. However, data from participant observation together with follow-up interviews with Boniem and an informal conversation with his whole group highlighted a different, significantly less romantic, side of their relationship.

Interested to know more about Boniem’s relation to this particular pastor, I asked him if he could help me to arrange a meeting with him. The next day, Boniem brought me a tiny hand-written note with Pastor Juma’s telephone number. I followed Pastor Juma several times during his street evangelization missions. One day we were to visit Boniem and his friends in the place where they used to wash car windows on a busy junction in

town. Before we left the protected environment of his Pentecostal church the pastor anticipated the reaction of the street children when they would see him again: “as soon as they see me, they will start shouting their greetings across the street, calling me ‘Pastor! Pastor! Are you there again? Please come, do come!!’ So I don’t need to present myself, they know me, and I can start right away telling the good news again” (Juma, pastor, expert interview, 19-04-16). Reality turned out to be different that day however which made me to question the pastor’s particularly optimistic interpretation of their relationship. When we approached the group of Boniem and his friends, who were just relaxing from work while sharing some weed, they indeed started to shout as soon as they saw us approaching around the corner. Their ‘greetings’ did not show an eagerness to hear about the good news however as they were shouting, in Swahili, “Pastor, pastor, we are hungry, we are so hungry! Give us food, give us food!” (observations 19-04-2016).

Weeks later, something else happened which provided further contradicting insights into Boniem’s relationship with this pastor: their trust-relationship altered after the boys had refused the pastor’s offer to baptise them. The reasons for this refusal will be discussed at length in chapter 6 (section 6.3.2). What is important here, however, is that after this unsuccessful attempt to truly convert and baptise the boys, the pastor withdrew from the relationship, arguably having given up his efforts at salvation. Whereas Boniem had previously argued the “pastor loves us a lot”, he then says: “He [the pastor] used to like me a lot, but now that he has seen that I don’t want to get baptised, he has taken more reserve” (Boniem, *bile*, informal conversation, 18-04-16). His friends later confirm this, telling that “when the pastor discovered that we refused [to get baptised], he stopped visiting us regularly” (focus group after boys theatre 4, 28-04-16). Without wanting to question the pastor’s intentions, his withdrawal from the relationship indicates his “love” for the children was conditional. Ultimately, this reveals that although mutual trust and respect *can* be part of a child-pastor relationship, its essence revolves around reciprocity: an exchange of ‘favours’ which is supposed to make both parties better. Hence, instead of a father-childlike relationship it would be more accurate to see it as a classic patron-client relationship, based on the interrelated values of generosity (patron/pastor) and loyalty (client/child) (Ballet, Sirven, and Requier-Desjardins 2007) and a typical example of social capital in Bourdieusian practice theory. Children primarily seek ‘daily bread’ on days (Sundays) when there are few viable alternatives for getting by, and, probably, (the) fugacious (illusion of) affection and father-like care. Travelling pastors, as representatives of their respective institutions, seek to convert unsaved souls,

perhaps because they truly want street children to go to heaven, perhaps because they believe evangelisation is God's will, but certainly also because they want their spiritual business to prosper, hence, seeking a way to expand their position in the field of power.

Hence, building on an understanding of street children's relational practices, Batumike's church-hopping strategies (section 5.3.1.1) emphasize its pragmatic and flexible/dynamic character and Boniem's story highlights the notion of reciprocity/exchange. In the next section, 5.3.1.3, I will demonstrate that the relational practice is also a precarious practice that requires children to constantly be on guard and to take risks.

5.3.1.3 Thwarting deceit: distinguishing real and fake pastors

In the chaos of a confusing religious market characterised by an over-supply of spiritual goods and services, it requires constant effort to identify and select the 'right' spiritual services and collaborate with the right, genuine spiritual experts to avoid deceit. Whereas the role of the witchdoctor is based, in essence, on ambivalence, the 'truthfulness' of pastors is also often subject to doubt. The distinctive ambiguity of the spiritual world, in which things are not always what they look like, features prominently in the data from the children's theatre activities. One theatre performance for instance, nicely illustrates both some *doxic* rules about the difference between (help from) God and (help from) Satan and shows the ultimate untrustworthiness of a pastor who had appeared as very noble throughout the entire play (boys theatre 4, 28-04-2016).

The play itself is too long to recount in detail here, but the story starts with a street boy who asks a witchdoctor for a fetish to be able to steal without getting caught. Nevertheless, the boy gets caught while stealing and when the police beat him he defends himself by saying it was the fetish that pushed him to steal: "I don't have the intention to steal, but it was because I used the fetish" (street boy in boys theatre 4, 28-04-2016). The police calls the pastor who prays for the boy. This is not unusual, as the pastor affirms: "God is everywhere. It doesn't only concern a witchdoctor... it also concerns the police. When you catch someone you need to refer to the Bible!" Then the pastor turns to the boy and asks him to reveal the person who gave him the fetish, to which the boy leads the pastor to the witchdoctor. When he sees him, the pastor asks: "is it you who authorises the children to steal?" To which the witchdoctor says: "I am not a witchdoctor, I am God!". But the pastor replies: "No, you are not! God would not have all these bizarre instruments you have here", pointing to the witchdoctor's traditional skirt and a mask and

the white and red candles that surround him. The pastor delivers the witchdoctor, shouting *Toka! Toka!* (Leave! Leave!), a truly physical exercise in which the witchdoctor falls unconscious to the ground and the pastor takes his magical attributes. The witchdoctor is successfully delivered and converted to Christianity. Nevertheless, after a while, he starts to complain to the pastor about his lack of income since he converted: “since I converted I haven’t found anything, but before when I was a witchdoctor I could find money, I could find good things... but now I don’t find anything, I need to go back to my activities... that is why I have come to take back my attributes....” and the witchdoctor tries to take back his skirt. But the pastor reassures him: “no, God doesn’t help directly...it is Satan who gives easily and quick, but God gives with patience so you need to be patient, I’m going to take these things back, we’re going to sing and pray” Instead of his attributes, the pastor gives the witchdoctor a Bible and a musical instrument. Later, the pastor explains to us, the public: “Through God you can find everything. It is God who gives, if you believe in God, if you give confidence to God, he can give you everything”. Then, the witchdoctor enters the scene and starts to confess his pre-conversion sins: sacrificing both his parents who are currently in *kuzimu* and eating humans...he also admits that he still struggles to live by God’s rules that require patience before one can count on His blessings. He complains, again, to the pastor: “You talk about the Bible, well what has the Bible provided me with? And also...I have already sacrificed so many people...can God ever forgive me?” The pastor remains surprisingly calm, and behaves according to the moral ideal of a pastor, reassuring the witchdoctor: “God has already forgiven you. Before you asked for it, you were forgiven in Jesus’ name”. Precisely because of the ideal behaviour of the pastor, as a true man of God, nothing could have prepared us for the denouement of the story when we see the pastor approaching the witchdoctor and the following dialogue emerges:

Witchdoctor: *You want to pray to how many people per day?*

Pastor: *Even one thousand people.*

Witchdoctor: *Are you going to accept the condition?*

Pastor: *Yes.*

Witchdoctor: *Are you ready to sacrifice your parents?*

Pastor: *Yes.*

Witchdoctor : *Okay go to our Leader, he will give you further instructions.*

Then, the pastor, who is still holding on to his Bible, goes to the Leader, the Devil, directly, who was sitting patiently in another corner, and he kneels down in front of him.

Pastor: *I come to you to demand the power to convincingly pray for everyone.*

Devil: *I know that you have still 50 years to live on this earth, do you accept that you will live only 25 years and those remaining 25 years you will work for me, in kuzimu?*

Pastor: *Yes.*

Devil: *You need to have confidence in me. I am God. The God you used to pray to is a false God. So, from now on, when you are going to pray, you have to say "Mungu wangu Mungu wangu" ('my lord my lord') and when you do as I say, you will attract many believers.*

After each theatre play I asked the participants why they chose to perform this particular play and each time, the response was along the same lines: "Because this is our life", "This is what we live through in the streets" or "we wanted to show you the things we live". In this particular group, the response was: "We have played this scene, because we know this is the same that exists in daily life. You easily find these people... pastors who preach but they go always to the Second World, that is where they find the power to convince people" (focus group after boys theatre 4, 28-04-2016). These kinds of pastors, who attend the Second World to make a deal with the Devil are referred to as 'false pastors', as the actors of this play explained: "the pastor accepted the conditions of the Devil so he could have the power to preach and to convince all the people to come to his church and [hence] also to find money easily. He follows only his own interests. It's a false pastor" (idem).

In a discussion after another theatre play (boys theatre 6, 30-03-2016), Pierre recounts his own, real life experience with a dangerous false pastor:

"One day, I was near the lake and I saw a group of people who came to be baptised there. They called me too, and the pastor baptised me too, he put me under water and I was baptised. And he brought me a piece of Fr.200 [\$0,20] bread and you know since that day...it's like that pastor took my spiritual power, my 'luck'. Because everything that I earned before that day... I don't earn this [amount of money] anymore and I see that my head doesn't function normally [...] these pastors they are great witches... You may think this pastor can do something for you, but on the contrary: it is him who kills, who steals. In fact, the big witches are thieves [...] the pastor who argues that he can change you he himself can come to kill you in the night..." (Pierre, focus group after boys theatre 6, 30-03-2016).

This quote illustrates the deep social distrust inherent to street life. In fact it opens a window to a whole new dimension of threats. Pierre sketches a pastor-figure who pretends to represent a street kid's interest but who turns out to be a dangerous witch who can "come to kill you in the night". Pierre has been suffering from what I see as

hallucinations for a few years now but according to him, it was this false pastor who caused that “my head doesn’t function normally”.

In these two examples, pastors are believed to be secretly engaged with the competing subfield of witchcraft. In these cases, spirituality is thus still the source of their success. In other circumstances, pastors turn out to be ordinary charlatans. In the theatre play of yet another group (boys theatre 10, 30-04-2016) there is a hilarious and particularly well-performed act in which a pastor is doing exorcism on a thief. As usual in such a ‘deliverance’, the thief falls down and lays unconscious on the floor, overcome by the Divine power of God. Then, however, the pastor starts to empty the thieves’ pockets...stealing all his possessions. As so often, this scene echoes a real-life story. The boy who played the pastor, explains: “I played what I have experienced. A long time ago I went to church and there I saw a pastor praying, doing exorcism for sick people... Unfortunately when he was praying for someone, when the person was unconscious, instead of continuing praying he now started to steal from this person whom he was praying for” (Selemani, discussion after boys theatre 10, 30-04-2016). Differentiating between true and false pastors is a challenging yet crucial task for street children. As one boy nicely summarizes: “You need to discover the right and the false pastors because in the life of Bukavu there are many pastors and every single one comes with his philosophy and strategy to bewitch and deceive the people” (Ikeno, discussion after boys theatre 4, 28-04-2016). In fact, years of experience with traversing the Spiritual Field has equipped the street children with a highly developed ‘radar’ to detect and unmask false pastors. One boy reflects:

“There are good and bad pastors. Some are not there to pray for you, but only to steal from you! There is a pastor that can bring you water to drink, and he will tell you “buy this water” or, he can bring you a stone he will tell you “buy this stone and you will be blessed!” so is it true that if you buy water or a stone will you really be blessed [rhetorical question]? Someone doing that; that’s a false pastor! There was this one pastor who used to come to us and he told us that before, he also used to be a thief, like us...but that he is now converted. But he says this just in order to connect to our experiences as street children...in reality he is still a thief” (Alexandre, focus group after boys theatre 4, 28-04-2016).

These examples illustrate first of all children’s awareness of the dangers inherent to the Spiritual Field and the way they rely on the accumulation of their experiences traversing the field as marginal actors. Alexandre’s confident words indicate children seem to trust their own critical thinking, experience and intelligence in the daily challenge of avoiding

spiritual deceit. Nevertheless, their experiences highlight the highly precarious nature of children's engagements with spiritual experts, which is, of course, only one example of the precarity of street life. To deal with these and other challenges, children turn to God to ask for protection. In the next section, 5.3.1.4, I will discuss children's direct relationships with God.

5.3.1.4 Ensuring protection: praying to God

Besides employing relations with religious institutions and leaders, street children address God directly for help. A large majority of my research participants showed deep religiosity by emphasizing a particularly strong relationship with God. The full meaning of children's relationship with God, including faith, spiritual subjectivity and salvation will be discussed in chapter 6 (section 6.3). Here I want to focus on those aspects of street children's relationships with the Divine that revolve around getting-by in the here and now. These aspects are most manifest in prayer. Out of 75 street children, only three indicated they never pray to God (survey June 2016). Of the 72 street children who do pray, all indicate they pray daily with a large majority praying multiple times a day. Most children pray twice a day; before sleeping and when waking up are typical times for prayer as well as throughout the day when God's immediate guidance or assistance is needed. Data from the survey indicated prayers have various purposes; to ask God for protection, to thank Him for help received, to ask for forgiveness, to ask for a change of life, to ask assistance in avoiding temptation, to "see a miracle" (Bihemu, survey, June 2016) or to simply know whether "God is there" (Musa, survey, June 2016). Here I will focus on those prayers related to street children's immediate survival only. Interestingly, whereas street children often expect and seek help from religious institutions and leaders in the form of material aid such as clothes, food or money, help from God is imagined and experienced in the form of daily protection most of all. Informants often ask God's protection when confronted with one of the many concrete dangers inherent to street life. Common examples include solicited protection during stealing and sex work as well as during the night and against witchcraft. Christelle, a 18-year old street girl, explains how she uses prayer to ensure her well-being on the streets:

"[...] I have two activities: prostitution and theft. Before stealing, I tell God to help me so that I won't get caught, and often it works. And when I find a man, before having sex, the boy can propose me money, he will say 'I don't like condoms', so then I can pray to God to help me because I'm going to have sex

with this man, so that I don't get a sickness. And there God helps too" (Christelle, *bile*, interview 29-03-2016).

Christelle thus asks for God's help to "not get caught" during stealing as well as His protection when having unsafe intercourse. The way it is phrased, it almost reads as if she uses God as an alternative to a condom: "so then [in that case] I can pray to God". What is furthermore interesting is that Christelle underlines the effectiveness of her prayers: "[.] and often it works / and there God helps too". This attitude towards soliciting God's protection in concrete situations as well as an unshakable faith in its effects is something I encountered among all my informants (in fact, even among those three who argued they never pray). In particular praying for help to avoid getting caught while stealing and to avoid Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) was very common as well as children asking for God's protection during the night. When I asked Batumike how he was sure that God listens to him, he responded: "I am convinced that my prayers work because when I pray: 'please, wherever I go today, make sure I won't get caught' and if the day indeed passes without getting caught, I thank the good God. Others have been caught and are imprisoned that day, so I can know God listens" (Batumike, *bile*, interview 07-03-2016).

Also praying for protection against witchcraft is a common practice. Pierre explains that he sometimes goes to 'evoke' (calling spirits from *kuzimu*) at the lake side. His objective is to find money through these spirits, but because of his relative inexperience, sometimes this risky practice goes wrong and the spirits turn against him, trying to drag him into *kuzimu* with them. On these occasions, he runs to a church in Laconye, a neighbourhood of Bukavu, to pray to God for protection against the spirits he himself evoked (Pierre, *bile*, informal conversation, 25-03-16).

These prayers for immediate protection against very concrete hazards illustrate children's goal-oriented, practical and pragmatic approach to relationality, which is in line with their engagements with religious institutions and representatives. However, in contrast to those other relationships, the notion of precarity seems absent as well as the logic of exchange. Regarding the first, it can indeed be pointed out that the practice of praying is not necessarily precarious, and, as such, forms an exception. Regarding the logic of exchange however, there are more complex reciprocal dynamics in children's relationship with God that will be discussed in detail in chapter 6 (section 6.3). Yet, children's experiences with seeking God's direct protection, in particular Pierre's

narrative, reveal another aspect of the spiritual practice of survival. Pierre's escape-mechanism of running to God when his negotiations with the underworld appear to fail indicate a highly eclectic strategy, one in which street children mix and match opportunities across fields and exploit relations with both the Divine and the Dark to maximise chances of survival. Another interesting example of this can be found in the conversion stories of children who, disappointed with the Christian God, change their strategy through converting to Islam, seeking prosperity but also belonging. In the next section (5.3.1.5), I will explore these pragmatic conversions,⁴⁷ showing that these may provide children with access to a whole new network of potentially useful social relationships.

5.3.1.5 Building social networks: converting to Islam

During the course of my fieldwork five street boys converted to Islam. Qadir, Viqaas, Fadlullah, Rizo and Mohammed all belonged to the same group of street children, the group of (key-informant) Nuru, who spend their nights at the Ludja fish market. Very close to their shelter we can find the Ludja mosque. Fadlullah, who received his Muslim name upon conversion, was the first of his friends to meet Ludja's sheikh Al-Hameed when he was curiously observing men leaving the mosque after a Friday prayer. The sheikh approached him and convinced him to try their prayer and after conversion Fadlullah persuaded his friends to join. Curiosity, a search for material goods and, to a less extent, a search for belonging, were important reasons for these five boys to become Muslim. When I asked Viqaas about "the primary reason for his conversion" his short but honest answer was "hunger" (Viqaas, *bile*, interview 12-05-2016).

Two months after Fadlullah's conversion, I met him, Viqaas, Mohammed and the leader of their group, Nuru (not a Muslim) in front of the Ludja mosque. Rizo was supposed to come as well, but he cancelled last minute because, as he explained, he finally decided he would not feel comfortable joining a Muslim focus group because, at the end of the day, he was not a "real Muslim" as he had mentioned a few months earlier: "I go to the mosque to eat, but out of nature I am a Catholic" (Rizo, *bile*, interview 28-02-2016).

The newly converted Muslim boys had promised to introduce me to sheikh Al-Hameed before participating in a focus group session. We are all invited into the sheikh's

⁴⁷ I certainly do not want to dismiss the role of faith in children's religious choices, which I will focus on at length in chapter 6. Here, however, I am concerned with the strategic spiritual practice of survival which revolves around the very practical and immediate struggle to get by.

home and while I interview the religious leader, the boys fall asleep on the sheikh's comfortable couches. After the interview and before going to a local restaurant, the children insist on performing the third of their required five prayers a day first. I have to wait outside but observe, through a broken window, their perfect ablution, before they take a pious position on the soft carpets. From the subtle movements of their lips, eyes closed in concentration, I read the mumbling of prayer and it is hard to detect any inexperience in the fluid movements of their bodies.

Later, in the restaurant, Viqaas gives a different response to why he wanted to join Islam than when I spoke to him alone and he mentioned "hunger" (Viqaas, *bile*, interview 12-05-2016). He now states "I had no religion so I liked it" (Viqaas, *bile*, focus group Islam, 25-05-16). Some advantages of being a Muslim had been carefully outlined to me in previous discussions, the boys stress the benefits of receiving free food during Ramadan (Rizo, *bile*, interview, 28-02-2016), as well as outside Ramadan, when they run into any sheikh on the streets and upon revealing their Muslim identity (Viqaas, *bile*, interview, 12-05-2016). Furthermore, free clothes are distributed upon conversion (Nuru, *bile*, informal conversation 30-02-2016). However, the opportunities that come with conversion to Islam extend beyond immediate, practical aid, in part because they are not restricted to a single relationship with a sheikh. In contrast to investing in an interpersonal relationship with a travelling pastor (section 5.3.1.2), a conversion to Islam may grant access to a wider social network, and consequently, multiple opportunities for acquiring social capital. In the focus group, the boys enthusiastically discuss the future possibility of marrying a Muslim girl from the sheikh's network as well as finding a job through contacts with other Muslims who attend the same mosque. Alongside their cautious optimism, the children also stress there are rules and conditions they will have to obey before they will be able to profit from these resources. For instance, they discuss the investment of praying five times a day and the challenge of refraining from drinking alcohol, eating pork and, most crucially, the moral obligation to stop stealing. This last obligation seems particularly challenging, as I soon discovered.

When we had almost finished our meals, Fadlullah took three memory cards out of the pocket of his shirt. We all stared at his self-satisfied grin in growing awareness he stole those from the house of sheikh Al-Hameed during my interview while actually pretending to be asleep. "Those two!" shouted Nuru and he pointed at Fadlullah and Mohammed, "they steal all the time!". To which Mohammed admitted "me, when I enter the mosque, the others go and pray, but I cannot pray...I close my eyes but at the same

time I am looking in the pockets of other people...for things I can steal” (idem). I was still puzzled, both by the fact that I had not seen Fadlullah stealing right under my eyes but even more by the paradox of pragmatism and religiosity, juxtaposing stolen memory cards with the impressive performance of piety during prayer. In contrast, Mohammed seemed not impressed by the fact that his friend stole from their new patron, the sheikh who feeds them and who holds potential social capital such as jobs and brides. Instead, he supported his friend by casually sharing a piece of unquestioned truth from Bukavu: “Before any thief goes to steal, he prays: ‘God please help me so that they won’t catch me’. God helps thieves, witches and prostitutes” (idem).

Qadir had remained silent during the entire focus group. Later, in an individual interview held during Ramadan, he expressed his disapproval of his friend’s pragmatic motives for joining Islam, arguing Fadlullah, Mohammed and Vikaas are not ‘real Muslims’ because they are only in Islam to “profit” (Qadir, *bile*, interview 20-06-2016). He gave the example of occasions in which “the whites” from MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission with mostly foreign Muslim soldiers (see chapter 4, section 4.3.4), arrive at the mosque with food. During those occasions, his friends made sure to visit the mosque because they knew they can eat: “that’s why they attend the religion” (idem). In contrast, he, Qadir, dedicated himself to obeying all the restrictions of the religion, such as fasting during this time of Ramadan. Instead of confronting him with my observation that he ate a cookie I gave to him that morning, I asked him how he feels “in his heart” with his new religion.

“I am very happy, I feel good. Before, I remember the life I was living with my friends... I was stealing all the time and I put my hands in the pockets of others... so when I started to attend religion, I was asking myself the question ‘when they catch me are they not going to kill me, or wound me?’ So *out of fear I was obliged to attend religion*. When I ask myself the question ‘if they catch me when I am stealing, they can kill me’. So I started to attend religion” (Qadir, *bile*, interview 20-06-2016)

Hence, despite critiquing his friends for their pragmatic reasons for conversion, Qadir here reveals his own, essentially practical reasons for turning to Islam: his fear of being killed for stealing. What he points out is in fact a growing awareness of the inherent and serious dangers of being a street kid and, consequently, the necessity to make ‘a radical move’, here found in conversion to Islam, to reduce risks in the future and secure (a better) life. Apparently, Qadir expected Islam would give him a necessary excuse to stop stealing

as well as, perhaps, an alternative source of income. During this interview however he admitted it remains difficult to stop stealing because he had not yet found such alternative sources. Interestingly however, he has been offered significant help by the other Muslims from his mosque. According to Qadir, several of his fellow Muslims have already offered him a place in their houses. Yet Qadir has refused, arguing he prefers to stay in the streets as long as he cannot afford his own house and as long as he cannot support his own family, until, one day, God will help him. In disbelief, I responded that maybe this is God's way of helping him and accepting such offers may have the life-changing consequences he aspires. But Qadir explains his reluctance further: "If I would go to such a [host] family, the person who brought me here is the one who loves me, but not the other members of the family. And, if something would get lost in the house, they won't suspect anyone else but me...and they will accuse me of having stolen. To avoid all of this, I prefer to stay where I am; in the streets" (Qadir, *bile*, interview, 20-06-16). Despite Qadir's conscious rejection of help from his new social network, he remains very much focused on their better economic position:

Qadir: "In our mosque, there are many rich people.... Me too, when I pray, I think a lot. When I am praying, and I see everybody who is praying inside, and they are all rich, and I am living in very difficult conditions on the street, I ask myself the question 'can they not show me where they go to search for money even through witchcraft or a fetish?' Me too, I can go... to find money" (*idem*).

In fact, having seen that Islam does not provide instant wealth the way he expected it, Qadir has started to suspect his fellow Muslims of practicing witchcraft, a common suspicion in Bukavu (see chapter 4, section 4.3.4), saying "we don't know where their money comes from" (*idem*). Sheikh Al-Hameed might also have a 'fetish', Qadir is thinking aloud. Then, the boy confesses that he has already put his hopes for rapid material enrichment on something else. He explains he has been approached by a fetish-seller on the street and that he is now saving money to buy a fetish in order to give witchcraft too a try.

The stories of Batumike, Boniem, Qadir and others illustrate street children's spiritual practice of material survival which, as argued, revolves around establishing and maintaining relationships with spiritual beings and representatives. Street children exchange denominational loyalty, "satisfying a pastor" or, indeed, a sheikh, in return for (gaining access to) material benefits. Once established, we can speak of these functional

relations as ‘social capital’. Yet it was my intention to explore the full process of children’s engagements with these spiritual others, including those relationships that were ultimately not fruitful (in the long-term), such as Boniem’s relationship with pastor Juma. I have thus come to analyze this relational practice as a highly goal-oriented, intrinsically eclectic, pragmatic yet (often) precarious practice that follows a logic of reciprocity. In the next section, 5.3.2, which focuses on children’s relationships across the subfield of witchcraft, some of these aspects will surface with even more prominence and urgency. In particular the notions of reciprocity/exchange and precarity will acquire a new dimension of intensity.

5.3.2 Dealing with the Dark

Despite the *doxic* promise of eternal blessing, research participants did not always have the patience to await God’s slow response when confronted with a critical situation. Turning to the Dark side to ensure a rapid intervention to save their lives proved a frequent yet not uncontested alternative. As outlined in section 5.3.1.4, Qadir (interview 20-06-2016) showed some disappointment with the extent to which Islam had changed his life. Nevertheless, he was not desperate yet because he had already been approached by a fetish-seller and this option was something he clearly held in reserve. Relations with fetish-sellers (often also witchdoctors), witchdoctors, witches and other spiritual experts are valuable for street children because, oddly enough, they symbolize hope. To truly understand this, it should be recognized that their opportunities in the ‘first world’ (this-worldly dimension) and in the context of ‘first world relations’ are extremely restricted. Generally, street children are said to have few options in urban contexts to meet their basic needs (Shand et al 2015, van Blerk 2003, Beazley 2000). Also in Bukavu, chances for formal employment, not to mention educational opportunities, are severely limited, almost non-existent. In this highly constrained context, building relations with spiritual experts such as pastors but also witchdoctors and Freemason leaders opens up an alternative realm of social and economic opportunities.

Whereas pastors are generally more accessible also due to their visibility in the streets, witchcraft experts operate in concealed spheres. In contrast to relations with pastors for instance, which are talked about openly, street children do not tend to share their experiences with witchcraft experts. Whereas Qadir visited the sheikh together with his friends, the fact that he was approached by a fetish-seller was something only I knew. In our interview, he underlined the individualistic, secret nature of these kind of

operations: “Even the Sheikh..[may use a fetish] we don’t know what he uses to have money...so I am going to search for a fetish. [A fetish] is the secret of each person, we pray together, but another person can’t tell you where he goes to find money” (interview 20-06-2016). In this context it is evident to perceive relations with witchcraft experts as something of high value, as they quite literally provide the holder access to alternative sources (of money).

Nevertheless, whereas nearly all of research participants indicated they foster relationships with the Divine (data from survey, June 2016) the number of children that admitted to dealing with the Dark was considerably smaller, with for instance ‘only’ 20 (out of 75) children stating they have experiences with fetish use. There are several explanations for this. First, as I will illustrate further in this section, there are higher investment costs for these dark negotiations and inherent risks are substantial. Not everyone is willing to take these risks and to pay a high price for such a rapid solution. A second reason concerns morality. Dealing with the Devil is anti-moral from a Christian perspective with which the children’s *habitus*, as Bourdieu would say, is “inculcated”. A third reason relates to children’s access to the subfield of witchcraft, which is limited.

Data from the basic information survey supports the argument that witchcraft is a concealed sphere. In total, there were three different questions in the survey asking for experiences with fetish-use and Freemason, practices most associated with acquiring material benefits in the Dark kingdom in contrast to ‘witchcraft-to-kill’ for instance which is explained as doing harm or taking revenge without necessarily resulting in monetary gains (see chapter 4). The three specific questions were: 1) “Have you ever used a fetish?”, 2) “Have you ever practiced Freemason?” and 3) “Have you ever been to *kuzimu*?”. These were clearly set-up as ‘yes-or-no’ questions and in the case of an affirmative answer I would ask the participant to give details/experiences. Instead of simply responding with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ however, quite a large number of children replied with the phrase “no, but I want to”. In fact at least 26 participants gave this answer for at least one of these three questions but the real number is probably (much) higher since this option was not officially included as a possible answer and I only started keeping track of this particular response after I heard it several times. When asked further, these respondents always explained they were still looking for a person to “initiate” them into these practices. Specific materials and knowledge are required to practice witchcraft and this know-how is transferred within a teacher-pupil relationship. These relationships will

be explored in detail in this section. I will start with discussing the most popular spiritual relationship in this realm, which is those with witchdoctors.

5.3.2.1 A little help: buying from witchdoctors

Relationships with witchdoctors are valued because only through them can one have access to the highly desired ‘goods’ of fetish objects. Research participants indicated they invest a lot of time and energy in selecting the right witchdoctor and building a relationship with him (rarely a ‘her’). Sometimes they travel even outside Bukavu to find the best witchdoctor, a reminder of the ‘rural’ connotations of witchdoctors, as outlined in chapter 4 (section 4.4.1). 15-year old Rizo for instance was approached by a witchdoctor from the island of Igui, located in lake Kivu between the cities of Bukavu and Goma. This particular witchdoctor roamed the streets of Bukavu to recruit new clients. Convinced by his power, Rizo travelled all the way to Igui to visit the witchdoctor in his home where he bought a special fetish said to cure *mapepo*, bad spirits, as well as one to facilitate stealing. As we were talking, Rizo showed a deep, round scar on his shoulder; it is the place where the witchdoctor cut into his flesh to insert the herbs before cauterizing the wound. It has left a deep scar and it hurt for more than a year, says Rizo (*bile*, interview 23-05-2016, see figure 5.3). At the time of our interview, three years later, the power of the fetish has long ‘expired’, which is not uncommon for fetishes. Rizo considers buying another one.



Figure 5.3. The place where Rizo’s fetish was inserted in his flesh, leaving a scar. Source: author.

Another research participant, Yanick, travelled three times to Uvira, a city 120 kilometers south of Bukavu to search for a witchdoctor. According to him, there are “no real witchdoctors in Bukavu” (Yanick, *bile*, interview 12-05-2016). In his case, it was a witchdoctor he already knew who guided him to yet a “bigger witchdoctor”, which shows the importance of being part of a spiritual network. Yanick bought a powerful fetish which consisted not of inserted herbs but a small bundle with dried herbs he used to carry under his clothes. Interestingly, Yanick lost his fetish again in the context of another relation with a spiritual expert. Twice, a traveling pastor discovered his fetish. He refused to hand it over to the first pastor but the second pastor offered him \$500 to hand over the fetish, an offer he could not refuse. Apparently, the pastor then put the fetish on show on his altar, a trophy of God’s power over the Devil’s, but the first night the object disappeared in a miraculous way (*idem*). This reminds us that whereas both relations with pastors and witchdoctors can be beneficial to street children, the spiritual power they have belongs to different, competing realms.

As explained above (section 5.3.1.3), relations with pastors are certainly not worry-free, yet the figure of the witchdoctor in particular is perceived as obscure and interacting with him carries serious risks. In fact, this ambivalence of basically all types of spiritual experts featured strongly in data from the theatre activities. The following extract of a theatre play (boys theatre 5, 30-03-2016) nicely illustrates important characteristics of the roles of both pastors and witchdoctors on the street as well as the complex intertwinement of opportunities and threats linked to these figures as well as other important actors on the street.

The play starts with a street boy stealing money from a ‘patron’, a rich man with high social status, recognizable in the play by a long coat, sunglasses and a shoulder bag. The child manages to steal but he gets caught by a member of the *Volontaires*, ‘Volunteers’, a civilian policing group consisting of unemployed males who - voluntarily - operate under the command of the Mayor tackling public order offences. Although the patron quickly discovers that he was robbed, the actual ‘arrest’ in which the street child gets beaten heavily by the *Volontaire* (the *Volontaires* are known in real life for using excessive violence against street children) happens outside his field of vision. The patron therefore decides to visit a pastor, to arrange a solicited prayer to help get his money back. He finds the pastor inside a church and the man of God advises the patron to let the case rest and to forgive the thief.

Meanwhile, the *Volontaire* has searched all over the body of the street child but cannot find the stolen money. He therefore takes the street child to a witchdoctor specialized in identifying thieves. The witchdoctor is sitting in a corner of the room, surrounded by white and red candles and wearing a mask and a traditional skirt. When the *Volontaire* and the street boy continue fighting inside his house, he silences his clients by saying in a low and impressive voice: “I am a witchdoctor, a traditional witchdoctor. From the village. Come to me, I will identify the person who stole money...but calm down first because in my place we don’t make noise so please sit down. Now tell me how this problem started”. The *Volontaire* explains the situation, and the witchdoctor then performs a ritual that includes beating and torturing the child as well as sprinkling magic water on both the child and the *Volontaire*. The purpose is to identify the perpetrator who will be the person who shows most fear. The boy indeed starts to become really afraid, but the *Volontaire* too, and at that point, money starts to appear from the boy’s pockets as well as from the pockets of the *Volontaire*. The witchdoctor concludes: the child stole, but the *Volontaire* stole a part of the money back from the child. An astonished *Volontaire* starts to complain, but the witchdoctor says: “if you think I am crazy...well, go to the pastor! He will pray for both of you and show you that I am telling the truth!” The two leave and go to the pastor, who is actually busy delivering the patron whom he identified as a Freemason...

While the pastor listens to the story of the *Volontaire* and the street child, the witchdoctor suddenly walks into the church and takes a seat next to the pastor. A dialogue between the pastor and the witchdoctor follows:

Witchdoctor: *I am going to stay here to listen to the problems of these people*

Pastor: *This is my place, the church, I don’t like to see a witchdoctor here!*

Witchdoctor: *Well, it is me who sent these people to you in the first place, so why do you chase me away?*

Pastor: *I don’t like people like you!*

Witchdoctor: *Why? I heal witchcraft and all kinds of sicknesses.*

Pastor: *It is me, God, who heals everything. I can pray for you and you too will be healed.*

The situation gets out of hand and the witchdoctor attacks the pastor. The pastor is stronger however and he submits the witchdoctor to a thorough exorcism, another heavily physical confrontation in which the pastor loudly proclaims *Jina ya Jesu! Jina ya Jesu!* “In the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus!” While the pastor discovers the witchdoctor

is actually a brother of the street child whom he provided with a fetish for stealing in the first place, the patron gets impatient and turns to us, the public, when saying: “clearly, the pastor doesn’t know how to search for my money. I will take justice in my own hands” to which he starts beating the anxious street child. The pastor regains order on the stage however and summons everyone to silence. He says: “let’s please stay quiet so I can pray and everybody will stop with these affairs.... Most of all we pray for this child because the Devil is in him, that’s why we need to pray. In fact, all street children have the Devil inside them, they have bad spirits....but (directing himself to the street child here) from today you should not continue with stealing!” (data from boys theatre 5, 30-03-2016).

This fascinating part of a theatre play shows a deeply complex and utterly confusing social-spiritual reality in which nothing is what it seems and nobody is what he looks like. The civil police agent is himself a thief, the innocent victim is a dangerous Freemason, the same witchdoctor who provided his brother with a fetish is paid to later accuse, beat and torture him. Whereas there appears to be collegiality at first between the witchdoctor and the pastor (“If you don’t believe me, go and ask the pastor”) their relation turns into bitter rivalry and a spiritual battle later on. Whereas the pastor at first pleads to “rest the case” and “forgive the thief” he finally decides the child is in serious need of salvation and he identifies himself as God.

Explaining the content of the theatre, Pierre explains: “I see this in my life. When I steal things there are people who will go to the witchdoctor because of me. Only because God didn’t want me to die yet, I am still here. But there are people looking for a fetish at the witchdoctor’s so I can die... But as you see, I am still alive” (Pierre, focus group after boys theatre 5, 30-03-2016). This fear of becoming a victim of a witchdoctor’s, or a witch’s, solicited curse after having stolen from someone is a daily reality for the street children. It illustrates situations in which children are the subjects of other people’s spiritual practices (see chapter 4, section 4.5). Whereas this is a serious threat, the children may use this same technique themselves, turning it into an opportunity in which they are the actors employing relations with witchdoctors in the pursuit of their own interests. To my question whether one of the participants has been to a witchdoctor yet, the same boy, Pierre, again answers:

Pierre: “Yes, me. I went to a witchdoctor one day because of money that I had stolen...I hid money in my house, and then someone else took it, so a friend

brought me to the witchdoctor. The witchdoctor told me to take off my clothes and shoes and he asked me the question what I wanted [from him]. So I told him I need to find the person who stole from me. Then he asked me the question whether I wanted him to kill the perpetrator or to just make him very sick. I responded I only wanted to *know* who it was. So he took eggs and a candle and the started to evoke and then he told me: ‘go to your house and you will find your money’. By that time, my big brother had heard the news that I went to a witchdoctor and he became really afraid and when I got home he told me ‘here is your money’ [which he had stolen from me]. So because of fear he gave it back to me, that is how my problem was solved” (idem).

In this case, Pierre was fortunate to have a friend who could introduce him to a witchdoctor, who - although indirectly - solved his problem for \$15. Not all experiences with witchdoctors’ services are equally positive however. As the theatre indicates and as I discussed in chapter 4, witchdoctors are seen as highly controversial figures. After hearing Pierre’s story, another participant, Akida, shared his own experience with a witchdoctor. He narrated how he and his friends once stole a bag with a large sum of money. They did not trust the source of this money, suspecting it to come from *kuzimu*, and one of his friends suggested to visit a witchdoctor for advice. The witchdoctor indeed confirmed the dangerous source of the money and advised the boys to leave the bag with him to return in three days. When they returned in three days, almost nothing was left of the money...(Akida discussion after boys theatre 5, 30-03-2016).

In this theatre play, only the integrity of the pastor remained unchallenged. In the discussion organized after the theatre I therefore asked Akida why he consulted a witchdoctor instead of a pastor to solve his real-life problem with stolen money. He answered: “The pastor has his power and the witchdoctor also has his power. The pastor can pray for you and he can pray against bad spirits but in case someone wants to kill you or someone wants to do something bad to you it is the witchdoctor who can save you. That is why we [street children] believe more in the witchdoctor than in the pastor” (Akida, focus group after boys theatre 5, 30-03-2016). Akida here differentiates between two types of spiritual power: a pastor’s power to pray and chase away bad spirits (‘deliverance’) and the anti-witchcraft power of a witchdoctor who can reverse a spell. Both types of spiritual services are very often demanded by street children. Because they are so often involved in theft they face a disproportionately high risk of being cursed by someone who holds the witchcraft power-to-kill hence they are often in need of deliverance to ‘reset’, as it were, their spiritual aura. But, as Akida stresses, the power of a witchdoctor is more highly valued because it can save a street child’s life.

Perhaps because of this high demand, prices for these kind of spiritual services are also relatively high. Whereas the exchange of favours in relationships with travelling pastors is relatively straightforward and transparent, the buying of a fetish is more complicated and risky. Children argue there are inherent rules and ‘conditions’ they have to obey not just in order for the fetish to work, but also to keep themselves safe. For instance, children are often threatened by witchdoctors that if they reveal the secret (of their fetish) they will become mad or may even die. Others are told that if they accidentally lose the fetish, they will be punished spiritually with madness.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the most popular kind of fetish, a charm that facilitates trouble-free stealing, comes with relatively few conditions of use and it is still relatively accessible compared to other kinds of fetishes, as some witchdoctors are said to sell these theft-charms on the market. Hence whereas one can simply buy this kind of fetish, others demand a higher investment. Girls seem to be particularly vulnerable in this sense because the fetish they need, a charm to attract men, functions by more complex rules. In fact, fetish-use in general is gendered, as literally all my female research participants indicated they use, or have used, such a fetish to compete with their colleagues who also use a fetish (see chapter 4, section 4.1.4, ‘the Mirror of Sin’). In comparison, only approximately 20 of the (61) boys indicated to have experiences with fetish use. The most common ‘female fetish’ aims to facilitate success in sex work. It often takes the form of herbs that can be mixed with powder or other beauty products. Girls also told me about special water, used to wash corpses, which possesses certain powers. In other situations, the girls’ fetish can also be inserted in their blood.

The conviction with which the girls believe in the power of their fetish takes *doxic* dimensions. When I asked Belle how she knew that it is because of the fetish that she earned a lot of money through sex work instead of because of her attractiveness, she replied: “Among us, there are girls who are very beautiful, so we are in competition. There are some who are very beautiful but still they don’t have men. That pushes them to use a fetish to attract men. So I have more trust in the fetish, because through the fetish I gain clients, I don’t trust my beauty” (Belle, *bile*, interview, 17-06-16).

However, as said, there is generally much more investment required for a female fetish than for a male fetish. Gloria (*bile*, interview, 29-02-2016) told me about one of her

⁴⁸ Because of this it took a lot of time before research participants trusted me with their witchcraft secrets, and probably, many of them never told me about their fetish use.

friends, who was told by a witchdoctor to ‘sacrifice’ her own child. The girl obeyed this rule and killed her baby in order to increase her luck in sex work. The two theatre plays performed by only girls narrate their search for a fetish and the inherent conditions of exchange.

In the first play (girls theatre 1, 29-04-16), two street girls ignore and even insult a pastor who tries to convert them and visit a witchdoctor instead. They are asked to sacrifice two young babies in exchange for the fetish (for which the girls use their own babies they brought to the play). The witchdoctor applauds them for their sacrifice, saying: “okay good! you have realised the condition... now I will give you the fetish. I’m going to put this [powder with herbs] on your breasts and on your vagina it will have the power to attract a lot of men!” After they have been given the fetish, the girls enthusiastically share their story with a group of female friends. They get visited by the pastor again, whom they insult as a ‘false pastor’: “don’t come here anymore to preach! You are a thief, you don’t have any job, that’s why you come to us!”. A physical fight between the girls and the pastor follows, to which the pastor falls down and the girls conclude: “He said he is real, but he is a false pastor because a real pastor can never fall!”. Meanwhile, however, the witchdoctor who provided the girls with a fetish starts to demand the sacrifice of even more children... The girls get afraid and flee, but that night, when they are asleep, the witchdoctor enters their house and kills one of them. Awaking to the dead body of her friend, the second girl jumps up, starts to scream and runs towards the house of the pastor she fought the other day.

This script reveals, again, the ambiguous reputation of witchdoctors and the high investment associated with this kind of fetish. In the girl’s theatre group the witchdoctor who demanded such a high price for his services was referred to as a ‘witch’. Using this term indicated moral evaluation; a witchdoctor, despite his dubious status, was still regarded as a relatively innocent spiritual expert who “cannot kill you if you don’t give him money” (Francine, *bile*, interview 12-05-16). A witch, in contrast, was associated with killing out of ‘pure evilness’ (see chapter 4, 4.4.3) as we witness in the girl’s theatre play. Generally, in street children’s instrumental relations with the Dark kingdom, both investment and risks tend to increase proportionally when the spiritual partner gets ‘darker’. Whereas one can relatively easily negotiate the price of a theft-charm with a witchdoctor on the market, relations with witches often involve a human sacrifice. The climax of dealing with the Dark is negotiating directly with the Devil, for which one has to enter his sinister underworld, *kuzimu*. In the next section, section 5.3.2.2, I will discuss

these kind of negotiations, which are characterized by extremely high investment and high risks. It is in this sphere of exchange that we can cautiously speak of economic ‘capital’ that is pursued.

5.3.2.2 *Thinking big: negotiating with the Devil*

“Njo ninajua kama kwako njo kunatoka kila kitu na wewe njo unajibia mbio mbio kuliko Mungu”

“This is what I know: all things come from you and it is you who gives quicker than God” (Prayer to Satan, taught by a Freemason teacher to Nuru and Rizo, interview Nuru, 31-03-16).

It is a Sunday afternoon. Nuru and Boniem accompany me to their witchdoctor who lives outside the city. To break our trip, Nuru suggests we could pay a visit to his grandmother whose house is along our route to the witchdoctor’s place. Nuru has regular contact with his grandmother and he tries to bring her some money every now and then. She is, in fact, the only person who has ever taken care of him. Nuru’s biography is particularly tragic, as I knew from a life history interview (Nuru, *bile*, interview, 11-03-16). His mother was an alcoholic and could not take care of him and his three siblings. Nuru is the only one who survived years of severe neglect. His mother used to carry loads at the harbour, but she spent her tiny salary on alcohol. As a small boy, Nuru used to accompany her, carrying around his youngest brother while his mother worked. After her work, she would come home very late, or not at all. She got pregnant three times after Nuru without knowing who the father of her children was. The second oldest child, the boy after Nuru, died as a baby because their mother let him fall from the stairs. Nuru’s sister suffocated because their mum laid on top of her in her bed, too drunk to notice. Finally, his youngest brother, the one he used to carry around, died at a young age because his mother forgot to breastfeed him (Nuru, *bile*, interview 11-03-16). At that time, Nuru got some attention from his grandmother, who was also an alcoholic however and unable to work because she suffers from elephantiasis. Instead, she used to, and still does, travel to the city centre to beg. Other family members had tried to help Nuru’s mother to overcome her addiction. They had brought her, for instance, to a Room of Prayer to chase out the demons that surely possessed her. But nothing helped and after the death of her fourth child, when Nuru was 12, the other family members were fed up with the woman’s behaviour and

they chased her out of the house while yelling she should send her living son, Nuru, to his father. When Nuru heard this and without knowing where his father was (whom he believed to have died), he realised he was a burden to the family and he decided to start living on the streets. “That’s why” Nuru concluded his life story, “I have no one left to cry with, no-one to share my problems with, I eat badly, I rarely sleep... Staying in the streets is horrible. If only my mother could take back her personality I could leave the streets and live again with her” (Nuru, *bile*, interview 11-03-16). Nuru’s mother is still alive. Sometimes he gets a glimpse of her at the harbour where she is, drunk, carrying loads.

That afternoon, we find Nuru’s grandmother resting against the wall of her tiny house, amidst many small children walking bare foot. She has her elephantiasis leg stretched out in front of her. I try to hide my growing unease, remembering our last interview, in which Nuru said he considered ‘sacrificing’ this woman in a last desperate attempt to escape his miserable fate.

I started the introduction of this thesis (chapter 1, section 1.1) with narrating Nuru’s venture into *kuzimu* where he was introduced to a “sort of King” by a spiritual mediator. This sort of King had presented the various ‘options’ to him: “different kinds of richness to choose from: Richness of money, cars, or you could choose to become a professional football player, or singer... they could give you work, you could become a ‘Big boss’ or you could get all the wisdom from the world” (Nuru, informal conversation, 31-03-16). Crucially however, these are no free ‘options’ - only the gifts of God are free - and Nuru has to sacrifice the person he loves most in exchange for the rapid enrichment *kuzimu* can offer: “I have to sacrifice the person I love a lot, if there is a mad person in your family, you cannot sacrifice him, they [those from *kuzimu*] do not accept that. Or any person you don’t love at all, they won’t accept that, only the person you love a lot [...] I love my grandmother a lot. I consider her as my mother, it was her who raised me” (Nuru, *bile*, interview 11-03-16). I tried to convince Nuru to re-consider the consequences of his choices, but he said: “When I speak with my friends, and everybody says ‘my father has given me a house’, ‘my father has given me this’, but me...I don’t have that kind of souvenir [of my father] so I say to myself, well, either way, I go to Satan, who can give easy and quicker than God” (*idem*). Emphasizing that he has searched everywhere for a job, Nuru reflects: “I can ask for work... but people won’t give it to me because I am a *maibobo* (street child). So I am desperate.” (*idem*).

In this section I will elaborate further on the experiences of Nuru and others who have chosen to start negotiations with *kuzimu*, a place that is imagined as the epitome of evilness; a last resort for the most desperate ones. Access to *kuzimu* is highly restricted. A more experienced *kuzimu*-goer needs to explain the route and preferably accompany first-time travellers and only when one has committed, at least, to a human sacrifice, will the gate be opened. In the previous section I discussed the importance of knowing (where to find) witchdoctors. Here, I will demonstrate that it is more challenging and more highly valued to have access to a Freemason-initiator: someone who can take you to *kuzimu* (see chapter 4, section 4.4.4 for the definition of Freemason and the difference between Freemason and witchcraft). Among my informants, there were some boys and girls who had visited *kuzimu* in the past - most of them as witches, not as Freemasons - often in the context of a 'forced initiation' by an elderly family member when they were still very young (see chapter 6, section 6.2.1). At the time of my fieldwork, Nuru and Rizo were the only ones from whom I heard that they were right in the process of making a pact with the Devil whereas there were many others who indicated they were waiting for someone to initiate and accompany them to the Second World but who had not yet found their initiator. To prepare for their meeting with an initiator, however, some of them were studying Freemason.

Nuru started his *kuzimu* venture together with his friend Rizo. They belong to the same group of street children who spend their days and nights at the lake shore. The boys met their Freemason-initiator, Mr. Jamal, on the streets. According to Mr. Jamal himself, with whom I spoke a few months after the initiation, he initiated them out of altruistic compassion, as he phrased it: "well, I saw them, I loved them and I wanted to initiate them because they didn't have anything else to do...they understood and so [it was to] initiate them so they could find something" (Mr. Jamal, Freemason teacher, interview, 05-07-16). Mr. Jamal denied the children paid him money for his services, arguing they only give him some money "to buy clothes" (*idem*). In fact, the reciprocal relationship between Rizo and Nuru and Mr. Jamal is more complex. Nuru had explained they were 'friends' and that he sometimes gives Mr. Jamal a telephone he had stolen (Nuru, *bile*, interview, 31-03-16). At the same time, Mr. Jamal had lied to them about his home address, as one day the boys stood in front of a bare piece of land when they wanted to visit him (Rizo, *bile*, interview, 23-05-16). At the time I first met Mr. Jamal he had asked the boys for \$50 each so he could introduce them to a Freemason-church in Bukavu.

Before I met Mr. Jamal, Rizo and Nuru had given me a short summary of his biography, explaining that he “gained his own life” by sacrificing his first wife to *kuzimu*. The day of their first meeting, Mr. Jamal advised the boys to search for candles of different colours: red, white and blue. It took some time before Nuru and Rizo managed to find the candles, as there was a general scarcity of candles in Bukavu. This scarcity was explained by Nuru by stressing “there are a lot of children who ask to be taken to *kuzimu*...” (Nuru, *bile*, interview 31-03-16). Due to the high demand, prices for candles had gone up to \$2.50 for one candle, and Nuru had succeeded earlier than Rizo to save this amount of money so he was the first to be taken to *kuzimu* while Rizo awaited his friend at the lake’s shores (see the opening vignette in chapter 1, section 1.1 for Nuru’s experience). In the weeks after Nuru’s visit to *kuzimu*, Rizo was also saving money to buy candles. We met several times to discuss his plans. He told me he was planning to sacrifice his brother Ricky who lives with him on the streets, or, if “they” won’t accept this, a sister he has lost contact with (Rizo, *bile*, interview 18-04-16). He also explained more about the ‘conditions’ by which Freemasons have to live when the pact is made. Nuru had already been given the condition to never buy clothes that are more expensive than \$15, not even when he becomes a millionaire with Second World wealth. Rizo narrated about a well-known ‘patron’ in Bukavu, who has chosen for ‘richness of commerce’ instead of ‘richness through stealing’. This man is a successful business-owner now but he can never sleep on a real bed (Rizo, *bile*, interview 18-04-16). Gloria, a street girl who was also interested in *kuzimu*, had told me about a rich Freemason who did not have a table in his house and who cannot feed his own children. Another example concerned a woman who had sacrificed her fertility and who had been given the condition to have sex only with young boys (Gloria, *bile*, interview 29-03-16).

When Rizo had finally found the \$5 he needed to buy candles, Mr. Jamal told him to travel to *kuzimu* alone and that he would join him there. Before leaving, however, he warned Rizo to not be afraid when he embarked on this journey, because if he would show fear, he could either become mad or die (Rizo, *bile*, interview 23-05-16). The risk of dying when showing fear when dealing with the dark is commonly acknowledged and reveals enormous (believed) risks of these kind of ventures. Rizo narrated his experience of going to *kuzimu* for the first time:

“As you know, I was lacking those \$5, but I found them and I searched for the candles. It was at two o’clock at night. After doing this [crossing his arms in front of his body in the form of a cross] I lighted four candles, all red. I closed my eyes

for evocation and soon afterwards I saw the path...the water had disappeared...it split in two parts with a path in the middle. I started walking on this path and when I looked behind me, the path had disappeared behind my back... I had to walk very far. Then I saw two people who came towards me to guide me further, one boy and one girl and they were both naked. We walked over a red carpet and there was something that looked like a gate. We entered and I was asked to take my shoes off and to take a seat. The boy and girl that had brought me there disappeared and I found myself in front of an old man. But not just an old man, he was a really really old man. And this man asked me who had been my guide, the one who told me the way to the Second World [...] so I mentioned the name of Mr. Jamal and his address although I knew it was a fake address.... And then the old father called Mr. Jamal right away and he asked him: ‘do you remember this little boy?’ And, to my surprise, Mr. Jamal said ‘no I don’t remember him’. So I told him ‘uh you don’t remember me? One day you taught me how to come here and it was there and there’ and then he suddenly remembered me and he said ‘yes I remember you’. And the old man now turned towards Mr. Jamal and he said: ‘ok, you have done a good job! You can leave now, I will stay with the small boy’. So Mr. Jamal left and I stayed there with the old man. And the old man asked me the question: ‘What did they tell you? Do you like witchcraft or do you want to become a Freemason?’ I answered I wanted to become a Freemason. Then he asked me ‘is your father still alive?’ I said no.. he asked me ‘is your mother still alive?’ I said no. So he continued: ‘since you don’t have the right person to sacrifice, neither your father nor your mother, in your heart what are you going to sacrifice?’. And I replied: ‘my arm. My right arm’... but he refused the offer. He said ‘you offer your right arm? I don’t like it [...] you can choose between two things: your eyes or your sex.’ So I reflected for a minute and I thought that if I sacrifice my eyes I won’t be able to see...so that perhaps it is better to sacrifice my sex. It means I won’t be fertile anymore. I accepted to sacrifice my sex I said ‘take my sex’. To which the man told me: ‘okay, you can go back [to the first world] and come back Saturday at two o’clock in the morning’” (Rizo, *bile*, interview 23-05-16).

Interestingly, when the ‘chief’ (boss) from *kuzimu* discovers Rizo cannot sacrifice his parents, he does not ask him for a sibling but rather negotiates over a body part. When I speak to Rizo back in the First World he seemed relieved about his negotiated sacrifice. He even optimistically reflected about the option of marrying a (former street) girl who has children already and who would not mind not having any more children with him. What is furthermore interesting is the fact that Rizo’s initiator does not remember Rizo at first when he is asked to verify the boy’s identity, something that highlights the child’s marginal positionality in the wider spiritual network, particularly in the context of his (dependency-) relation to a more powerful other (Mr. Jamal). Also because Rizo is referred to as the “small boy” by the ‘chief’ (boss) this could be interpreted as a manifestation of hierarchy showing Rizo’s inferior, subordinate position in the Dark Kingdom. Mr. Jamal, in his turn inferior to the ‘chief’ (boss), gets complimented with his recruitment of Rizo and is sent away. Whereas Mr. Jamal pretends to not even know Rizo

in the Second World, he carefully follows up on him and Nuru in the First World, urging the boys to make the human sacrifice they promised. These efforts reveal a relatively durable relationship that extends beyond initial initiation and to which the notion of reciprocity is central, as we learn from Nuru's words:

“Mr. Jamal came to see us lately and he said: ‘eh you small ones, it looks like you have forgotten what we are doing!’ I told him I had not forgotten, but that I wanted to take it slowly a bit, because of the fear I had when we went there [in *kuzimu*]. So I reflected a bit. He told us, ‘small ones, you need to have a hard heart of resistance, you shouldn’t be afraid’. I was with Rizo when he gave us this advice; he told us ‘you know in life you need to have the spirit of giving before receiving, when you want to have something, you too you need to sacrifice a person. Just accept to sacrifice people, and then you’re going to find the money you are looking for. If you want to gain life, find good things, you also need to sacrifice good things’” (Nuru, *bile*, pictorial interview 20-06-16).

This quote from a Freemason teacher provides interesting insights into the kind of exchange that underlies children's relationships with dark spiritual actors. It can be argued it highlights a gift-based logic of exchange, showing that no good things are for free and everything comes at a proportionate, market-regulated price. Whereas \$25 dollars, a few minutes of physical pain and a big scar are enough investment to acquire a theft-fetish, major ‘capital’ such as a life-long supply of money requires a more fundamental loss. This system first of all alludes to the theory of the Maussian gift (Mauss, [1954] 2011). Secondly, in particular the notion of a human sacrifice reminds us of the theory of ‘limited good’ which was first explored by the anthropologist George Foster (1974). As explained in chapter 4 (section 4.4.1), witchcraft has always been concerned with (people's ideas about) production, exchange and consumption (Crapo 2003 on cargo cults; Moore and Sanders, 2001). The wide-spread metaphors of witches as ‘eating’ their victims (e.g. de Boeck, 2008; Geschiere, 1997) reveals the idea of witches as consuming disproportionate amounts of ‘good’ while there is only a certain finite amount of wealth, health and happiness to go around (hence, ‘limited good’, see chapter 2, section 2.6.2). If someone is particularly successful, fertile and fortunate in life, there is thus an assumption that they have profited at someone else's expense. Sacrificing a close relative is not just a significant emotional loss for the Freemason him/herself, but he/she is clearly profiting at the victim's expense. This becomes most clear when research participants explained that the people they sacrifice will be put to work, eternally, in *kuzimu*. In the opening vignette in chapter 1 (section 1.1) in which I described Nuru's venture into the

underworld, he describes seeing “people carrying luggage on their heads” (Nuru, *bile*, interview 31-03-16). These are the innocent victims of Freemason’s greed, sacrificed by their wives, husbands or children and put to work to pay for their relative’s wealth. Perhaps, more symbolically, we could also perceive these victims as carrying the heavy and eternal load of their relatives’ sins.

There is a second meaning of ‘limited good’ in this context however. *Doxa* indicates God answers slowly and hence “for all the things that come from God you first have to suffer” as Francine puts it (Francine, *bile*, interview 12-05-16), yet His blessings, when finally given, are endless, unconditional and unrestricted. In contrast, the ‘good’ from the Devil comes quickly and easily but with severe conditions and limitations attached. This ‘good’ is limited in two ways: first, there are conditions that regulate *how* Dark money can and cannot be spent; for instance it cannot be spent on expensive clothes, food or a bed (the three things a street child primarily lacks) or it cannot be shared with one’s offspring. Secondly, it is limited in time. Being life-long sounds better than it is here because in Freemason, one has to give up half of the remaining years of expected life to spend the other half in *kuzimu* working to facilitate the material quest of newcomers. As Rizo explains: “So when you do this, the years you still have to live are halved. So for instance, he [the Devil] knows that you still have 20 years to live, now it means you have 10 years left. In those 10 years, you have a lot of money, you will be very rich. But then you die, and you go there, you go to *kuzimu*, and then you will have to be working for other people. Because it is they [from *kuzimu*] who will be looking for money for you” (Rizo, *bile*, interview 28-02-16).

Clearly, the things from the Devil do not offer ultimate solace, perhaps not even ultimate happiness during those years of earthly richness, as Gloria reflects about Freemasons: “They are happy only during the day, in the night they have no happiness...they work a lot in the night to respect the conditions...” (Gloria, *bile*, interview 29-03-16). Initially, Rizo seemed to be at ease with his prospects: “punishment is still far away [...] since I go to *kuzimu* and I do all these witchcraft things, there won’t be no paradise for me” (Rizo, *bile*, interview 18-04-16). When I asked him whether he has peace with that idea he responded: “it is not a question of peace, it is a question of profiting from life here as long as I live” (*idem*). Nevertheless and despite both his and Nuru’s attempts to appear as brave as possible to impress me, their courageous words did not match their practices which reveal hesitation. In fact, they both kept postponing their

ultimate payment. The nature of their doubts and fears and fascinating reflections on life - as well as those of others of course - will be discussed in chapter 6.

5.4 Conclusion: Alternative agency in the spiritual practice of survival

In this chapter I have analysed the way street children employ spirituality in their quest for everyday survival. Whereas spirituality, particularly in the Global North, is often associated with sense, meaning and one's inner life (for instance in the famous theory of Maslow 1943), in a context of existential insecurity and a chronic lack of prospects, spirituality surfaces prominently - yet not exclusively (chapter 6) - as a tool for material survival. I have argued the 'spiritual practice of material survival' revolves around relationality; street children engage in relationships with spiritual beings, such as God and the Devil and spiritual experts such as pastors, witchdoctors and Freemason teachers with the goal of facilitating day-to-day survival. In contrast to Bourdieu's analysis of relationality in the field, street children are thus not directly concerned with the pursuit of economic capital -with the exception of those seeking *kuzimu*'s wealth- but rather struggle get by in the here and now, hence the pursuit of a piece of bread, a t-shirt or some coins, i.e. the bare minimum to make it through the day. In contrast to economic capital however, I have demonstrated street children do have access to, and struggle for social capital, which I perceive as the established relationships in which children can find actual or potential (future) resources. Nevertheless, I have chosen to analytically work with the term 'relational practice' because it allowed an exploration of all aspects of children's engagements with spiritual others, including their attempts at establishing relations and their strategic reasoning and reflections behind them, instead of only focusing on the outcomes of those relations. Furthermore, I find the term better reflects the dynamic nature of intersubjective relationships, acknowledging relationality as a process.

Hence, I have argued street children's spiritual practice of material survival should be seen as a relational practice. Data have shown this relational practice is always highly goal-oriented, intrinsically pragmatic and eclectic, with children mixing and matching opportunities across subfields to maximize chances of survival. Besides these characteristics, the notion of reciprocity is central to street children's relational practices, although the exact manifestation differs. This difference can be explained by *doxa*; here manifest in the important intuitive dichotomy between (rules regulating) relationality and inherent reciprocity in the Kingdom of God versus the Kingdom of the Devil. In short this can be summarized with the statement that, when it comes to significant change, God

answers slowly but surely and his provisions, when finally given, are unconditional and unlimited. In contrast, the Devil responds fast and easy but his ‘goods’ are conditional and limited. In addition, there are much higher risks and higher costs associated with satanic gifts. Whereas children’s engagements with pastors already reveal precarity, data demonstrated that risks tend to increase when the exchange partner gets ‘darker’. In some situations, reciprocity seems best described as functioning along the lines of a patron-client relationship, such as when children exchange religious loyalties for material goods. In other circumstances, it reveals a gift-based logic, for instance when Mr. Jamal, a Freemason teacher, explains his obscure business in limited goods in terms of “giving and receiving”.

Crucially, street children’s relational practices reveal extraordinary resourcefulness, incredible creativity and excellent strategizing, highlighting a fascinating manifestation of agency in constrained settings. It has been argued by other scholars that street children have very limited options in challenging urban settings (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2013; Shand et al. 2015). Findings from the wider GUOTS project’s comparative research into street children’s lives across Africa underlines, for instance, “the constrained agency” of street children and youth, in particular when it comes to economic practices (Shand et al., 2015, 18). My data support this argument that street children’s agency, is *generally* restricted. Yet, I argue, spirituality opens up an alternative framework with opportunities for survival in which ‘real’ and ‘assumed’ opportunities coexist. Consequently, we can witness in the spiritual practice of survival the emergence of a specific kind of agency: *alternative agency*. What makes this kind of agency ‘alternative’ is precisely the way it manifests in children’s practices of establishing and fostering relationships with spiritual beings and experts. These relationships belong to a field, as in a non-physical space of practice, that implies a social realm that expands beyond the conventional. In other words: these social relations with unconventional others go beyond the usually narrow confines of the street child’s stratum.

In chapter 2 (section 2.5.2), I have conceptualised agency in the light of practice theory, specifically drawing on the work of Ortner (2006). I have adopted Ortner’s distinction between agency-as-power and agency-as-projects. The alternative agency of street children in this chapter primarily illustrates this first modality: agency as linked to social power. Informants’ manoeuvres in the Spiritual Field reveal such agency in the way children are capable of establishing and maintaining relationships and exploiting inherent opportunities for survival. Hence street children exercise power in particular in

their role as consumers of spiritual goods and services, capable of negotiating their prices and conditions: trading one's fertility for life-long wealth, sacrificing a relative to the Devil, exchanging loyalty with a travelling pastor or buying a fetish from the witchdoctor. Contemplating children's alternative agency further, it should be acknowledged that many of the tactics employed as part of the spiritual practice of survival do not actually lead to significant gains. Although the functioning of a fetish is difficult to verify and informants insist they earn more through it, we could question the causality⁴⁹. I have furthermore not come across a street child who had, indeed, become a millionaire through *kuzimu*'s money. The question whether we can still refer to these practices as agentic despite their dubious at best, or illusionary effects at worse, depends on how agency is defined. If we take as the analytical point of departure agency as someone's objective position in the field of power, recognized as such by others, alternative agency is, perhaps, nothing but illusionary agency. Yet, building on Ortner who emphasizes subjectivity as the basis of agency, I have come to define agency as 'the experience and pursuit of possibilities' in which this experience should be seen as independent of feasibility, actuality and (unintended) outcomes (chapter 2, section 2.5.2). Hence, from the protagonists' perspective, alternative agency is real and relevant as the experience and pursuit of possibilities, the means to an end the children themselves value.

What my informants valued, in this chapter, was mainly material goods. This is unsurprising given the conditions of their existence; they balance on a very thin line of life, a 'bare' existence in which meeting one's most basic needs is a daily struggle, hence what is at *stake* (as Bourdieu would say) is material survival.

Yet there is more. Some data provided in this chapter already alluded to the importance of social and emotional survival. In the next chapter, chapter 6, I will explore a second, crucial role of spirituality in street children's lives: its role in practices and processes of sense-making on the streets. To survive emotionally/morally, street children use spirituality to traverse not just today's Spiritual Field as we have seen in this chapter, but also to travel in time and to contemplate, as such, the self as a subject with a past and a future. In chapter 6, I will move beyond Bourdieu, employing Ortner's conceptualisation of subjectivity to explore what I refer to as 'the spiritual practice of moral survival'. I will show that whereas the spiritual practice of material survival turned out to be essentially a relational practice, the spiritual practice of moral survival is in fact

⁴⁹ It can be argued, of course, that when children take more risks in their activities because they believe they are protected by a fetish or God, this may lead to more success.

a personal, contemplative practice in which children reflect on their moral subjectivities in particular. In this contemplative practice, Ortner's second modality of agency, agency-as-(culturally constituted) life projects, features with prominence.

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF MORAL SURVIVAL

(Life)projects of Normality

6.1 Introduction

In chapter 5, I examined the role of spirituality for everyday survival on the streets. The analytical point of departure was the ‘spiritual practice of material survival’: children’s agentic practices establishing and maintaining valuable relationships with spiritual beings and representatives with the aim of easing everyday survival. The employing of spirituality in these essentially pragmatic ways surfaced prominently in the data. Yet, there is another, equally important side to the role of spirituality in street children’s lives. Data reveals spirituality sparks reflection: it makes these children think about life. More than just pragmatic action, spirituality appears to be central to practices and processes of sense-making, enabling introspective reflection and the contemplation of the self as a subject in time and place with a past and a future. This ‘contemplative’ role of spirituality will be the subject of analysis in this chapter.

Such contemplation and sense-making of street children is based on the accumulation of their experiences of traversing the field that were central to the analysis in chapter 5. It concerns their perspectives on the world they know for which the awareness of their own - marginal - position appears crucial. Their efforts to make sense of themselves in relation to the world point at subjectivity, which I broadly understand as the ‘relational self’ or the ‘self-in-the-world’. Drawing on Ortner (2005, 2006) primarily, I will employ this notion of subjectivity in this chapter to analyse the ‘contemplative role’ of spirituality.

If subjectivity is the ‘relational self’, it is important to define ‘self’ before the notion of subjectivity can be further outlined. In fact, concepts of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ are often used interchangeably, but it is important to distinguish between the two. Sökefeld (1999, 424) explains the self as being subordinate to (though not detached from) a person’s plurality of identities. The self is neither passive nor immune to change but

whereas a person's different identities can be experienced as a plurality, the self is rather experienced as one because it is a frame that guarantees the continuity on which the multiplicity of identities is inscribed (Sökefeld 1999). Then, to define subjectivity more precisely, the straightforward definition of Weedon (1987) is useful. Weedon argues subjectivity is "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (1987, 32). In a way, Ortner's work on subjectivity (2005; 2006) links to this explicit definition while elaborating further on it. Ortner also takes as a point of departure those 'ways of understanding oneself and one's relation to the world' but she stresses this cannot be set apart from a historical and cultural consciousness, because how an individual thinks about oneself is influenced by localized dynamics of culture shaping (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts and meanings. In this light, subjectivity builds on practice theory because it relates to ideas about the field (chapter 4) and goal-oriented practice (chapter 5). At the same time however, subjectivity goes beyond Bourdieusian practice theory with its emphasis on the pre-reflexive behaviours of individuals that precludes the contemplation/reflection which is central to this chapter. Whereas Bourdieu was therefore useful to shed light on the calculative tactics of street children in chapter 5, I will leave his work to the side here and draw primarily on Ortner who points at a tendency in the work of Bourdieu and others "to slight the question of subjectivity, that is, the view of the subject as existentially complex, a being who feels and thinks and reflects, who makes and seeks meaning" (2005, 110).

The experience of being marginalized and excluded appeared central to how informants think about themselves and how they see their position in the world. In line with findings from other researchers studying the exclusion of street children (Saraví and Makowski 2011; Herrera et al. 2009; Butler 2009; Young 2003), my informants felt stigmatized as being different; poor, dirty, violent, addicted, delinquents and blamed, as it were, for growing up outside a family setting which is the cultural ideal in the DRC. Importantly, the children were certainly not indifferent to this stigma of being a social and cultural anomaly: they felt a strong moral discomfort about living a lifestyle they knew was not in line with the religious doctrines that are so important in the sociocultural setting (i.e. field) they grew up in. This moral struggle that my informants experience when trying to get by as marginal beings is reflected in literature about street children or youth in other places as well (Farrugia, Smyth and Harrison 2016, Jones et al. 2007, Snow and Anderson, 1993). The sociologist Farrugia for instance, writes about "the

symbolic burden of homelessness”; a cultural trope which homeless youth in Australia are aware of (Farrugia 2011, 71). Farrugia et al. (2016) stress that this symbolic burden of homelessness, which is associated with irresponsibility and moral failure, is an enormously painful kind of disadvantage which means that homeless youth come to articulate themselves as subjects who are agents of their own disempowerment, resulting in feelings that they have eroded their own sense of ‘active subjectivity’ (see also Saraví and Makowski, 2011). In line with this, Snow and Anderson (1993) write about the need for those experiencing homelessness to “salvage the self”. This metaphor is particularly apt within discussions of moral worth which are key to the experience of subjectivity among homeless people. “Salvaging the self” may involve a discourse in which one distances the self from the idea of moral failure, for instance through rearticulating homelessness as a result of bad luck (Snow and Anderson 1993) or the valorisation of the toughness required to negotiate life on the street, something which was manifest among my informants when referring to themselves as *Biles* (see chapter 1, section 1.8).

In “Tears, Trauma and Suicide”, Jones et al. (2007) study how in the aftermath of the suicide of their friend, a group of street youth in Mexico seek to assert individual and group identities through adopting an idiom of culturally and religiously appropriate behaviour, trying to give legitimacy to the suicidal act that others may see as morally wrong. Jones et al. (2007) demonstrate the group draws some strength from treating a suicide within normalised codes of death, setting out their appropriate behaviour as an identity marker. Nevertheless, the young people were not always able to keep up with this kind of appropriate behaviour they aspired to, leading Jones et al. (2007, 473) to argue their informants seek to “resolve the tensions between their lifestyles and their and society’s moral and religious codes”.

Like the street youth from the study of Jones et al. (2007) and the homeless people Farrugia (2011, et al. 2016) followed, also the *Biles* struggled with a certain moral discomfort and ‘solving’ this discomfort was fundamental to their subjectivities. Their ways of resolving this tension were enabled by spirituality, together constituting what I will analyse in this chapter as ‘the spiritual practice of moral survival’. Whereas the spiritual practice of material survival revolved around social relationships, the spiritual practice of moral survival took place, mostly, in the intimate space of the mind, hence: a contemplative practice.

Importantly, against prejudices that the street is a place devoid of values and morals, I thus found precisely the opposite, like some others (Butler, 2009; Jones et al.,

2007, Ennew and Swart-Kruger, 2003; Hecht, 1998). Morality was very important to my informants and their awareness of being seen by others in dehumanizing ways ultimately fuelled a strong desire among these children to be normal and to be included. A similar desire is observed by Butler (2009). Studying street children in Brazil, he argues that one of the results of the experience of prejudice or stigma is the desire to project oneself as equal to others, as being ‘normal’. In Butler’s case his informants claimed an identity as a person like anyone else by appealing to notions of citizenship most of all, but he also refers to the influence of the Christian ideas of ‘brotherhood’ (Butler 2009). The study of Jones et al. (2007) also reveals street children’s search for normality and inclusion. In their case, normality is sought through the active conversion of what was culturally and religiously seen as an ‘immoral’ death into an ‘ordinary’ death, performed within normative religious codes that even involved the Catholic church. As such, the authors argue, suicide and suicidal ideation were given “a halo of normality, one more part of a constant struggle with visions and attitudes towards life that jump between feelings of valuelessness and a search for pleasure and significance” (Jones et al. 2007, 477). In line with these scholars, and building on the observation of Ennew and Swart-Kruger (2003; see also Swart, 1990) that street children seem to have remarkably mainstream norms and aspirations, I argue that instead of having mainstream aspirations, my informants have the aspiration to *be* mainstream. This is what the spiritual practice of moral survival ultimately entails: it provides a re-humanizing frame allowing, eventually, the experience of normality and inclusion.

In contrast to agency-as-power that surfaced in chapter 5 (section 5.4) in the way children (aim to) profit from relationships with spiritual others, children’s aspirations and their pursuit of normalization and inclusion highlight Ortner’s second modality of agency: agency as intentionality and the pursuit of (culturally constituted) life projects. As I outlined in chapter 2 (section 2.5.2), these life projects are explained by Ortner as being “defined by local logics of the good and the desirable and how to pursue them” (Ortner 2006, 145). I argue the wish of street children to be included indicates the essence of “the local logics of the good and the desirable”. Local should in this case be understood as the local street context of Bukavu and the desirable as relating to cultural ideas about ‘the good’ and that part of ‘the good’ you don’t have. For instance, when having a successful career is highly valued in a given society, this can be (part of) ‘the good’ and when one doesn’t have such a career this may be the subsequent desire. Hence it follows logically that for those who are excluded, being included forms (a substantial part of) what

constitutes the desirable. Spirituality plays a crucial role here, facilitating both the pursuit and imagination of this state of inclusion. It is important to stress however, that religion only, and not witchcraft, is able to facilitate this. In a society in which the ultimate good is framed as religiosity, as I will argue in section 6.3.2, street children's desire to be included is likely to have moral connotations. Hence whereas the balance in the previous chapter was eventually more towards witchcraft, as the subfield that offered immediate opportunities to bargain and manipulate, in this chapter the emphasis is on religion. As I have shown in chapter 5, Dark opportunities are always imagined as structurally limited and conditional and often, eventually destructive because of unbalanced reciprocity. This counts for both material and emotional/moral support from the subfield of witchcraft. In contrast, religion, as I will show, is intrinsically intertwined in people's imaginaries with morality and pathways towards the ultimate good, including salvation.

Data revealed the spiritual practice of moral survival takes place in two dimensions. The first dimension concerns the immediate reality of street life, facilitating what can be seen as an everyday kind of moral survival. In section 6.2, I will explore the ways children contemplate their present moral selves in the context of local religious and moral doctrines but also historicized cultural perspectives on religious subjectivity, such as the Congolese idea that the self is God's gift. I will discuss how street children perceive their moral selves and outline three moral strategies they undertake as part of the spiritual practice of moral survival, to resolve the moral discomfort they experience. In this contemplation and subsequent action, a fascinating kind of agency at the margins of power emerges, illustrating Ortner's understanding of agency as intentionality to which subjectivity is the basis. I will argue that through the spiritual practice of everyday moral survival children ultimately realise the normalization of the self vis-à-vis God, allowing them to feel included and loved by Him.

In section 6.3, I will discuss the second dimension of the spiritual practice of moral survival to which a notion of temporality is central: the contemplation of the self in time. Here, I will argue spirituality allows children to locate the self in time and place, revealing themselves as moral beings and becomings. This section is thus built around children's dreams and aspirations in which, interestingly, spiritual inclusion (being included in the eyes of God) is a detour through which this-worldly inclusion is imagined. Specifically, I will discuss a fourth and final strategy of the spiritual practice of moral survival which concerns the conscious postponement of religious conversion, imagined as a total rupture, a transition from immorality to morality but also from marginality to

participation and from deviance to normality. This second dimension of the spiritual practice of moral survival is arguably the most ultimate way in which spirituality offers a powerful ‘normalizing’ frame: keeping the ultimate dream of social inclusion alive.

In the conclusion, section 6.4, I will reflect on the importance and implications of spirituality as a frame for the normalization of the self. In the context of this contemplative practice and given the centrality of reflexivity in the spiritual practice of moral survival, I will plea for a rethinking of marginal children’s agency in the light of subjectivity. As I will show, this may contribute to a deeper understanding of the temporality of children’s agency.

6.2 Contemplating the self: reflections on the moral subject

On a Monday afternoon I met Rizo at one of the PEDER centres in town for an interview. He arrived in a new Islamic thobe, wearing earphones through which he listened to the music selection on a mobile phone he had stolen that morning. He proudly showed me his catch and swore to never sell this particular phone which came with earphones and good music...but I knew there was a high chance it would be sold within 24 hours when Rizo gets particularly hungry or longs for a drink later in the afternoon. We entered one of the large dusky halls of the centre used for indoor activities. I had planned a pictorial interview with Rizo but because we hadn’t seen each other in a while we first caught up and I asked for any developments regarding his plan of entering kuzimu. For the first time he told me he considered sacrificing his older brother Leo who also lives on the streets. I was startled because I knew Leo is the only family member Rizo has left besides one sister who lives far away. The brothers always seemed to get on very well, traversing the streets together and Rizo appeared fond of him. I urged Rizo to re-consider his options even sharing my doubts that kuzimu may not actually exist and that his Freemason teacher is only after his money. He argued against it however, almost begged me to believe kuzimu is real, giving the example of his friend Nuru who descended into the underworld and who could sell his first stolen phone after coming back for \$70. I stressed: “Are you sure that this is what you want, do you prefer having money over having your brother by your side?” To which Rizo shortly answered with “makuta” [money] (Rizo, bile, pictorial interview 18-04-16). I looked at the boy in growing disbelief over the emotionless tone in which he could talk about these things, his voice devoid of any sentiment. Knowing him long enough to know that he was not just performing indifference to impress me, I wondered whether he was traumatised to such an extent he is simply no

longer able to allow his own feelings. Rizo himself often proudly spoke about his “*cœur dur de résistance*” [a hard heart of resistance], a way of phrasing not uncommon among the Biles.⁵⁰ When understanding that his ‘hard heart’ made him able to talk about killing his only brother and making it sound as if he was talking about buying a Fr.200 (\$0,20) piece of bread, I started to wonder whether it had been exactly this hard heart which had kept Rizo alive for seven years on the street, since he arrived there as a 9-year old boy. I asked myself the question whether a ‘hard heart’ was essentially about a lack of feelings. I got my response much quicker than I could have imagined when I continued with the proposed interview and showed Rizo the first simple black-and-white image. It happened literally seconds after Rizo argued he preferred money over his brother’s life and that he only cared about profiting as much as he can from life on earth.

The first image I showed Rizo was the image of a church (see image 3.4 in chapter 3, section 3.3.3) and I asked him to tell me what the image shows as well as his thoughts about the content. The image is extremely simple but Rizo’s reaction was very intense. His facial expression radically changed; his smile had disappeared, he lowered his eyes and first looked away from my computer screen where the image was shown. When he looked up again to stare at the black-and-white drawing I suddenly saw his eyes were filled with tears and he was biting his lip. His voice was so low I had to bend over to understand what he was whispering: “that’s the church...” and after a silence: “I immediately regret that I am even thinking about doing witchcraft...because that is the house of God where one should enter to pray to the Lord”(Rizo, bile, pictorial interview 18-04-16).⁵¹ Rizo’s emotional reaction to a drawing of a church forms a fascinating contrast with the seeming nonchalance that dominated his vocabulary and body language when speaking about his proposed sins.

Interestingly, Rizo’s reaction to the images was not unique. There were more research participants, both boys and girls, who showed an emotionally intense response to the images that were all related to religion or witchcraft (see appendix 1 for the full list of images). This indicates spirituality is something that affects the state of mind, or the inner

⁵⁰ In fact, having a ‘hard heart of resistance’ was often used as a defining factor of the street identity of the Biles. Newcomers had to prove their ‘hard heart’ before being fully accepted. At the very end of my fieldwork I experienced a threatening situation during participant observation with Nuru and Rizo. The next day the boys told me they had not been sure in the beginning whether I would become their friend or not, but now they had seen I also have a ‘hard heart’, showing no fear, they said I had become one of them and would forever be their friend.

⁵¹ See chapter 3, section 3.6.4 on the ethics of (evoking) emotions in pictorial interviews.

life, of these children. As we saw in Rizo's case, a simple drawing of a church achieved within seconds what my - and other people's - well-meant advice and personal questions had not easily attained: a moment of reflexivity in which rather 'unpractical' feelings, such as guilt and regret, appeared at the surface. Another example which shows that spirituality, in particular faith, encourages children to reflect on the (im)morality of their actions is given by Cizungu in a drawing exercise. I asked research participants to draw two scenarios: the first showing something they can do to make God happy and the second one something they can do to make the Devil happy. Cizungu drew a real-life experience he had when stealing from a handicapped person (see figure 6.1).

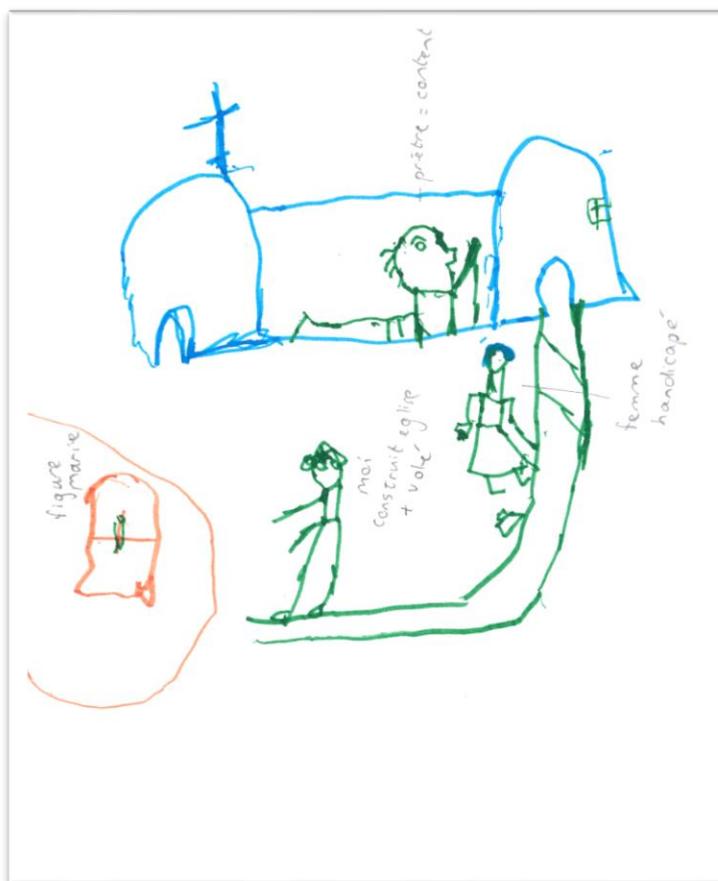


Figure 6.1. Drawing made by Cizungu, *bile*, drawings 24-06-2016

Cizungu narrated his experience (shown in the drawing, figure 6.1) as follows:

“In this drawing you see, I am working on constructing the church and the road (green figure, left of centre). There is a mother [woman] who is handicapped and she is walking to church (green figure with skirt, right of centre). I have taken her bag and run away... Then all of a sudden I see that in front of me there is no longer a path...but I only see the Virgin Mary standing in front of me (centre left, orange

figure). When I see that, Mary in front of me, I directly return the bag that I had stolen to the woman who is handicapped. And directly I started to pray the ‘Our father who is in heaven’. And the path opened again. And the priest who is inside the church is happy (centre above, figure in green, waving)” (Cizungu, *bile*, drawings, 24-06-16).

The stories of Rizo and Cizungu are indicative of what I came to understand during my stay in Bukavu: that spirituality, more than anything else, stimulates these children to think about who they are in the context of their lives, hence their own position in the social space in which their life unfolds. Specifically, spirituality facilitates the manifestation of a particular kind of subjectivity concerned with morality; spiritual contexts and encounters as well as personal spiritual beliefs stir critical reflexivity, contemplating oneself as a moral subject in particular.

In this section, I will explore how street children contemplate their present moral selves, outlining three different ‘moral strategies’ they develop based on these contemplations, to come to terms with the moral discomfort they experience in their lives. I will start, in section 6.2.1 with outlining how children perceive their moral selves, discussing a discourse of “(spiritual) instability” that children used to describe themselves. In section 6.2.2 I will add to this the notion of the self as God’s gift, which I will argue is highly influential in shaping people’s subjectivities. In fact, this notion offers a first moral strategy that I will analyse as part of the spiritual practice of moral survival: this notion of the self as God’s gift is used by some children to cease accountability over immoral conduct: being created by God means He holds final responsibility over everything they do, including sinful conduct. In section 6.2.3, I will discuss a second strategy of moral survival, in which personal reflections are translated into (social) action: children try to live as morally as possible within the constraining structures that impact their lives, revealing a fascinating kind of agency played out at the edges of power which highlights the notion of intentionality. Finally, in section 6.2.4, I will reveal a third moral strategy in the way children prescribe themselves a position of limited accountability for moral transgression based on their awareness of their limited possibilities that come with their marginal position. Through this position of exception they experience spiritual inclusion, being loved and forgiven by God, amidst worldly exclusion.

6.2.1 Being “unstable”: revealing children’s moral subjectivities

Data indicate research participants showed serious concern over their precarious moral lives. Notably, street children often spoke about themselves as being “unstable”. Different

street girls for instance told me they cannot take care of their children because they are “unstable” themselves. Whereas instability in street children’s lives can logically be interpreted in terms of income or safety, it was rather quite often explained by the children themselves in *spiritual* terms. Informants described particularly their spiritual selves as unstable. They showed serious concern for instance about their ultimate accountability for day-to-day immoral conduct, in particular when contemplating options for the afterlife. Budugu illustrates this concern by pointing out that “street children are in massive problems because they do whatever...if death finds them early...well, if they have remembered to pray, maybe God can accept them [in heaven], but if they have not remembered to pray, that’s the end: they will go to the Devil”. (Budugu, *bile*, interview 22-06-16). When discussing the never-ending battle between God and the Devil, imagined as the battle between good and evil, I asked research participants what the role of street children is in this battlefield of competing spiritual powers. After contemplation, Moise replied: “The role of a street kid is that of a *pepo* [spirit]...a certain moment we are doing stuff like stealing and the other moment we are doing good things...so one moment we can be with the Devil and another moment we can be with those things that concern God” (Moise, *bile*, discussion after boys theatre 8, 28-04-16). The use of the Swahili term *pepo* is interesting here. A *pepo*, a spirit, is a perfect example of a being which is not stable, imagined by Moise as dwelling without a purpose and without having firm ground under its feet. Street children are thus sketched here as beings that are wandering around without concrete direction, alternately being “with God” and “being with the Devil”. When I asked Moise and his friends to give some concrete examples, he explains: “When I am for instance with the prostitutes, then I tell myself ‘now I am with the Devil’ or when I am trying to fight with other people...whilst on the other hand when I meet someone who is suffering and this person is lacking a few francs and I give it to him, I thus save him from a difficult situation, then I will find myself in a situation that concerns God. Like also in church; when you go there and when you pray, then you are in contact with God” (idem). Later, another boy from this same focus group admitted that although he and his friends are in contact with both God and the Devil, their relationship with the Devil is stronger because they dedicate themselves more to those things that concern the dark side, like going into the bars, stealing in the markets and taking drugs (Ndogo, *bile*, focus group after boys theatre 8, 28-04016). In a discussion after a theatre session (boys theatre 9), a similar vision is shared:

“Street children are being sent by the Devil to steal and kill. The street children that follow God, even if they haven’t found [Him] yet, God will take care of them. But, many street children work for the Devil because they look for money through stealing, they can even kill; if they are asked to kill for money they will do it. So they work for the Devil. God cannot want people to do bad things, He wants that people do good things [...] and those [children] who don’t attend any church that means they are following what the Devil is telling them” (Jean-Paul, *bile*, focus group after boys theatre 9, 28-09-2016).

In a similar line of argumentation, girls often associate their sex work with “working for the Devil”. When describing her drawing showing the club in which she works (see figure 6.2), Gloria points to a specific room in the club and says: “this is the room where we commit our sins [...] This is the Devil’s place: when we are in Ricardo’s [club in Bukavu, see the triangle-shaped, orange room, centre of drawing image 6.2] it means we are with the Devil” (Gloria, *bile*, drawings 25-06-6).

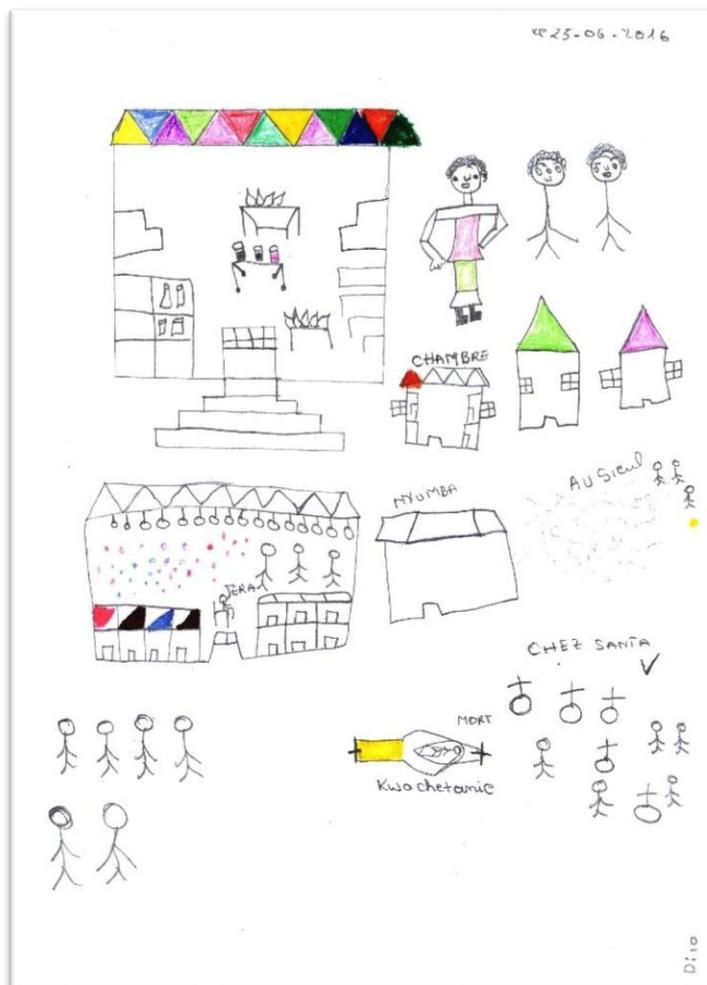


Image 6.2. Drawing made by Gloria: “This is the room where we commit our sins (centre of drawing, small orange triangle) [...] This is the Devil’s place: when we are in Ricardo’s [club in Bukavu] it means we are with the Devil” (Gloria, *bile*, drawings 25-05-16).

In general, it should be noted that street children showed clear awareness of their religious and moral positioning as well as a personal condemnation and/or regret of current life styles. They were generally very self-conscious and open about how they saw their own moral status, often arguing they were sinners or at least that they (had) committed sins. In a predominantly Catholic country and despite having fallen between the nets of the usually strong family and church-based religious socialisation they were familiar with religious dogmas shaping the local moral framework in eastern DRC. Most of my informants had lived in a family for a few years of their life, where they had learnt at least the basis of their religious and moral education. After leaving the family home, most children stop attending church services for spiritual reasons although they continue to pray daily (Survey, June 2016).

Furthermore, on the streets, religious NGOs such as PEDER and new religious acquaintances such as travelling pastors or Islamic figures continue ‘inculcating’ (as Bourdieu would say) a certain religious *habitus*. In fact, there doesn’t even have to be a personal relationship before such religious knowledge can be transmitted. During a pictorial interview, I showed Rizo a black-and-white image of Jesus carrying His cross. Rizo said it reminded him of the story from the Bible in which Jesus, carrying His cross, was approached by a woman who offered her help to whom Jesus had said: ‘Don’t pity me, pity yourself’. When I asked Rizo where he had heard this story, he said he heard it from a priest who was preaching publicly at the market. Ironically, Rizo added “I listened for a while to the story and then I started my activity [stealing]” (Rizo, *bile*, pictorial interview 18-04-16). Furthermore, religious knowledge and spiritual perspectives are shared between street children such as when they gather at the ‘Site of Ideas’ (see the opening vignettes in chapter 4, section 4.1.1). Consequently, informants were aware of the Catholic dogmas in particular and they knew drug-use, stealing and prostitution were generally condemned as sins from a religious perspective as well as more serious crimes such as armed robberies and murder. The discourse of both NGOs and travelling pastors condemning these sins was often highly moralising. Pastor Juma’s preaching for instance consisted of some core sentences that started with “*Acha...*!” meaning “stop...!” and then followed by a series of undesirable behaviour: “Stop stealing! Stop prostitution! Stop drugs! Stop drinking! Stop sinning!” (observations 19-04-16 and 16-06-16).

In the context of reflecting on the spiritual nature of their activities (belonging to God vs. belonging to the Devil), informants often used notions of ‘instability/being

unstable'. This can be seen as jargon on street subjectivity, showing parallels in a way these children speak about themselves as street children. Most of the times, 'instability' was actually a euphemism for not being on the right path, or even being in "massive problems" as Budugu phrased it (Budugu, *bile*, interview 22-06-16). When asked to draw a picture about her afterlife, Furaha drew her own funeral attended by her father and her two children (see figure 6.3). At the bottom of the page we see the underworld; Furaha has no doubt that her final destination will be *kuzimu*.

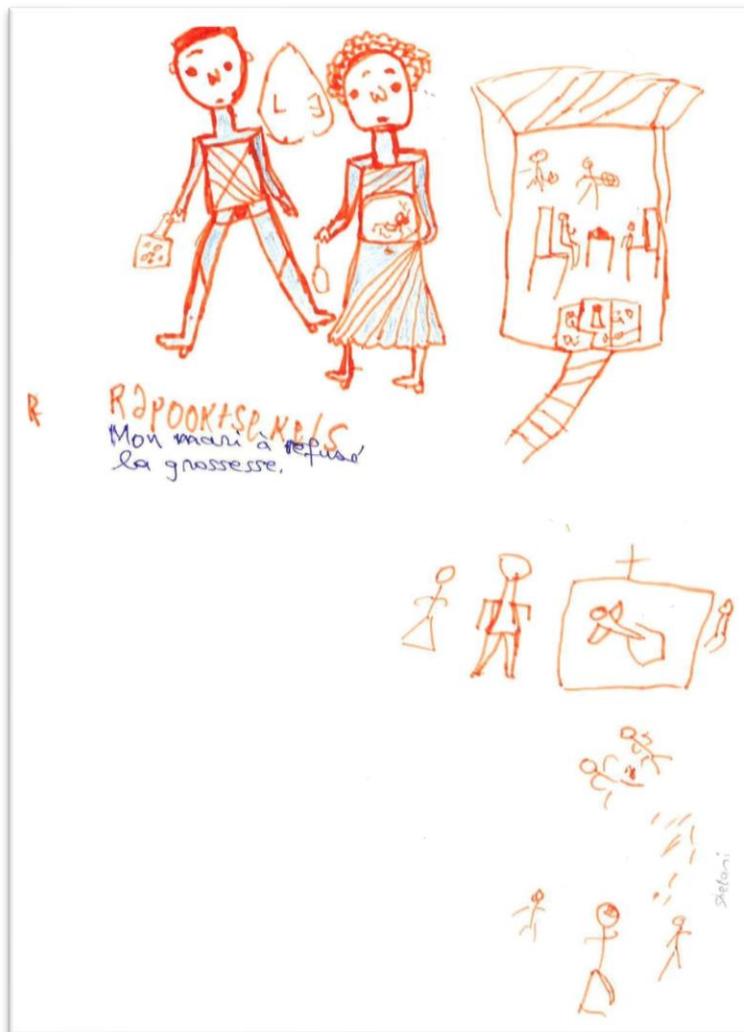


Figure 6.3. Drawing made by Furaha: "I am pregnant. This boy you see here has given me the pregnancy, but he refuses [to accept that he is the father] and he has left (top left corner). After giving birth, I die. Here are my two children. My children and my father (right side, underneath the house). They are at the burial. I will go to the Devil (right bottom shows hell) (Furaha, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

When I ask Furaha why she thinks she will go to the Devil, she says: "Because I was not stable". When explaining what she means with "not stable", she adds: "I died because of

the pregnancy...and I was a prostitute” (Furaha, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16). The way Furaha uses the term “unstable” here reveals that her experienced instability concerns (morally problematic) behaviour. Also Veronica pictures her afterlife and the trajectory towards it very pessimistically (see figure 6.4).



Figure 6.4. Drawing made by Veronica (*bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

Veronica explains her drawing (figure 6.4) as follows:

“I am with a boyfriend, he comes to knock at my door (upper left corner, blue figures inside the house). The boy leaves to see Esther. The three here are my little brother and my two little sisters (upper right corner, next to house). The boy came to see me, but I have closed the door for him. This person here is another friend, who stays in the room next to me (bottom right corner). The boy asked where is Veronica? The girl said I have left somewhere. When I come back, I have lost my head (bottom centre, blue figure). And after I have died, I ask myself the question where will I go? I will go to the Devil (bottom left corner, figure in coffin)” (Veronica, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

Veronica then predicts she will “lose her head” - which she translates as “becoming incapable of reflection, crazy” - before dying and going straight to hell. When explaining

what will cause her to ‘lose her head’ she says: “not having a fixed place to stay. I don’t have a precise address” (Veronica, *bile*, drawings, 25-06-16).

Finally, in Sophia’s explanation of her art work this unstable position street children use as a framework to talk about themselves, continues even after death (see figure 6.5).



Figure 6.5. Drawing made by Sophia (*bile*, drawings 25-06-16)

Sophia explains her drawing as follows:

“Here I am in the street, walking (upper left corner, figure wearing skirt). I find a boy, he tells me let’s go to Ricardo’s (upper centre). When we arrive there, I decide to go back, but he continues to follow me. When I arrive there on the street again, I find a friend, who is sitting on a chair (centre of drawing, figure on a chair). Then, I fall sick and I am directly dead. My spirit doesn’t have a fixed address, it starts to vagabond, and it asks ‘where will I go?’ There, when I am between God and the Devil, but without having a position, I start to ask myself the question ‘where will I be?’ (bottom right corner), and immediately I ask forgiveness from the angels. So they have come to take me and we leave to go to heaven (bottom right corner)” (Sophia, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

Interestingly, Sophia thus imagines her spirit to dwell without having “a position”. It can thus be argued the discourse of “being unstable” gives insights into street children’s moral subjectivities. Street children thus contemplate their moral self as spiritually unstable and undecided yet biased towards the Dark side because of existing opportunities for survival such as those investigated in chapter 5. Yet there is another, equally important side to the formation of their moral subjectivities. In the next section, section 6.2.3, I will explore the local cultural notion of the self as God’s gift. I will show there is some tension between this discourse on spiritual instability, in particular street children’s bias towards the Dark, and this idea that they are God’s gift. Besides stirring deep notions of gratefulness, the idea of the self as God’s gift offers a first tool in the spiritual practice of moral survival: it allows children to (partially) cease accountability over their immoral conduct, holding God responsible because He created them.

6.2.2 The hammer is intention-less: thoughts on moral accountability

In chapter 4 (section 4.3.1) I discussed the perspective on the self as God’s gift for which one ought to be grateful. This view is reflected even in common first names in eastern DRC: Someone I knew was called ‘*Don*’, which is French for ‘gift’. Another very common name was ‘*Dieumerci*’ which means ‘thank you God’. Others were called ‘*Cadeau*’: yet another word for ‘gift’. As such, this perspective is central to how informants see themselves and how they picture themselves in relation to God. The belief in particular that each and every one is purposefully created by God gives a sense of worth to street children, perhaps we can even say a *raison d’être*. At least, this is how Fr. Emmanuel explains this feeling:

“According to my experience we need a *reason* for living to be able to truly live and endure. When someone doesn’t have a reason to live, and when he or she encounters a particularly difficult situation this easily becomes a reason to commit suicide or to give up on life. But those who believe, and especially in our Catholic faith, what gives a positive reason to live that’s God. In African culture it is the Supreme Being, the ancestors, who constantly re-assure us that we are not the fruit of an accident, but that we are, in fact, a desired person, a loved person. And the difficulties we inevitably encounter in our lives, they are never a proof of God’s neglect or His non-existence as you say, but it shows us that we are alive, that our life is reality and that we need to continue living it despite of difficulties we face” (Fr. Emmanuel, Catholic priest, expert interview, 06-07-16).

These words from Fr. Emmanuel from our final interview in the last week of my fieldwork confirmed my own initial analysis of the fascinating and humbling attitude I had observed among Bukavu's street children. I had often been confronted with the wrenching state of their marginality and amazed (as I was, ethnocentrically) by the depth of their faith, I had sometimes asked research participants whether they did not feel abandoned or unloved by God considering their precarious situation. I was always corrected and told that in fact, the opposite was true. When I asked Pierre whether he thought God doesn't like street children he responded: "God likes street children, it is the people who don't like them" (Pierre, *bile*, interview 15-03-16). To my question how she pictured God, Francine said: "considering everything he does for me, I have the impression that he loves me a lot" (Francine, *bile*, interview 12-05-16). Also to my question whether she felt God listened to her prayers, Francine affirmed: "Yes, because everything that He is doing for me, I directly see he listens to me" (*idem*). As an example she mentioned that when she suffered from a sickness in her breast she had prayed to God in a Room of Prayer and He healed her. "But still you suffer so much" I insisted, knowing her tragic biography, "how can you explain that?". "I don't suffer to such an extent that I would say God has abandoned me" she said; "No. And we all know that before finding all these [good] things that come from God, you first have to suffer. With regards to the Devil it is contrary: you don't have to endure, he will give it to you straight away" (*idem*).

This experience shared by all research participants that their life was a 'gift' stirred deep notions of gratefulness. Consequently, it worked as an important motivator for many to express this gratefulness to God through prayers and church attendance. I experienced this in a very clear way when I joined 19-year old Hupenda and 17-year old Belle at a church service in a Pentecostal church. From my fieldnotes:

The street girls had dressed up for the occasion by dressing down: it was the first time I saw them without the usual heavy layers of make-up, their hair modestly covered by a shawl. Instead of one of their tight, fashionably torn pair of jeans they wore ankle-long locally made traditional skirts and simple but colourful t-shirts. (see figure 6.6). They looked much younger and there was nothing in their physical appearance indicating they were somehow different from other young women participating in the church service. Hupenda was still recovering from her fourth, most recent pregnancy, but Belle had worked all night in one of the city's nightclubs. During the service, I had observed the girls' pious behaviour, standing and praying as close as possible to the altar surrounded

by perhaps a hundred other women and some men. Knowing there would be no distribution of food or other items to the deprived, I had come to wonder what brought the girls here.



Figure 6.6. Hupenda (left) and Belle posing outside the doors of a Pentecostal church (source: author, 28-06-16).

After one hour the girls had finished praying and we left the three-hour service early which was something a lot of other people did. While we walked the long way back to the slum on the outskirts of Bukavu where the girls often spent the night, I asked them why they want to go to church, to which Hupenda gave me the following answer: “I might be a prostitute. I might be a sinner...but I still have to pray every now and then. For me, waking up each morning is not a right. I wake up only by God’s grace. So sometimes I need to glorify the Lord and say grace” (Hupenda, bile, informal conversation, 28-06-16).

Besides illustrating awareness of her moral position as a sinner, Hupenda's fascinating answer reveals this notion of gratefulness and the corresponding desire she experiences to "glorify the Lord and say grace". It also extends the idea that human life is a gift: not just the moment of birth was a gift, but each next morning she wakes up and lives is facilitated by God's grace only.

Next to evoking gratefulness, this cultural perspective contributes to the formation of children's moral subjectivities, in particular, influencing the way children think about their moral accountability. This can be explained by elaborating further on the notion of the self as God's gift. As argued in chapter 4 (section 4.3.1), this perspective is taken one step further by arguing the self is an *instrument* in God's hands. "As an instrument", explains Fr. Emmanuel, "if you want to do something, you can't do it yourself, the hammer cannot work himself, he needs to be in the hands of God to work" (Fr. Emmanuel, priest, expert interview, 04-03-2016). This perspective clearly surfaced in street children's contemplations, in particular in their reflections about the extent to which they 'own' their own lives and, subsequently, the extent to which they feel accountable for their actions.

From the conviction they were purposefully created by God, informants often regarded their own lives as first and foremost His responsibility instead of theirs. For instance, when asked about plans for his future, Boniem responded: "Well...I am created by God. I hope God will help me" (Boniem, *bile*, focus group GUOTS, 18-05-16). In general, literally nothing was imagined as possible without God's help whereas everything was believed to be possible when facilitated by Him. This is illustrated nicely by Raoul in the following quote: "You can have a small boutique, if it is God who has given it to you, you will find yourself ending up with a big shop [...] Everything that you may do outside of God has no importance. Even if you work hard, put a lot of effort, it is God who gives it to you" (Raoul, *bile*, interview 29-03-2016).

Also when it comes to day-to-day survival however, informants stressed they had no 'right' to live but rather ought to be grateful as long as they keep breathing. Besides Hupenda (see above), many other children told me they found it rather awkward to think of themselves as having a 'right to live', because from their experience it is God who decides over life and death, which makes being alive into a gift rather than a right. As

Pierre for instance said: “Only because God didn’t want me to die yet, I am still here” (Pierre, *bile*, focus group after boys theatre 6, 30-03-16).⁵²

Hence, when everything is imagined to be in God’s hands, this has implications for how children perceive (the limitations to) their agentic possibilities. It can be argued of course, that a hammer, as an intention-less object, can never truly be held accountable for any action since it is the hand that decides. This logic, summarized by the metaphor of the intention-less hammer, reveals a first moral strategy employed as part of the spiritual practice of moral survival. This is a strategy that not all children relied on, but something they could all relate to and something they discussed, for instance at the Site of Ideas (chapter 4, section 4.1.1). Indeed, some children clearly chose to cease final responsibility over their lives by holding God accountable. When contemplating herself as a moral subject, Belle for instance argued: “Well...if prostitution is a sin, how is it possible that God helps us by sending clients? Ok, prostitution is a sin. Everybody is a sinner. But people who sin...well ultimately their sins are also sent to them by God. And whatever you do...good things or bad things...we are all children of God” (Belle, *bile*, interview 17-06-16). Here Belle falls back to the ‘God created me-argument’, placing ultimate responsibility with God. Another illustration can be found in the following interview extract from an interview with Denis:

Author: “Do you feel that God is listening to you when you pray?”

Denis: “I know that he listens to me, but sometimes the pastor tells us that God does not listen to the prayer of sinners...”

Author “And what do you think about that?”

Denis: “I ask myself the question: since it is God who has created me...and because of sinning he won’t listen to me??!” (Denis, *bile*, interview 16-05-16).

For Denis, the conviction that he was created by God works as a strong argument that God must listen to him despite his sins. What is interesting here is that Denis argues he *knows* God listens to his prayer, despite a religious authority arguing otherwise. He thus trusts his own moral judgment (i.e. ‘God listens to me’) and/or spiritual reasoning (i.e. ‘God has created me therefore he ought to listen to me’) over a pastor’s professional perspective. Both his and Belle’s critical analyses indicate a high level of reflexivity and

⁵² When street children do not consider themselves as having a right to life (let alone other rights...) this poses interesting challenges to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment on Children in Street Situations (2017).

significant trust in personal moral judgements when it comes to religion. In section 6.2.3, I will provide more examples of informants who relied, ultimately, on their own religious and moral expertise even when this contrasted with the perspectives of religious authorities.

So far we have thus seen street children regard themselves as sinners through the sinful nature (from a Christian perspective) of their survival strategies, explaining their moral subjectivity as unstable yet biased towards the Dark because of existing opportunities for material survival (section 6.2.1). At the same time however, they see themselves as God's gift: purposefully created to be in the world (section 6.2.2) The conceptual paradox which seems to be the result of these two views is something children struggle with, in particular because it raises the questions of accountability and responsibility. The choice of some children to cease personal accountability for their conduct by holding God responsible reveals a first strategy to ease moral discomfort in the context of the everyday, hence a first example of the spiritual practice of moral survival. In other situations, however, street children do take full responsibility over their lives, which encourages them to develop other strategies to resolve the moral discomfort which is a consequence of taking such responsibility. Informants often express the wish to change their lifestyles and abandon the street and its associated sins. Yet at the same time - as I will show below - they acknowledge there is no opportunity, in the present, to allow for such a change. Incapable of changing their lifestyles, however, informants do strive to deal with their immoral selves in the best possible ways. In the next section, section 6.2.3, I will thus elaborate further on the spiritual practice of moral survival, outlining a second moral strategy developed by street children as marginal agents, operating within the structural constraints that impact their lives. This strategy can be seen as a partial moral solution to inevitable immorality, and it implies the avoidance of lying and hypocrisy towards God, enabling these children to be able to live with themselves morally and spiritually.

6.2.3 Playing fair with God: moral solutions to deal with immorality

In chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.1) I narrated my experiences of trying to join 19-year old Batumike at a church service in the Pentecostal church he said he attended weekly. Both Sundays I tried to meet the boy I failed and it turned out he had, in fact, lied to me about his regular church attendance as well as about the church location. What he had not lied about however, was how much the prospect of becoming a singer in the church's choir

appealed to him. Batumike had predicted he would walk through the church's doors with his girlfriend and mother-in-law, whereas the very existence of these two people is disputed by Batumike's friends. Here, in section 6.2.3, 6.2.4 and later in section 6.3, I will explain respectively why Batumike lied about these things and why this promise of becoming a singer appeals so much to him. In fact, in an interview months prior to my church visit attempts, Batumike had already revealed his ambivalent approach towards church attendance. He outlined why he felt he could not go to church although he might want to:

“I refuse to go to church. I believe in God, because I know that when I live, it is by His grace only. But for me, someone who behaves badly should not go to church. So I can't go to church. But one day, I will go. When I am really converted, that's when I will start attending church. When I am sure that I have stopped all my bad behaviour, I can go. But I see a lot of people I know well who go to church. But those people are the same people who do bad things...so I ask myself the question should I really go to church while I am doing all these bad things...like stealing, like doing bad things to other people. Or should I go to church after having stopped all those things? I feel like I am still a sinner. I am still behaving badly so I cannot go to church because it would mean cheating on God. But I know that one day, after converting, I will go to church!” (Batumike, *bile*, interview 29-03-16).

There are various insights to be retrieved from Batumike's explanation of his moral perspective. First of all, we can recognize the reference he makes to “living by God's grace only”. Second, Batumike explains that his refusal to go to church is unrelated to his faith and religious intentions; “I believe in God...one day I will go [to church]”. Third, Batumike self-identifies as a sinner. Fourth, he clearly reflects on and gives importance to the question of morality in his life (e.g. “I ask myself the question should I go to church while doing all these bad things?”). Fifth, and most importantly, he decides to not go to church as long as he considers himself a sinner, because it would mean “cheating on God”. This decision reveals moral agency. It is decided on after thorough contemplation and based on knowledge of oneself (e.g. “I steal and do other ‘bad things’”), knowledge of the cultural and religious field (e.g. “this behaviour is a sin”) and his desire to be as good as possible in the eyes of God (e.g. the assumption is here that God would not like to be “cheated on”). Batumike felt incapable of changing his bad behaviour as yet. In general, street children agreed that at this particular moment in time, they were simply not able to fully adhere to the moral-religious guidelines of their faith. The particularly harsh conditions of street life keep them away from the total (social, moral, psychological)

rupture associated with conversion, as I will demonstrate in section 6.3.1. In the participatory diagramming exercise, Gloria had emphasized that: “it is the *context* that doesn’t allow me to be in church. For example, my sleeping conditions...if I don’t smoke [weed] I cannot sleep. And this [smoking weed] is what is forbidden in church, so for that I have to leave the church...that’s why I stopped going to church” (Gloria, *bile*, participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-16). Yet this radical change in the form of conversion is what Batumike aspires to; the sixth and final insight from his quote above: “But I know that one day, after converting, I will go to church!” This tendency towards the postponement of real conversion and, consequently, of sustainable commitment to moral-Christian behaviour was very common among research participants and should be understood in the context of grave existential insecurities. Yema underlined this for instance, by saying: “[...]if I find money I can start a small business and then I will leave prostitution. If I gain something to support myself and my children. [But] It is difficult for me to recognize God at this moment, to transform now, because of the situation I am going through. It is truly difficult. That’s why I currently do prostitution; to be able to eat and feed my children” (Yema, *bile*, focus group after girls theatre 2, 29-04-16). Like Batumike, Yema was talking about the religious conversion that she postponed in spite of her faith because the chronic lack of opportunities in her marginal existence obliged her to commit sins in order to survive. In section 6.3 I will elaborate more on this mechanism of postponing conversion, keeping a dream alive, by assessing the temporal component of subjectivity.

In section 6.2.3 I described Hupenda and Belle’s motivation to go to church. Their moral strategy (e.g. “I have to go to church to say grace”) was different from Batumike’s final decision (to not go to church), but the process of reflexivity that preceded their decisions is essentially the same. Hupenda decided that *despite* sinning she still had to go to church to glorify the Lord. In contrast, Batumike felt that *because of* sinning he could better stay away from church to avoid hypocrisy. In both cases, we thus see how a contemplation of the self leads to intentional decision-making. This underlines the centrality of subjectivity and indeed reflexivity for understanding children’s agency. At the level of the acting individual it indicates these children are always at least partially ‘knowing subjects’, as Ortner (2006) explains subjectivity in relation to agency, emphasizing individuals have at least some degree of reflexivity about themselves and their desires. The decisions of Hupenda and Batumike are based on thorough contemplation of the world and their position in the world. In both cases their subjectivity

as sinners - "I am a sinner" - was important. Besides indicating reflexivity, this highlights the importance of a certain cultural awareness that is time and place-specific, i.e. in Catholic-dominated Bukavu, the lifestyle of street children is considered sinful. As such, this illustrates Ortner's argument that subjectivity cannot be set apart from a historical and cultural consciousness, because how an individual thinks about oneself is influenced by localized dynamics of culture shaping (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts and meanings (Ortner 2005).

It should be noticed that Batumike's strategy, to avoid church attendance and hence hypocrisy, was more common among the *Biles*. When asked about church attendance, Francine gave a similar answer saying that: "I can't [go to church]. It is difficult because I commit sins...I do prostitution in the night and to go to church after such a night... that is provoking God" (Francine, *bile*, interview 12-05-16). Both Batumike and Francine phrase their moral objections to church attendance whilst still sinning along the same lines: cheating on God/provoking God. Even if informants feel as if there is nothing they can do to avoid committing sins that constitute the very basis of their survival toolkit, there are thus opportunities for moral strategies, moral solutions one can say, to confine the immoral spiral. Particularly, research participants went to great lengths to avoid hypocrisy towards their ultimate creator and saviour; playing as fair as possible with God. In this process of contemplating and creating personal moral strategies to deal as best as possible with their immoral selves, street children relied heavily on their own expertise in different ways. Being created by God, as everyone else, informants felt they were as much children of God as everyone else. Hence, they knew as well as everyone else what God wants. Remarkably, informants relied on their own moral assessments even when spiritual experts argued the contrary. An example of this can be found in Gloria's explanation of occasions on which she and her friends disagreed over the Bible with a travelling pastor:

"It happens that a pastor arrives and he approaches us on the streets. For instance, the place where we often eat, the pastor enters there to preach. And when he approaches us, sometimes he talks to us about the Bible and we also want to show him that in the past we also used to pray and read the Bible and we will tell him: 'No, you lie! We also know the Bible and it says...this and this and such'. And that's how such a discussion with a pastor starts. So, although we are on the streets we still have a notion of the Bible and we can have a discussion about it with a pastor" (Gloria, *bile*, pictorial interview 21-06-16).

Gloria outlines how she and her friend rely on their own knowledge of the Bible and how they do not hesitate to reject a pastor's religious authority when they disagree with him based on their personal interpretation of the Bible. Next to being God's child like everyone else, street children are, of course, experts on marginality. As such, they clearly felt they knew more than anyone else about the specific dynamics of their relationship with God. One example of this can be found in Denis' reflections above (section 6.3.1) in which he mentioned he *knows* God listens to him despite a pastor saying God does not listen to the prayer of sinners. Below, I will present two powerful illustrations of this second moral strategy deployed in the context of (children's reflections on) immoral selves in which the authority of a religious expert is rejected. Both examples derive from observed interaction between a group of street boys and a travelling pastor.

On April 18th, 2016, I followed pastor Juma to Boniem's group of street boys. A group of fifteen boys was resting from their car-washing work at a parking place near a large junction. The boys greeted me and quickly made room so I could sit in their middle on car carpets laid down on a small brick wall. Pastor Juma asked if he could pray with us for two minutes. One boy wearing a black hoody jumped up and provokingly applauded, encouraging the pastor to start. Only one boy chose to continue with his work, the others remained seated to listen to Juma's words. The pastor's voice transformed into a real preacher's voice and he preached along these lines: "Jesus loves you. Jesus loves everyone. Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins...for my sins (pointing to himself), for your sins (pointing to one of the boys), for his sins...So: stop stealing! Stop taking drugs! Stop drinking! Go back home!" (Observations, 18-04-16). At that moment, one of the boys stands up, visibly irritated and while walking away he shouts to Juma in Swahili: "How can you tell us that we are not allowed to drink?! You are crazy, man!". Without paying any attention to the boy, Juma continues. After his short sermon, he invites all of us to pray together, telling us to raise our hands and repeat his words. All the Biles close their eyes and raise their hands in the utmost pious way (see figure 6.7). Juma starts: "I believe in God and Jesus". We all repeat after him. "I won't commit anymore sins...", "I will go back home...Jesus will take care of me". The choir of religious street children repeating Juma's statements hesitates. "I will stop stealing". Voices falter. "I will stop fighting". Someone laughs. Then the final promise: "I will stop drinking beer". An awkward silence. I secretly open one eye to look around the circle of Biles. One of the

boys also peeks from underneath his cap and we exchange a knowing glance. I see his lips are firmly pressed together, determined to not lie in his prayer to the Lord.

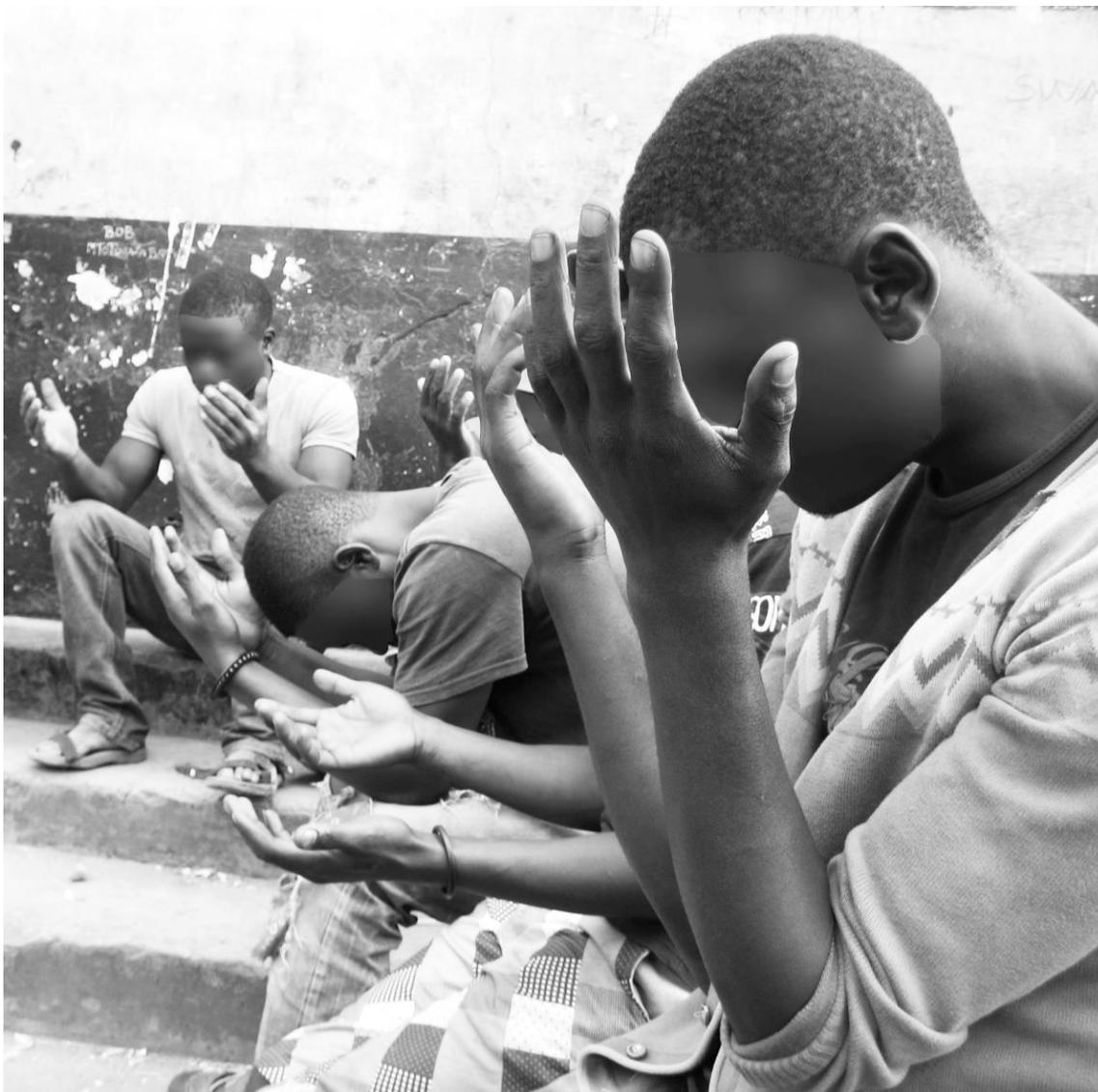


Figure 6.7. Street boys praying together with Pastor Juma on the streets (Source: author, 18-04-16).

Here it becomes clear that these children's urge to "satisfy the pastor" as Boniem had once described his motivation for going to Juma's church, was not strong enough to consciously make promises to God that are considered untenable given the circumstances of their lives. Reasons to not participate in certain parts of a prayer and to ignore moralising discourse were not just pragmatic or reflecting self-interests. This behaviour I witnessed is a telling example of informants trying to avoid lying and hypocrisy *despite* the fact that this is not particularly in their best material interests. Although they were always open and respectful to (religious) authorities, informants valued their relationship

with God over their relationships with religious representatives and in fact, as morally autonomous beings *and* as experts on marginal life, they relied heavily on their own insights when making moral claims and when assessing their relationship with God. This same group of street boys illustrated this insight even more powerfully on a second occasion, to which I will now turn.

In chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.1) I discussed the relationship between Boniem and his friends and pastor Juma. Pastor Juma showed remarkable tolerance towards the boys' anti-Christian behaviour as well as patience towards the change he allegedly fought for. Consequently, Boniem had argued the pastor "knows us well" and "really loves us" (Boniem, *bile*, interview 31-03-16). Yet only a couple of weeks after this interview with Boniem, something very insightful happened which altered the trust-relationship between the boys and the pastor, revealing the complexity of these kind of relationships, the way the children ultimately rely on their personal capacities for moral judgement, illustrating strong agentive awareness and the deployment of strategies based on self-reflection and intentionality.

March 13th, two weeks after the interview with Boniem in which we discussed his relationship with pastor Juma, I talked with Mosi, a PEDER street worker who has regular contact with the group of Boniem. He informed me that according to Boniem, pastor Juma had put arrangements in place to baptise four boys from Boniem's group last Sunday (March 6th). Apparently, the pastor had tried to appease the boys by giving them money in exchange for the promise to indeed get baptised and to facilitate the process by ensuring they would not be drunk or under influence of drugs that day. A week later however, when the pastor arrived at the scene to guide the boys to his church for their baptism, he found them all too drunk to get up...(Mosi, PEDER street worker, informal conversation 13-04-16). I was not surprised to hear the boys had been drunk and in the remaining short conversation I suggest to Mosi the boys must have forgotten the date, because usually they would try their best to satisfy the pastor hoping for his aid, or otherwise they simply did not care enough about the promise of baptism, focused only on the material benefits of their relationship with the pastor. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

When I caught up with Boniem later that week, I came to understand that the boys consciously, and after a week-long contemplation and discussion, collectively decided to be drunk that specific day and time to avoid what they saw as an illegitimate and therefore

undesirable baptism. Out of respect for the pastor they had not wanted to reject his offer or argue with him and since the pastor always knew where to find them, they had seen no other way to escape baptism than through breaking the one condition the pastor had set: getting drunk. This strategy clearly worked, as Pastor Juma got angry with the boys for being drunk despite his promise for giving them (more) money after baptism, and he had left them alone for more than two weeks. Interpreting the pastor's disappointment, Boniem said: "He [the pastor] used to like me a lot, but now that he has seen that I don't want to get baptised, he has taken more reserve" (Boniem, bile, informal conversation, 18-04-16). When I asked Boniem why he did not want to get baptised despite it being an opportunity for material enrichment, he said: "I cannot accept to be baptised, because I know I am still going to continue my life on the street; strangling people at night... killing people... and also stealing. So, I really cannot accept baptism. The day I will be baptised will be the day I leave the street" (Boniem, bile, informal conversation 18-04-16). Boniem was not alone in this decision but received the support of his friends. Later, the other boys argued along the same lines in a focus group: "We are not sure whether he [Pastor Juma] is a true or a false pastor, it depends on his heart. But one day he told us to get baptised...and when we heard this we were very surprised!! How can we be baptised before following the instructions?! We should first follow the instructions and then we can become baptised. So therefore, we decided to refuse...and when the pastor discovered that we refused [...] he stopped visiting us regularly" (focus group after boys theatre 4, 28-04-16).

These reflections reveal important insights. It shows first of all the extent to which street children endorse the value of religious baptism as something that should be taken very seriously. It indicates the limitations of their opportunism and reveals a tendency towards sense-making which clearly moves beyond the quest for everyday material survival that was the analytical point of departure in chapter 5. It also shows the extent to which street children, ultimately, do not entirely trust anyone but themselves and how their own moral expertise and knowledge of the Spiritual Field forms the solid conceptual basis shaping thought and action. Boniem clearly trusted the pastor and he did not doubt the pastor was after his best interests. Remember for instance how he argued: "you know, this pastor he really loves us a lot. When we smoke, he demands our cigarettes and he destroys them under his shoe and he says: 'a man of God doesn't do that'" (Boniem, bile, interview 31-03-16). Hence when the pastor proposed something unexpected, Boniem could have also

decided to trust that it was the best thing to do, *spiritually*, and that the pastor, as a religious authority, probably knew what he was doing, also because Boniem knew the pastor had observed the boys stealing in church; an indication of their sinful tendencies. In contrast, when the pastor proposed baptism, the whole group of street children had been shocked by his offer and it had made them question the pastor's integrity, to reject his authority and make a decision, "salvaging themselves" (cf. Snow and Anderson 1993) based on personal spiritual evaluation of the situation.

It should be noted that the boys did not refuse baptism because they do not *want* to get baptised or they do not value it. Quite the contrary: it is their profound desire to become baptised and to be truly 'converted' in the sense of changing their sinful lifestyles by leaving "the bizarre zone of society" as one boy described it nicely (*bile*, boys focus group after boys theatre 1, 28-04-16). Yet at the same time they are aware this change is not realistic at this point in time because right now there is no alternative for making a living hence they are not in the position to "follow the instructions", to indeed live along their religion's moral and social guidelines. In the examples in this section, the contemplation of the self leads to social action: through reflecting on themselves as moral agents *and* rooted in their awareness of the (rules of the) field, children consciously decide to avoid lying or hypocrisy towards God by not going to church for instance, and by escaping an illegitimate baptism; a way to play as fair as possible with God. This second strategy of the spiritual practice of moral survival reveals a way of operating of marginal beings in a setting that highly constrains them. As the children themselves have pointed out: "it is the *context*" (of marginality, poverty, chronic lack of opportunities) that does not allow them "to be in church" (Gloria, *bile*, participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-16). Yet, despite these constraints, these children struggle, not just to get by but also with existential questions, contemplating their moral selves and seeking to live their lives as meaningfully as possible.

Hence, we can detect an interesting kind of agency, which is played out at the edges of power and to which intentionality is key. According to Ortner, intentionality, a concept meant "to include all the ways in which action is cognitively and emotionally pointed *toward* some purpose" is what differentiates agency from routine practices (Ortner 2006, 145, emphasis in the original). The example of Boniem's group escaping an illegitimate baptism is highly illustrative of this intentionality in agency. The children's decision to get drunk to avoid such baptism is based on their *intention* of maintaining a good, moral relationship with God to the best of their potential seen the

challenging circumstances of their lives. It can thus be seen as a moral strategy directed toward the purpose of realizing their desire of inclusion, in this case spiritual inclusion. In the next section, section 6.3.4, I will elaborate more on the pursuit of this inclusion, discussing a third moral strategy of the spiritual practice of moral survival. I will outline the paradox that ultimately, street children feel spiritually included because of their worldly exclusion. Based on their awareness of their positionality as children of God, like everyone else, *and* highly deprived, like no-one else, they ascribe themselves a moral position of exception, a position of limited accountability for moral transgression. This makes them feel loved by God and included in His eyes.

6.2.4 Being God's beloved: moral pardon and spiritual inclusion

Generally, informants argued they felt loved and cared for by God. They worried about their sinful behaviour but generally said they thought God would understand and forgive them. I have already outlined how the analogy of the hammer in God's hands is sometimes used as a 'moral excuse' to cease responsibility (e.g. Belle had said that it is God who sends clients and ultimately even sins to prostitutes). This analogy however accounts equally for everyone, street kid or non-street kid, as everyone has been equally created as God's child. This *doxic* truth helps street children to feel accepted and included; as we have seen above, Belle had argued: "Whatever you do...good things or bad things...we are all children of God" (Belle, *bile*, interview 17-06-16). Yet it can be argued there are two different ways in which street children feel they are uniquely nurtured and loved by God. Whereas the 'God created all of us and nobody was an accident argument' is based on street children's equality compared to others, these other two ways are rather rooted in their difference; their distinct position as extremely marginal children.

First of all, although informants agreed that God loves everyone, they believed that He puts particular effort into protecting street children. In fact, informants stressed they, as street children, were generally closer to God than others. In the context of a complete absence of protection from caring adults, they relied completely on God's care and they felt God compensated for their lack of protection from others. Gloria nicely illustrates this:

"It is God who protects us, street children. Because often there are bad things during the night...yes it is God who loves street children a lot. The children on the streets are protected [by God], but those in the family they are less protected [by Him]. Street children encounter a lot of things in the streets, they come across

heavily armed gangsters and they cross their path without problems. Children in the family are protected by their family [...]. When we are going to steal, when the owner catches us and starts to beat us, there it is God again who protects us” (Gloria, *bile*, interview 29-03-16).

Gloria’s experience that as vulnerable street children she and her friends receive a disproportionate amount of God’s protection was shared by many others. In chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.5), I presented the common dogma that “God helps thieves, witches and prostitutes” (e.g. Mohammed, *bile*, focus group Islam, 25-05-16) as *doxa*. The conviction that God loves and protects street children can be seen in this light. Regardless of the overlap of these categories - street children usually *are* thieves and prostitutes - and despite their differences, these groups have in common that they are all seen as deprived, socially excluded and highly marginalized. As Gloria’s explanation suggests (see above), their social exclusion is imagined to be compensated for a larger share of God’s protection and love. They are thus seen as further away from mainstream society yet closer to God.⁵³

A second spiritual privilege street children talked about concerns a certain moral pardon granted by God. For instance, there was general agreement that stealing is - normally - a sin. At the same time however, they argued that *for them* stealing is forgivable given their existential needs. Rizo for instance argued that “God forgives me, because He knows I don’t have [anything] to eat and that I need to steal to eat”. As such Rizo considers it legitimate even to ask for God’s assistance when trying to steal; “and I pray to thank Him too, once I’ve managed [to steal something]” (Rizo, *bile*, interview 28-02-16). Antoine claimed that for street children “*kuiba haiko zambi*” (“stealing is not a sin”, Antoine, *bile*, interview 24-05-16). When Ikeno told me that God loves street children I asked “even when they commit sins like stealing?” to which he replied “stealing it not a sin because God knows we are also just getting by [...] stealing is not a sin because God said ‘if you help yourself, God will also help you’” (Ikeno, *bile*, interview 15-06-16). The majority of research participants thus thought stealing was either not really a sin for them or, at least, a sin which was easily forgivable: “Stealing in church is forgivable. God can forgive you for this because he knows you have a problem, you have difficulties, you are hungry” (Rizo, *bile*, pictorial interview 18-04-16).

⁵³ Although the children never made this reference themselves, their perspectives can perhaps be interpreted as being in line with Biblical theology. Matthew 21: 31 for instance teaches us that Jesus said: “truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you”.

Hence, stealing was categorized under God's moral pardon: this should be seen as an exception made for street children because God would never accept the same moral transgression from a 'patron': a rich man. Things became more complex when children were asked to judge the forgivability of their activities related to sex work and witchcraft. Generally, witchcraft was evaluated as the most immoral act followed by prostitution and then stealing and drug use which were seen as relatively innocent acts. The extent to which witchcraft and prostitution were judged varied significantly. Antoine for instance believed stealing is a forgivable sin while witchcraft leads straight to hell. He explained he based this perspective on a film he had seen in which Jesus allegedly forgave thieves but doomed witches (Antoine, *bile*, interview 24-05-16). The most important measure was always the question whether these acts were ultimately forgivable, which meant one could still go to heaven or whether these sins would irreversibly preclude salvation. Vincent and Esther judged their childhood witchcraft practices as forgivable because of their young age and moral ignorance (Vincent, *bile*, interview 17-03-16 and Esther, *bile*, interview 07-03-16). In contrast, Rizo and Nuru took full responsibility for their current intention of making a pact with the Devil and they accepted the consequences of "no paradise" (i.e. Rizo, *bile*, interview 18-04-16). When thinking back to the hammer analogy it can of course be argued that in the case of witchcraft, a person has deliberately chosen to leave the hand of God to become a puppet in the hands of Satan. With regards to sex work, Antoine, Ikeno, Francine all argued prostitution is a serious sin. In fact, this made them stricter in their moral judgment than Fr. Emmanuel, a Catholic authority, who explained the Catholic concept of a sin as a "free, consented and decided refusal to not do what God is asking from us and to do, instead, what he is not asking for". The priest alludes here to the girls' position as victims of sexual exploitation rather than agents that choose to go against God's will while they have another alternative. With sex work judged by the children as less forgivable, at best, compared to stealing, this means a gendered division of moral evaluation since only girls were known to be sex workers while boys were almost always thieves. In section 6.3 (section 6.3.1), I will discuss this gender difference in more detail when I will turn to an investigation of how informants imagine their near and distant futures as well as their afterlife.

Hence, reflecting on the local credo that the self is God's gift on the one hand and their experiences receiving a disproportionate amount of God's protection and mercy on the other hand, children ultimately ascribe themselves a moral position of exception. Being God's child, as everyone else, yet being highly deprived, like no-one else, children

ultimately felt included as precious beings loved by God. As such, the spiritual practice of survival offers a first, crucial yet partial realisation of children's (culturally constituted) life projects which revolves, in essence, around becoming included. Notwithstanding its value however, spiritual inclusion seems not to be the end goal children aspire to. In the next section, section 6.3, I will focus on a second dimension in which the spiritual practice of moral survival is employed: the way children contemplate the self in time, hence imagining oneself as a subject with a past, a present and a future. I will explore a fourth and final strategy of the spiritual practice of moral survival, one that highlights the practice's engagement with a notion of temporality: by aspiring to religious conversion in the future, imagined as a "complete break with the past" (cf. Meyer 1998), children are better able to live with their current immoral conduct. Religion is key, both to imagining the facilitation of transformation (i.e. conversion) as well as picturing such a good life. A deeper analysis of the way children imagine such a good life reveals an essence of 'the ordinary/the normal'. This is, I will argue, the final outcome of the spiritual practice of moral survival: the pursuit of the state of normality that will allow children to experience the social inclusion they so deeply desire.

6.3 Traversing time: the pursuit of inclusion

Having outlined children's (understanding of their) present subjectivities in section 6.2.1, I will start here, in section 6.3.1, with an analysis of how children perceive their past and, particularly, future selves. I will show for instance how, despite all the hardships on the streets and their self-condemnation as sinners, most children - boys more than girls - remain hopeful about a good ending of their life, imagining a point in time in which things will change for the better. Such radical change is imagined through religious conversion. I will argue that such vast belief in the power of conversion reflects the local promise of the option of becoming 'born-again', which is brought to Bukavu's Spiritual Field by Pentecostal Christianity (see chapter 4, section 4.3.3.2). The Pentecostal idea of conversion as a "total rupture" (Daswani 2013), "a complete break with the past" (Meyer 1998), is framed in moral terms by my informants and I will show how the *postponement* of this rupture is a fourth strategy of the spiritual practice of moral survival. In section 6.3.2 I will elaborate further on this hopeful prospect by analysing the role of religiosity, explained as the local logic of how to pursue 'the good and desirable' in Eastern Congo, for imagining a good life. I will outline the remarkably modest aspirations of the *Biles*, in which religiosity, in particular church attendance, symbolizes the ordinary and the

normal, ways through which street children ultimately pursue the social inclusion they desire.

6.3.1 *'Scripts of Life': on moral being and becoming*

Data has indicated that street children's discourse on subjectivity shows a clear temporal component. Children's ideas about the self are in fact ideas about a present self versus future and past selves. As I have argued above (section 6.2.1), discourse on present selves is often phrased in terms of an immoral spiritual self and current spiritual bias towards the Dark side. As I outlined earlier in this chapter (section 6.2.2) this (present) situation is often interpreted in terms of limited accountability: street children insist the "context" does not allow them to change their immoral conduct and they fully rely on God's mercy. The future however is often imagined differently. Almost all research participants imagined a certain moment in time - "one day" - when things would change for the better. This moment was often interpreted as a transition from (working for) the Devil to (serving) God, a transition from immoral to moral, but also from marginalization to participation, a spiritual and social transformation from being a street child living on the edge to becoming a Christian citizen. Girls strongly linked this transformation with ending their work as sex workers, boys often spoke about their desire to stop stealing and committing other crimes. The following quote derives from a girls' focus group and it shows the prospect these girls have of changing their behaviour, a spiritual "transformation" and living a good life:

"One day, the Devil will not be stronger than God. You can work for the Devil for many days and many years, but one day you will abandon him to go to God. Especially the person who served Satan and who did bad things, it is that person that God would like to see changing to become His child. Many people were sinners before, doing bad stuff, but if God transforms them, they are going to find things and they will tell other people about their transformation [...] so it is better to start bad and to end good [in life]" (focus group after girls theatre 2, 29-04-16).

The last sentence is noteworthy here: "it is better to start bad and to end good". It nicely summarizes, in fact, how children often image the spiritual chronology of their biographies. This belief, that there will always be, sooner or later, an opportunity for sincere conversion, a radical transformation and hence, a new life, motivates them not to lose hope. Importantly, it is a way of legitimising, for themselves, their current (immoral) conduct. Later, the girls illustrate this even better: "We go to the Devil first. Instead of

going to God. Even while we know that it is God who protects...the Devil always responds...We have faith. We know that in the end, we will come to God. But at this moment we need to realise our fun so we need to go to the Devil” (focus group after girls theatre 2, 29-04-16). These girls’ conviction that “in the end we go to God”, while consciously choosing to ‘serve’ the Dark Kingdom in the present, “realising our fun”, is remarkable. This reveals the fourth and final strategy of the spiritual practice of moral survival: by aspiring to, yet consciously postponing conversion, and the inherent moral transformation, children experience less discomfort acknowledging their current immoral conduct.

These imagined spiritual (life) trajectories, from the Dark to the Divine, featured very prominently particularly in both theatre and art data. A vast majority of theatre plays were dedicated to portraying such a trajectory starting with a situation in which Satanic forces dominated the lives of theatre participants, then a spiritual battle between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ leading (almost always) to a triumph of the ‘good’. For instance, when explaining what their theatre play was about, Martin outlined: “in the theatre we showed that people can think twice and convert. We have shown how you can convert...abandon the Devil to become a believer. We have shown that God is always God. Even if we do things He doesn’t like, He always has the power to change everything” (Martin, *bile*, focus group after boys theatre 8, 28-04-2016).

Indeed, in the theatre plays it was not uncommon for thieves, prostitutes, witchdoctors, witches and sometimes even the Devil himself to convert, often under influence of a pervasive and powerful pastor, and to abandon their previous activities. In one boys’ theatre play (boys theatre 1), a dedicated pastor manages to convert a thief and a witchdoctor respectively. After their conversion, they both assisted the pastor in the challenging conversion of the Devil himself. They succeeded: all satanic objects that the Devil used were burnt and the Devil himself was taken to church. All joined in happy and harmonious singing and praying, praising the Lord. They even sang a special ‘conversion song’, which, as the boys told me later, they remembered from their youth: “I am converted, all my sins are forgiven!! I am very happy because all my sins are gone... I am now going to work for the Lord: All the days of my life! All the days of my life! I am converted, all my sins are forgiven!! I am now going to work for my saviour, the Lord, all the days of my life, all the days of my life!” (conversion song, boys theatre 1, 29-04-2016). All’s well that ends well. The practicalities of life after conversion however were not given much attention in theatre plays. We do not learn, for instance, how thieves,

prostitutes and witches can make a living after conversion or what the role of a converted Devil would be. The optimistic message is clear however: God triumphs over Evil. He has the power to transform even the most immoral beings into His servants. When I asked for details about how such a transformation worked in practice, informants often answered with “God is God/God is always God”.

Crucially, informants argued they knew from experience that these kind of drastic conversions were never impossible but rather omnipresent. When explaining their theatre play, they often shared experiences about people they know who used to be collaborators of the Devil before becoming a servant of the Lord. This was the case for instance with the boys’ theatre group described above in which even the Devil becomes converted. When I asked the participants whether they thought their play could be a real story. They all shouted “Yes!!” and argued: “Yes, because we see them...these people are there. Those who were big criminals, big thieves and we saw how they were and today they are real preachers! And others...those who practiced witchcraft and now you can see that they are even the ones who sing in certain churches...” (focus group after boys’ theatre 1, 29-04-16). These experiences of witnessing a moral transformation of other people made street children more confident about the prospects of their own life paths. A group of girls argued for instance: “One day, God will forgive us [...] We know we will go to heaven, because many people who are believers today, they were prostitutes like us in the past and today they have changed so we also have hope that one day we will meet God” (focus group after girls’ theatre 2, 29-04-16).

Interestingly, children’s belief in and experiences with (the possibility of) such radical transformations clearly reflect (local) theological teachings of Pentecostal Christianity. Sketching Bukavu’s religious subfield in chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.2), I argued the Pentecostal emphasis on the possibility, and desirability, to become ‘Born-again’ helps to explain the religion’s local popularity in general and the way it allures street children in particular. Indeed, scholars studying Pentecostal conversion, which happens in the form of adult baptism, argue it is the most radical form of conversion, a total “rupture” (Daswani 2013) or a “complete break with the past” (Meyer 1998) after which believers are said to be ‘Born-again’ (see also Engelke 2004). Studying Pentecostalism in Ghana, Meyer (1998, 317) has argued that “make a complete break with the past” is an often-heard cry in Pentecostalist circles and she argues that the “notion of rupture...forms a key to a better understanding of much African Christian religious practice”. Building on this, Daswani (2013, 474) adds that rupture is always registered in moral terms, which

makes “ethical practice paramount to an understanding of Pentecostal rupture”. This notion of rupture, indeed framed in moral terms and imagined as this “one day” when “the Devil will not be stronger than God” (focus group after girls theatre 2, 29-04-16), strongly surfaces in my data. For instance, as outlined before in section 6.2.3, Batumike had said: “I believe in God...when I am really converted, that’s when I will start attending church” (Batumike, *bile*, interview 29-03-16). This indicates Batumike does not see conversion as a transition from not believing in God to embracing the Christian faith, because he explains he already believes in God. Rather, his understanding of conversion echoes the Pentecostal cry of a “total rupture” framed in moral terms. Batumike adds: “when I have stopped all my bad behaviour, I can go [to church]” (*idem*), revealing he associates conversion with a behaviour change rather than a change in conviction.

In fact, it can be argued, street children have incorporated this notion of rupture in the spiritual practice of moral survival, highlighting a Bourdieusian understanding of the way individuals *internalize* rules and principles of the field (this is what Bourdieu would call *habitus*). In the light of Ortner’s work, the incorporation of the Pentecostal notion of rupture in the spiritual practice of moral survival reminds us that subjectivity cannot be set apart from a historical and cultural consciousness, because how an individual thinks about himself is influenced by localized dynamics of culture shaping (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts and meanings. Hence, interestingly, whereas the pre-colonial/Catholic credo that the self is God’s gift serves to comfort street children in the everyday, the Pentecostal option of ‘making a complete break with the past’ provides these children with hope for the future.

However, the notion of rupture and the belief in personal moral transformations was not always enough to make children envision the last stages of their life and the hereafter positively. Indeed, based on (most) theatre data, it can be argued that the future seems hopeful. However, whereas the theatre plays were collective ventures in which informants tried to present a scenario which they thought was ‘likely’ but perhaps most of all as ‘desirable’, data from the art exercise gave a more nuanced view of children’s expectations of their personal unfolding life paths. Even more than the theatre plays, drawings took the form of what can be seen as ‘scripts of life’, discussing not just the present and (prospects for) the future, but also one’s past. As such, the art data indicated that the future is not only characterized by hope, but also by uncertainty and even fear. The most important determinant shaping children’s feelings about their spiritual life trajectories - balancing between hope and fear - happens to be gender. For one particular

drawing exercise, I asked participants to draw the answer to the following question: “*kisha kufa, unaendaka wapi?*” meaning “where will you go after death?”. In the responses to this question, an important gender difference emerged. An impressive majority of the boys still thought they would go to God, in accordance with the theatre data. Exceptions were those boys who were, currently, in negotiation with the Devil over a pact. In contrast: half of the girls believed they would go to hell and one girl feared for this fate.

Raoul, for instance, a boy, drew a church and a God with wings and the text “*ndayenda kwa Mungu*” [I will go to God] (see figure 6.8). He explained: “After dying I will be with God. Despite my sins, God is God. I am not a witch to say that I will go to the Devil. The end of my life it will be with God” (Raoul, *bile*, drawings 23-06-16).

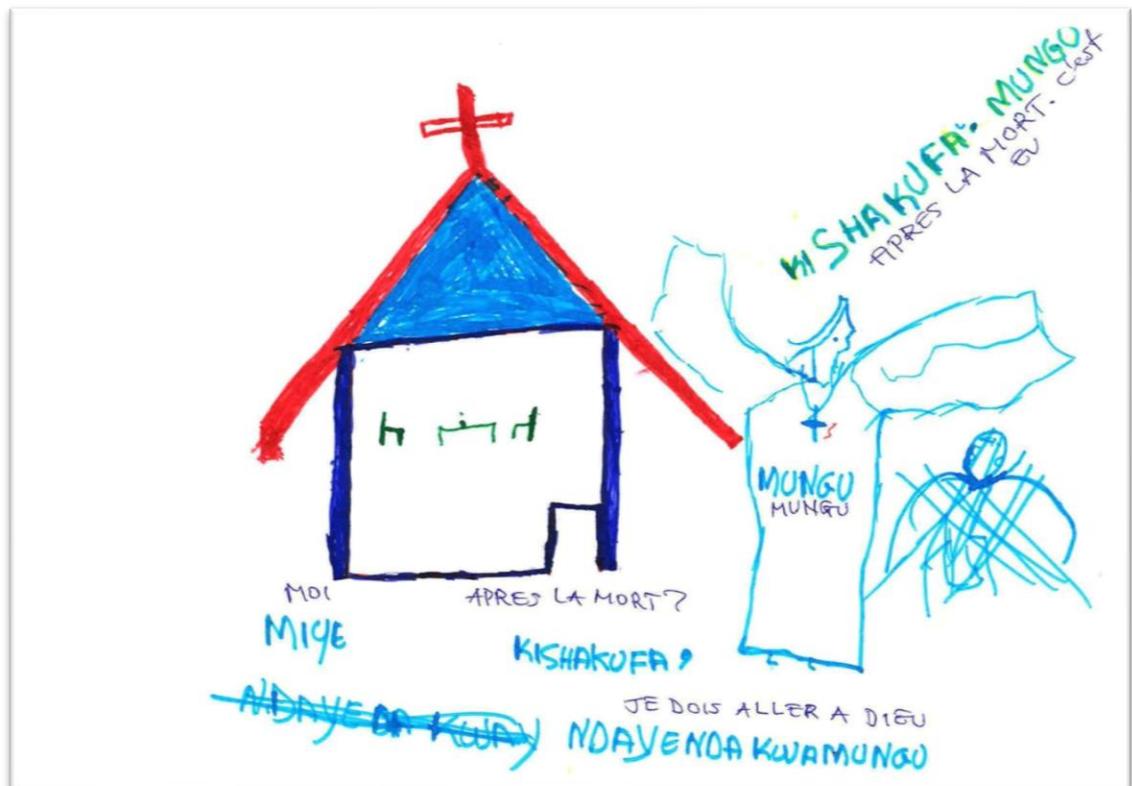


Figure 6.8. Drawing by Raoul. “That’s the church (left of centre, church building with red roof). That’s God (right of centre, blue figure with wings). After dying I will be with God. Despite of my sins, God is God. I am not a witch to say that I will go to the devil. The end of my life it will be with God” (Raoul, *bile*, drawings 23-06-16).

Interestingly, many participants included the very contemplation over the question in the drawing itself, often drawing themselves thinking about my question. A nice example is

this, I ask myself the question ‘everything I do, I steal, I have sex...if I die right now, where will I go?’ (right upper corner) And directly, I think of God. God is here (at the top, coming down from heaven, drawn in the circle). God has listened to the reflections of the child and he says ‘hi, you, small children come to me, I am your father!’” (Damien, *bile*, drawings 23-06-16).

It should be noted here that although the very precise and quite directive exercise was to ‘draw oneself : you’ Damien starts, and ends talking about the protagonist of his drawing-story in the third person: “a street child”. After a few sentences he changes to the first person. This happened very often when the children were asked to explain their drawing. Perhaps they struggled with the confrontation of contemplating their afterlife, including admitting to oneself that one might actually go to hell. However, when I asked them directly who the street kid in their drawing was, they always responded that it was them. Damien’s drawing reveals his street biography, including a description of how his street career began. The drawing indicates he has clearly reflected on the question of an afterlife in the context of street life, in particular moral conduct associated with street life (i.e. stealing and prostitution). At a certain moment in time there seems to be a moment in which the Damien in the drawing is confronted with the question of the future consequences of his current survival repertoire: he asks himself the question “after having done all this, what will happen?/where will I go?”. This is also the moment he remembers God (exists) and when thinking of Him, Damien ultimately and intuitively feels God will forgive him and welcome him as His child. Damien’s God is merciful and - with open arms - reassures that “small children come to me, I am your father!” The reference to “small children” may point at the experience of limited accountability due to age.

Whereas most boys thus ultimately see themselves going to heaven despite their lifestyles, the majority of the girls imagined a different ending for themselves in their drawings: six out of twelve girls thought they would go to hell because of their sins, one girl was not sure and five saw themselves going to heaven. This was in contrast to the stories they told in their theatre plays and to their statements in focus groups which were more redemptive. Yet individual life trajectories did not share this optimism but were particularly tragic instead. It was remarkable, for instance, that at least eight out of twelve girls imagined their own deaths to happen in the near future, at least always before the deaths of their parents, friends and/or siblings. This incoherence of thoughts manifest in girls’ theatre performances versus their drawings can be explained as rooted in the nature of the method - collective vs. individual - but arguably we should not forget that it is not

uncommon that people's narratives about their lives, including memories, hopes, fears and ideas about the 'desirable' are incoherent in essence, messy and changeable when people struggle to seek sense.

An example of quite a tragic 'script of life' can be found in Mary's drawing (figure 6.10).



Figure 6.10. Mary's drawing of her street biography, 25-06-16.

Mary narrates her story:

"I meet a boy on the street. He proposes: 'my sister, come, I will buy you a bottle' (upper left corner). I ask him if we can go to Karaoke [a club in Bukavu], he says

‘okay, we can go. Let’s go’. We arrive at Karaoke (upper right corner) and after having a drink, we leave [the dance floor] to enter into a room [to have sex]. When we got here, I ask the boy ‘give me my money now’. He gives me money and afterwards I tell him ‘it is finished, nobody has the right to another person’ (right side, underneath the club). The next morning I leave to my house, I find my mother and my father around the table (bottom left corner), they are eating but they chase me away. They ask me ‘where did you stay the night?’ And they chase me. When they chase me away, whilst running, I fall and death has come. I am dead (bottom right corner). Where will I go? To the devil [...] because I was in bad actions” (Mary, *bile*, drawings, 25-06-16).

Mary predicts her own sudden death while being chased away by her parents who clearly disapprove of her conduct. In the short interview I had with Mary she explains that because of the sudden nature of her predicted death, she won’t have time to confess and ask for forgiveness. She says that she will go to the Devil because she was in “bad actions” right at the moment of her death (Mary, *bile*, interview after drawing 25-06-16). Esther predicts a similar ending for herself but is more optimistic about the ultimate judgement (see figure 6.11).



Image 6.11. Drawing made by Esther showing her interpretation of her biography, 25-06-16

Esther describes her drawing:

“[In this drawing] I meet two boys when I am walking (upper left corner, Esther is the figure with a blue top and a skirt). The boys ask me [for sex] but I refuse. I leave, when I arrive here, I find my friends in the bar. Here I am pregnant (bottom left corner, Esther wearing blue dress and visibly pregnant). I have already given birth here. When I discover that I am pregnant, not one boy steps forward to acknowledge that he is the owner of the pregnancy. Here: This boy comes to find me in my house (upper right corner) to tell me that he is the father of the child. He takes a machete and I chase him away, I tell him ‘leave, don’t come here, it’s not your child!’ Here, I am death (left of centre, Esther in a coffin). My mother starts to cry (figure in light blue bottom left). My little brother starts to cry” (Esther, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

When I ask Esther about the small green building at the bottom of her drawing with the description “*mu kanisa*” which means “in the church”, she explains that she wanted to include the church in her drawing because “before doing my activities [sex work], I was singing in church” (Esther, *bile*, explanation after art, 25-06-15). Esther thus insisted on including her past as well, melancholically reminiscing on morally better times in which she was singing in church. In general, temporality strongly surfaces in Esther’s and other drawings, for example when Esther carefully explains that she chases away the boy who visits her in her house when it is too late to acknowledge the baby, arguing the father should have done so during her pregnancy and not after birth. This story is, in fact, the story of Esther’s life with a glimpse of the future that awaits her. Above the coffin in the drawing, Esther has written “*ninaenda mbinguni*”: “I will go to heaven”.

Because girls were underrepresented in this research (a total of 14 participating girls vs. 61 boys) data on girls is too limited to formulate adequate conclusions about their pessimism towards the future which manifested through the drawing exercises. Perhaps girls feared the final judgment more than boys because in the sociocultural context of Bukavu, street girls’ main activity, sex work, is considered more immoral and less easily forgivable than stealing, which is boys’ primary source of income (see section 6.2.4). I got the impression that girls who are known to be sex workers will never completely get rid of this image, not even when they leave the street, marry, find a job or ‘convert’. whereas theft was often more associated with urgent existential struggles hence when boys mature into adulthood their past would not significantly hinder them. In this case, children’s interpretation of the option of pursuing “rupture” as a “complete break with the past” would not apply to sex workers. This hypothesis was, of course, difficult to test because none of my informants left the streets during the time of the research and

interview questions about this topic were difficult to answer for girls. If we remember the prevalent interpretation of the self as a gift of God, however, we can cautiously deduce some insight also in the light of the gender difference in children's experienced prospects. According to classical theory on gift-giving, a gift is never completely given, but is partially held. This paradox means that even when abandoned by the giver, the gift still forms a part of him, retaining a magical hold over the recipient (e.g. Mauss 2011; but see also Pyyhtinen 2014; Godelier 1999; Weiner 1992). In our case, God is the giver of the gift of life and each human being He brought to life thus remains a part of Him. When street boys steal, they may do something which God does not like, but they do not act against the gift of life also because, ultimately, stealing is seen to be something which does not affect the self as "one frame", it rather concerns one of a person's many identities (i.e. stealing is seen as a 'profession'), if we follow Sökefeld's (1999) understanding of the self vs. identities. Sex work on the other hand does not just concern the self - that is the body as part of the self - but it even implies *selling* the self by virtue of selling one's body. Both boys and girls often argued they felt they did not "own" their own lives. Selling something of which you are not the ultimate owner is problematic. A more detailed discussion about the gift goes beyond the scope of this thesis but I have dealt with this topic elsewhere (Krah 2014).

Hence so far we have seen that spirituality not only offers a frame for moral survival in the everyday but is also used to contemplate the self in time, something which featured prominently in drawings. Whereas children's current subjectivities are described as "unstable" yet biased towards the Dark side (section 3.2), most children imagine their future selves as having undergone a transformation from the Dark to the Divine, from irresponsibility to responsibility, from marginality to participation and from immorality to morality. I have explained this belief in the power of such change in the light of the notion of Pentecostal conversion framed as a total rupture. Children have incorporated this hopeful notion of rupture in the spiritual practice of moral survival in the way they aspire to conversion in the long run whilst currently postponing it in the light of daily existential challenges. Whereas this potential of becoming 'Born-again' seems enough for almost all street boys to remain optimistic about their future, girls were more often concerned about how their life trajectory would unfold. I have explained this difference by pointing at the dissimilar moral evaluations of gendered survival strategies, with stealing explained as an economic activity which is relatively easily forgivable whereas sex work is seen as highly problematic since it implies the selling of the self which was

God's gift. This extent of immorality and the perceived limitations to the option of rupture (as something that would exclude sex workers) makes girls to question whether they can still be born-again and thus, saved.

Furthermore, it should be noted that a notion of 'time' appears central to children's subjectivities and the way they contemplate their moral selves. In particular, the workings of spiritual practice of moral survival reveal a complex engagement with temporality, indicating an interplay between children's past, present and future moral subjectivities. Temporality has long been a rather ambivalent theme in research with children and youth (Ansell et al. 2014; Durham 2008b; Craig Jeffrey 2010). Ansell et al. (2014) for instance argue that geographers have been remarkably reluctant to explore children's future livelihoods in particular, inspired by a concern to view young people as human beings, worthy of study in their own right rather than mere human becomings, of interest only as 'adults in the making'. Yet there is a growing acknowledgement that young people are always both 'being and becoming' (e.g. Horgan 2017; Davies 2014; Horton and Kraftl 2006). In this light, Ansell et al. (2014) argue for greater attention to the connections between young people's current and future lives, also because their thoughts and actions are so often geared to the future, and this future orientation shapes their present worlds. My data support such perspective on the interplay of future orientation and the way children perceive their present worlds. In particular, I have outlined how street children's intention of religious conversion, the prospect of becoming born-again, affects their current moral being, facilitating for instance the resolving of a moral discomfort children experience in the present. Observing theatre performances and children's drawings that took the form of 'scripts of life', it can thus be argued this data indicated that children's present and future lives are fundamentally interwoven, highlighting children's position as 'moral beings' and 'moral becomings'. Furthermore, such data demonstrate that children consider their time on the street as a temporary stage in their life trajectories, as part of a transition from a past that was morally superior, living at home and helping one's mother supporting the family for instance, as in the drawing of Daniem (figure 6.9), to an "unstable" moral present manoeuvring between shadow and solace, aspiring to a radical break in the form of conversion to be able to return, in fact, to normalization. Behind the horizon then lurks the promise of the redemption of one's soul in a blissful afterlife. Indeed children's moral subjectivities are constructed from the iteration between memories of the past, "before, I used to sing in church" (Esther, *bile*, explanation after art, 25-06-15), present circumstances, "the *context* does not allow us to

be in church” (Gloria, *bile*, participatory diagramming exercise, 12-02-16), and future aspirations; “one day, we will abandon the Devil and go to God” (focus group after girls theatre 2, 29-04-16), but should also always be seen in the light of historical and cultural processes.

In the next section 6.4.3, I will further elaborate on children’s aspirations and dreams for the future, outlining their remarkably modest aspirations to which religiosity is key. A deeper analysis of the life children aspire to reveals the centrality of ‘the ordinary/the normal.’ This is the ultimate outcome of the spiritual practice of moral survival: realising a state of normality through which children can, ultimately, experience the social inclusion they so deeply desire.

6.3.2 Dreams and aspirations: the role of religiosity for imagining a good life

Without exception, boys and girls who had become experts in surviving society’s “bizarre zone” (cf. boys focus group after boys theatre 1, 28-04-16) longed for the most ordinary life one can think of: having a job, having a house (i.e. having an address), being a parent and going to church on Sundays. Nuru for instance, who was in the process of making a pact with the Devil, entrusted to me that what he ultimately really wants is “a family: a wife and children” (Nuru, *bile*, informal conversation 30-04-16). Batumike, who hopes to become a church choir singer, said he wants to stop stealing in the future, become a father, find a house and a “commercial activity” (job) (Batumike, *bile*, informal conversation 02-05-16). Saluni said she wished God would give her a place to stay, money to start a small business so that she can stay in one place; find a “fixed address” (Saluni, *bile*, girls focus group after theatre 1, 29-04-16). The transformation that these children would like to see is also a transformation from their current situation of ceasing accountability to taking full responsibility over one’s life. When asked about his aspirations for the future, Boniem for instance first reminded me that “no-one knows the future” but then he lowered his voice and said: “I hope to be responsible one day” and, anticipating my next question, he hastily added: “being responsible means having an address” (Boniem, *bile*, informal conversation 18-04-16). Interestingly, Boniem thus frames responsibility in spatial terms: whereas the street is associated with instability and indeed irresponsibility, having an address implies responsibility. Indeed, all street children juxtaposed the notion of ‘street’ as the public space, with the notion of ‘neighbourhood’ as private place/‘home’.

Generally, the modesty and ‘normality’ of children’s aspirations supports the argument made by others that street children have remarkably modest aspirations (Butler 2009; Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003; Hecht 1998). Butler (2009) for instance argues that whereas the life projects of boys and girls who live on the street are normally linked to their immediate survival and security, their dreams are frequently related to overcoming the prejudices they suffer in their day-to-day lives.

If we take a closer look at how such an ideal future life is imagined, it should be noticed that spirituality is always an essential aspect of it. In fact, religion (and never witchcraft) stands for all that is desirable and aspired to. In her drawing, Esther had included a reference to a more glorious past when she was still singing in church (see above, image 6.11). This indicates, first of all, that she and many others consider the current phase of their life as the darkest. Second, in many narratives, the church in particular is intrinsically intertwined - in people’s imagination - with those goods of ordinary life: a place to call home, a stable job and family life. One can argue the church symbolizes the life of any normal, God-fearing, hard-working citizen: the life which thus contrasts most sharply with street life as informants know it. Ortner (2006) explains agency-as-projects as structured by “the local logic of the good and the desirable and how to pursue them”. I argue that if social inclusion is “the local logic of the good and the desirable” for the *Biles*, then religiosity, materialized in church attendance, is about how to pursue that good, i.e. inclusion. Batumike had argued that “one day, I know I will go to church one day” (see section 6.2.3). His statement, and his profound desire not just to attend church but even to sing in its choir glorifying the Lord, should actually be seen as a synecdoche: singing in church is one aspect of the ordinary non-street lifestyle he aspires to. Another example: in a GUOTS focus group discussion a group of boys was asked where they see themselves in ten years. One boy immediately responded with “In ten years, I will go to church” (*bile*, GUOTS focus group, 18-05-16). In this response, going to church stands for much more than literally going to church. It consequently implies having changed one’s behaviour; having left the “bizarre zone”, having “an address”. In a drawing exercise I asked participants to divide their paper in two halves and to draw the one thing they loved most and, on the other half, the one thing they feared most. Most participants drew a few things on both sides and there were quite a lot of churches included in the section “the one thing I love most”. See for instance Jean’s drawing (figure 6.12).

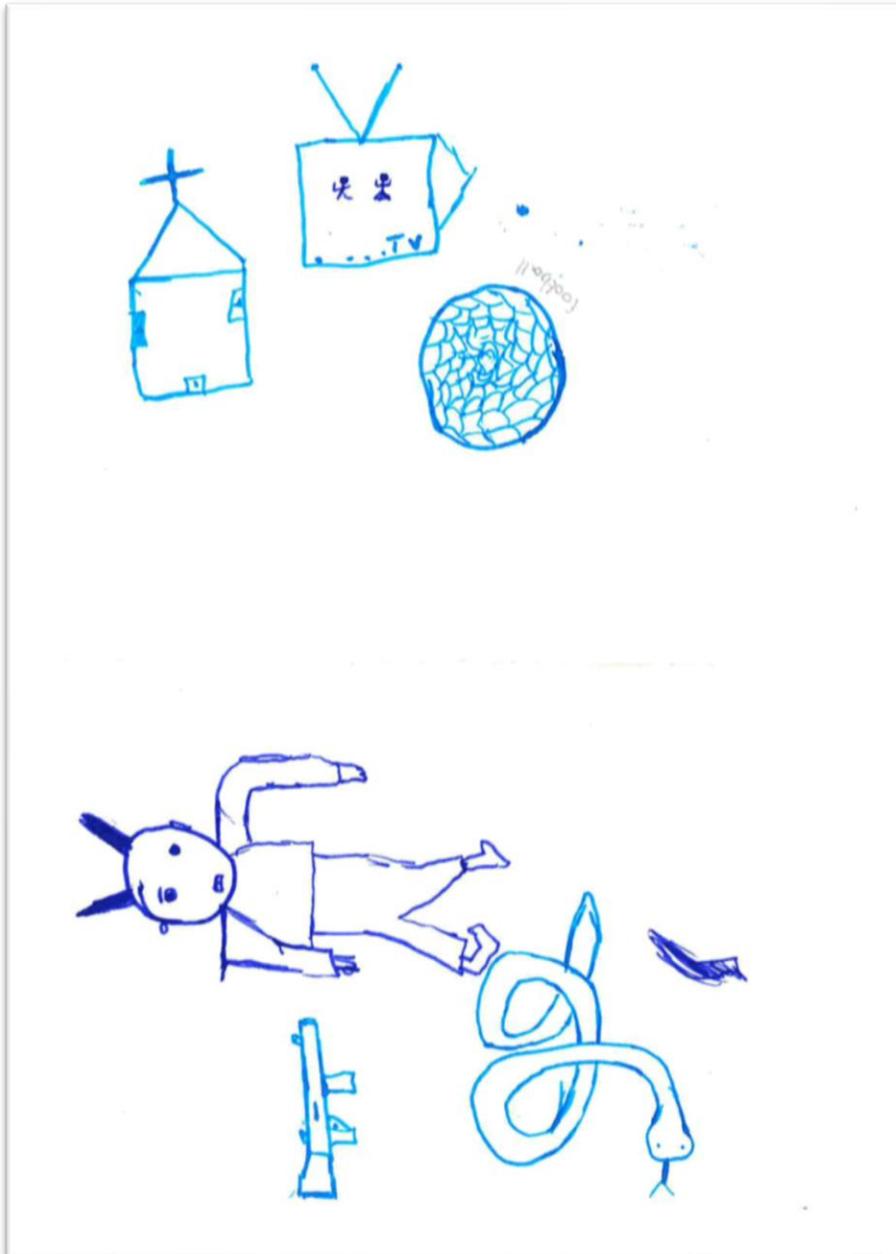


Figure 6.12. Drawing made by Jean: “The one thing I love most: a church, a television and a football (upper half of drawing) and the one thing I fear most: a snake, a gun and a witch (lower half of drawing)” (Jean, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

About the things he likes most, Jean explained:

“The happy things: church, television, football. The church is a happy thing because if you go there, they can give you good advice that can help you to change your behaviour. The television is also good because it can distract you, it can help you to not steal things from other people, because you are distracted. The football can help you to play with the ball, you can play the whole day without thinking about something else, because you’re busy playing the whole day” (Jean, *bile*, drawings 25-06-16).

Like Batumike and many others, Jean also links going to church to the behaviour change he aspires to. To fully comprehend why the church and church attendance represents the ‘good life’ my informants pursue, it might be helpful to be reminded why street life basically excludes the possibility of going to church. In chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.1) where I discussed the story of Batumike who lied about his church attendance, I already argued that street children are, strikingly, out of place in churches, yet most of all in Catholic churches, in Bukavu. The example I gave in this chapter of Hupenda and Bell praying in a Pentecostal church (section 6.3.2) is, in fact, a noteworthy exception. Besides important moral reasons for avoiding churches that I discussed at length in section 6.2.3, informants also always said they cannot go to church because they “lack clothes”, they “lack time” or they “lack somebody to take me”. Because none of them was ever completely naked, without the company of friends or without time, these arguments had initially occurred to me as excuses. But I was wrong. Ikeno for instance had argued that although he used to attend church in the past he stopped going to church when he started living on the streets. When I asked him why he doesn’t go to church anymore he replied: “I don’t have clothes. I don’t have a place to go to when I leave church. I don’t have a place to stay after leaving church” (Ikeno, *bile*, interview 15-06). All of this sounds, of course, like an excuse. But in fact, Ikeno points here at the deep societal *and* spatial incongruence between street life and church-going life. His argument that he doesn’t have a place to stay after leaving church resonates with Boniem’s reflections on the importance of a place where one belongs, i.e. “having an address”. Furthermore, street children do have clothes of course, but they don’t have the *right* clothes. In chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.1) I described my experience waiting for Batumike in a Pentecostal church. All the church goers were extremely well-dressed, men wore suit and tie. Everyone entered carefully shaved and carrying the smell of perfume. Ushers guided people with the most expensive clothes to the front rows. After having observed this ritual for some time, I started to wish Batumike would never enter. It was common for everyone in Bukavu to really dress up when going to church. This accounted for Catholic churches at least as much as for Protestant denominations. When attending the Catholic parish next to my house I was always flabbergasted at the extravagance of women’s dresses. Looking back I don’t know why it still surprised me when street children kept insisting they do not belong in church. I probably thought I understood, but it took a successful attempt to go to a Catholic service with Raoul and Buduge (see figure 6.13) to feel the awkwardness of bringing street children to a regular church service in each and every cell of my body.



Figure 6.13. Raoul and Buduge posing in front of Bukavu's cathedral (Source: author, 03-07-16).

Unlike the attempt with Batumike, going to this church with Raoul and Buduge was my initiative. The boys had said they used to attend a Catholic church when they still lived at home. Buduge had even said that he currently still attends the cathedral service every now and then. I suggested to go again that coming Sunday and they had been absolutely delighted with the idea. In fact, the other boys from Raoul's group were jealous and asked if they could also join. I invited all of them but ultimately only Raoul and Buduge showed up. Remembering their delight when we had planned the activity, I was very surprised to see that the look on their faces when we climbed the stairs leading to the head entrance of the city's cathedral was everything but happiness. Whereas we had been laughing and joking a bit before the church bells rung, I now realised the boys looked very miserable...uncomfortable and unhappy. Nevertheless, I saw Raoul making the sign of the cross when he enters the dark church. After eight years of not practicing his religion, he has thus not forgotten his religious routines. I asked Buduge where he usually sits but he did not answer. Then, the boys chose one of the pews at the back, one of the least

visible places. When the priest started the service, I realised it was in French, meaning the boys could not understand a word. For the first few minutes, the boys were clapping along. Buduge in particular really embodied the characteristic Eastern Congolese style of clapping in which one takes one's arms very far back behind the back, contracting one's shoulder blades, before clapping. The man sitting on the pew in front of us left his phone unattended for a second. I saw the boys exchanging a knowing glimpse but they did not move a finger. Then, after literally ten minutes both Buduge and Raoul had fallen asleep. I was astonished and suddenly realised these children are physically not able to endure a three-hour church service. People really started staring at us now. I woke the boys up and I heard Buduge saying to Raoul that he is not feeling very well, that he is tired and wants to sleep. I reminded them that they are free to leave and that they should at no point feel obliged to stay. Immediately, Buduge stood up and with a simple "*ninaenda*", "I am going", left the church. After two minutes, Raoul followed his example. I felt extremely uncomfortable and finally fully realised what was somehow difficult to grasp; that these boys seem to not belong in a church. They are simply not capable of long hours sitting in a church, mentally nor physically. They can't concentrate longer than twenty minutes (maximum). They are too tired. They are too stoned. They feel pain, discomfort. They love God but it seems they don't resist being in His house; it seems they don't belong here socially, morally and physically.

Three days later I visited Fr. Emmanuel to talk about this experience. He said he laments that the 'church structure' in Bukavu belongs to rich people only. This structure, he said, the way a church is constructed, inevitably implies the exclusion of street children:

"It is the place where everybody goes clean, perfumed, by car, with family, with children and a street kid doesn't have all that. He is excluded beforehand. When he wants to enter, being dressed like that, the woman guarding the entrance will not let him pass. A child who is dirty cannot enter [...] The way we celebrate [the Eucharist] it's like a party. The celebration is a party whereas the other [the street child], if you put it in the caricature of the words of the Gospel; doesn't have party clothes. He doesn't have the face for a party: he is tired, he is excluded, he is under drugs so he cannot enter" (Fr. Emmanuel, Catholic priest, expert interview 06-07-16).

Yet, Buduge had told me he still attends church every now and then. Raoul had been enthusiastic about going with me. Batumike (chapter 5) had even lied about the pastor's promise of becoming a singer in the choir and also about entering the church with his

family-in-law. I argue these things appeal to street children because they have great social and cultural value and belong to those who are included: normal people who go to church weekly and who go clean, perfumed, by car and together with their family. These normal people have had a good night's sleep before entering the house of God, they are not hungry, they are not in pain or under the influence of drugs, they can afford a nice pair of shoes. These are people who afterwards return home and share a meal. Street children's desire to go to church in the future is, I argue, rooted in the awareness of their current social exclusion which becomes painfully tangible when they try to visit the house of God as their present "unstable" selves. Because they struggle with the immorality of their survival conduct most of all, being excluded in church - the moral centre of mundane life and the place where everyone *should* be equal - is particularly challenging. They are God's beloved already, but their ultimate desire is to count for, and be loved by other human beings as well. Hence, the path towards social inclusion is imagined to go via religiosity, with church attendance seen as the culturally appropriated way to pursue the life project of inclusion.

6.4 Conclusion: spirituality as a frame for the normalization of the self

In this chapter I have analysed the spiritual practice of moral survival of Bukavu's street children. Besides being a system facilitating immediate getting by on the streets (chapter 5) data indicate spirituality affects the inner life of these children, being central to practices and processes of sense-making on the street. Studying these children's spiritual lives revealed their profound reflexive tendencies and critical self-consciousness. Some PEDER street workers suggested street children are much more reflexive than their living-at-home peers because of their experiences with inequality and the layers of oppression that cause their exclusion. Indeed, their sense-making is inevitably based on their experiences traversing the field that were central to chapter 5. In this light I found that contemplation is not a choice but rather a consequence of the moral experience of getting by as marginalized and vulnerable beings. This experience requires a contemplation of the moral reality and religion is the available cultural systems to think about the moral reality in Bukavu.

Revealing a relation between spirituality, in particular religion, and sense-making, including emotional or moral well-being is in itself nothing new. The employment of spirituality by street children has previously been described as some sort of coping mechanism (e.g. Williams and Lindsey 2006) or functioning as a sort of strength or

resilience (e.g. Malindi 2014). For instance, Oppong Asante and Meyer-Weitz (2014, 3) describe children's "strong religious beliefs" as "a source of strength to navigate the odds of the street". Similarly, Drybread (2013) argues that organizing spiritual funeral rites for deceased friends, allowed street children in Brazil to experience, if only for a moment, that their own lives were meaningful and valuable. These studies provide interesting insights but remain generally limited in the extent to which they analyse the inherent processes of sense-making, leaving aside the question *how* such functioning of spirituality works on a personal level. In this light, I have argued that an exploration of subjectivity is key because sense-making is situational and boils down, ultimately, to the question of how to understand oneself *in relation to* the world. Specifically, building on Ortner's notion of subjectivity, I have shown that spirituality stimulates these children to contemplate themselves as moral subjects. Hence, whereas the spiritual practice of material survival (chapter 5) revolved around social relationships with spiritual beings and experts, the spiritual practice of moral survival is largely a contemplative practice.

The way children contemplate their selves in relation to the world is thus inevitably based on their experiences living in the world, trying to get by. At the core of these experiences we find their awareness of their marginal position, being stigmatised and excluded. Rooted in this awareness of exclusion I found the deep desire to become included. I have analysed this core aspiration, and the ways children try to realise it, as illustrative of Ortner's second modality of agency: agency as intentionality and the pursuit of (culturally constituted) life projects. These life projects, argues Ortner, are structured by "the local logics of the good and the desirable and how to pursue them" (Ortner 2006, 147). In the case of the *Biles*, I have argued that, based on the awareness of exclusion, becoming included constitutes the very essence of their local "logic of the good and the desirable" and religiosity, imagined through church attendance, is seen as the local cultural logic of how to *pursue* such inclusion.

Hence, this modality of agency as intentionality and (the pursuit of) life projects featured with prominence in the spiritual practice of moral survival. Based on systematic contemplation of themselves and their positionality, and rooted in (tacit) knowledge of the (rules of the) field, children employed strategies to resolve what I explained as certain moral discomfort they experienced trying to get by as marginal beings. Specifically, I identified four such intentional strategies: ceasing accountability, avoiding hypocrisy, ascribing exception and postponing conversion.

The first strategy is built around the notion that the self is an instrument, a hammer, in God's hands. Since an instrument is essentially intention-less, this enabled some children to cease accountability over their immoral conduct by holding God responsible, whose hands are holding the hammer.

A second strategy to come to terms with one's moral discomfort surfaced for instance in the reflections and actions of Boniem and his friends, who consciously decided to escape what they saw as an illegitimate baptism. Unable to avoid sinning, as travelling pastors naively urged them to do, these boys resonated they were able to avoid hypocrisy and lying. In these situations, long-term moral survival is clearly prioritised over immediate material survival in an effort to play as fair as possible with God. These conscious efforts indicate an agentic way of operating within structural constraints, seeking to nourish and protect agency-as-projects by creating, as Ortnier puts it, "sites, literally and metaphorically, on the margins of power" (2006, 145).

A third strategy demonstrates how children ascribe themselves a special subject position which is a position of exception: they know they are children of God, as everyone else and they know they are highly deprived, like no one else, and because of this they believe to be pardoned by God for their current moral transgression. This allows children to experience a 'spiritual inclusion', being included and loved by God, as long as they keep aspiring to conversion in the long run.

This conscious postponement of conversion, in the context of the grave existential insecurities of the present, is a fourth and final strategy employed as part of the spiritual practice of moral survival. Without exception, informants aspired to religious conversion, imagined in accordance to the Pentecostal notion of conversion as a "radical break with the past" (cf. Meyer 1998) and framed in moral terms, seen as a transition from working for the Devil to serving God. I have argued the postponement of such conversion served to relieve the moral tension informants experienced in the present.

These strategies shed light on the individual sense-making of agents who are largely self-dependent when it comes to the seeking and creating of meaning. It should be noted this sense-making is often discursive. The first and the third strategies should be understood as discursive practices revealing how moral conversations take place within and essentially with oneself. Indeed, reflecting on oneself as an instrument in God's hands and ascribing oneself a moral position of exception are examples of retrospective or general sense-making that do not necessarily translate into direct action. They do, however, expose the crucial desire for normalization and the pursuit of this normalization

manifests as agency-as-life-projects. The second strategy, avoiding hypocrisy, can be seen as a strategy for the maintenance of the moral self, ensuring normalization in the eyes of God, and this maintenance requires agentive action, for instance by avoiding hypocritical church attendance. Finally, the fourth strategy, the postponement of conversion concerns the ultimate pursuit of normalization in the eyes of fellow mankind.

In the beginning of this chapter (section 6.1), I already mentioned that here the emphasis would be on religion and not on witchcraft. Witchcraft offers immediate tools to manipulate reality but it can never offer ultimate solace - salvation - and therefore only religion concerns the ultimate. But there is another important difference between witchcraft and religion in light of this chapter. Witchcraft can never be the path towards the '(re-)normalization' that my informants so deeply aspire to. The "bizarre zone of society" is characterised by delinquency but even more so by fetish-use and Freemason, and the route to leave this zone, to move towards normality, is imagined through praying, which becomes clear from this quote from a boys focus group: "There are some of us who are changing, because they go to church and because they are praying.... so they have left the 'bizarre zone' of society" (focus group after boys theatre 1, 29-4-16).

The spiritual practice of moral survival provides strong evidence for seeing street children not as mere survivors, trying to meet basic needs, but always also as moral beings who struggle with existential questions, striving to live as meaningfully as possible given the extremely challenging circumstances of their precarious lives. This builds to the observation already made by others that the street is certainly not a place devoid of morality (Hecht 1998, Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003, Butler 2009) but rather a place of heightened reflexivity, moral consciousness and critical self-contemplation. Although the local manifestation of the spiritual practice of moral survival is clearly context-specific, other researchers have also outlined street children's concerns with coming to terms with a certain moral discomfort, seeking to resolve the tension between their lifestyles and their society's moral and religious codes (Jones et al. 2007, see also Farrugia et al. 2016).

Another conclusion that can be drawn concerns the relationship between agency and subjectivity. Against Bourdieu's insistence on the deeply internalized and largely unconscious nature of social knowledge in acting subjects, the extraordinary reflexivity of my informants and the way their practices (both mental and bodily) reveal intentionality, in the sense that they are pointed *toward* some purpose, reveal that individuals are always at least partially knowing subjects, as Ortner (2006) pleads. Seeing

how this agency as intentionality and the pursuit of life projects of my informants is always rooted in their awareness and contemplation of their selves in time and place, I agree with Ortner who suggests seeing subjectivity as the basis of agency: a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. This is not to deny completely the existence of processes of internalization or the importance of (the structuring role of) contexts. In fact, I have argued the formation of children's moral subjectivities should be understood in the context of processes of socialization, for instance children's adoption of the Catholic/pre-colonial credo that the self is God's gift and the way they have internalized the Pentecostal notion of conversion in their contemplations. As Ortner indeed stresses, subjectivity is not only the reflexivity of knowing subjects, it also implies a specific cultural and historical consciousness.

Building on this relationship between subjectivity and agency, we can take another look at the notion of temporality. As outlined in section 6.3, the spiritual practice of moral survival implies an interesting engagement with temporality, highlighting the intertwinement of memories of the past, present circumstances and future aspirations at the level of individual sense-making, exposing these children as moral beings and becomings. Discussing the temporality of children's agency, Jeffrey (2012) points out that within scholarly literature, children's agency is often conceptualized in terms of 'tactics', immediate responses to the vagaries of fluid events, rather than orchestrated 'strategies' aimed at long term change. Drawing on de Certeau's (1988), Honwana (2005) for instance analyses child soldiers as possessing a 'tactical agency': "a specific type of agency that is devised to cope with the concrete, immediate conditions of children's lives in order to maximize the circumstances created by their (violent) environment" (2005, 49, see chapter 2, section 2.4.2). This tactical actions, she stresses, comes from a position of weakness. It is a manoeuvre within the enemy's field of vision that operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. In contrast, the exercise of "strategic" agency would imply a basis of power and require mastery of the larger picture, of the long-term consequences of their actions, in form of political gain or benefits/profits (Honwana 2005). Yet my data show that agency-as-(the pursuit) of projects is intrinsically strategic and, in fact, trans-temporal - with long-term planning affecting short-term moral survival - whilst being without an 'objective' basis of power as Honwana suggests. My rejection of the need for "a basis of power" in strategic agency, as Honwana argues, should be understood in the context of my definition of agency as "the experience and pursuit of possibilities" regardless of actual outcomes. Although the examples of my informants' mastery of the

long-term *material* consequences of their actions are limited (with the exception of deals with *kuzimu*, see chapter 5, section 5.3.2.2), the spiritual practice of moral survival reveals children are clearly concerned with long-term moral consequences of their actions. This can partly be explained by the interesting fact that the boundaries between long-term and short term moral consequences are blurred: the future re-normalization of the self (the *restoring* of family life and the *return* to an address) that spirituality offers, brings solace in the present. Hence, understanding children's agency as based on subjectivity and manifest in the pursuit of life projects, may deepen our understanding of the temporality of young people's agency.

Then a final note on the relationship between the spiritual and the non-spiritual that surfaces in the spiritual practice of moral survival. The sequence in this chapter of first exploring (the pathways towards) this spiritual inclusion (section 6.2) before discussing how children pursue and imagine their normalization vis-à-vis other people was not accidental. I want to stress we should understand the second process as ultimate: it is certainly important to these children to prepare a good afterlife for themselves but in the end, their life projects revolved around social inclusion: they want to be (respected and recognized as) human among others. In other words, the expectation that underlies the desire to be normal is that being normal means being included, being accepted and no longer being deviant. The spiritual practice of moral survival is essentially about situating the self in the context of one's life, thus not a higher or divine place. In this light it can be argued that attempts to be normal in God's eyes are in fact a spiritual detour to worldly normality, showing that ultimately, spirituality is about the mundane.

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I present the research findings, weaving together insights from the previous chapters and working towards a comprehensive conclusion about the lived spirituality of street children in Bukavu. In this short introductory section, I will start with providing an initial, short answer to my research question. Before dissecting and elaborating on this answer in more detail in section 7.3, I will first critically reflect on the methodological challenges and implications of my study in section 7.2. Finally, in section 7.4, I will discuss the scholarly relevance of my study and its knowledge contribution. This contribution is directed first and foremost at the interdisciplinary field of street children studies in which my research is situated. Second, I aim to contribute to wider debates on (the Sociology of) Childhood and, finally, to the emerging field of lived religion. I will present these contributions through a discussion of the different research objectives as outlined in chapter 1. I will also identify limitations and potential areas for future research in this final section.

My research question was: *What is the role of spirituality in street children's everyday lives growing up in a context of grave existential insecurity in Bukavu, the Democratic Republic of Congo?*

Very broadly: data indicated spirituality is essential to the lived experiences of street children in Bukavu. Specifically, spirituality appeared to be integral to children's everyday quest for survival. I do not want to argue spirituality - religion and witchcraft - does not exist at all in these children's lives outside its appearance in practices of survival. However, precisely in a street context of serious existential insecurity, spirituality clearly serves the pursuit of survival on the streets. This manifestation of spirituality featured with such prominence in the data, I decided to only focus on this fascinating spiritual practice of survival, which I analyse as being twofold. First, spirituality is employed for the sake of *material survival*. It enables children's engagements in relations of exchange with unconventional (alternative) others: spiritual experts, such as pastors and

witchdoctors and spiritual beings such as God and the Devil. Within these relations, children may negotiate directly over material benefits such as cash, food or clothes that are exchanged in return for denominational loyalty for instance.

Yet with survival one should not just think of material survival. The second part of the answer reveals spirituality is also as a framework for *moral survival*, offering recipes for justification, comfort and hope. This ‘contemplative role’ of spirituality demonstrates street children are not only concerned with acquiring food, shelter and safety, but also struggle with existential questions. Data indicated that an important aspect of their lives concerns a daily struggle with a certain moral discomfort that is the result of their experiences of getting by as marginal and excluded beings. In the light of their awareness of their exclusion and abnormality, spirituality offers these children the realisation of that state of inclusion they deeply desire, both in the eyes of God and, ultimately, in the eyes of other people.

For understanding this dual spiritual practice of survival, the importance of the sociocultural environment - ‘the field’ - for shaping opportunities and limitations for conduct cannot be overemphasized. Street children have internalized the rules and principles inherent to the field in which they try to survive. This (sometimes implicit) knowledge helps them to determine options, define strategies and ‘sense’ limitations in their struggle for survival.

7.2 Studying street children’s lived spirituality: methodological reflections

Exploring the lived spirituality of Congolese street children implied an inevitable confrontation with some key challenges: 1) doing research with children and young people with low literacy levels and limited concentration levels; 2) approaching a hard-to reach and particularly vulnerable group of children who have learnt not to trust; 3) working in a war-torn and unstable (political) environment; 4) accessing and making sense of deep-seated feelings and experiences, seeking information which is not openly ‘out there’. To address these challenges, I designed a multi-methods approach, combining classic ethnographic methods, specifically participant observation, and semi-structured interviews, with participatory creative methods including participatory diagramming, mapping, pictorial interviews, theatre and drawings. I have labelled this approach a ‘synergetic’ approach, instead of adopting the term ‘mosaic’ for instance (Clark and Moss 2001). I have explained this term by pointing at the layering of methods which, from my experience, ‘boosts’ the strength of each method, leading to a stronger overall

methodology. This synergetic approach was grounded in an ethnographic epistemology, to which the notion of reflexivity is central, as well as the continuous effort of problematising power relations in the field and contemplating ‘data’ as a dialogical construction of knowledge. From this perspective it has been my intention not simply to hand over ‘voice’ to the young people of my study, but rather to facilitate a dialogue in which their voices would be represented, acknowledging that data emerges not in a single voice but rather through multifocal interaction.

Furthermore, to make it suitable for studying the fluid and precarious lives of street children and as advocated by others (Bemak 1996; Young and Barrett 2001a), notions of flexibility, adaptability and holism were central to this synergetic approach, drawing on processes of trial-and-error and open to experimentation. From my experience working with children, compared to adults, you are much less likely to have a compact and efficient high-intensity exchange of information in the format of an interview. Instead, it takes a combination of methods, yet always including participant observation, to make the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. An illustrative example can be found in my efforts of trying to make sense of the complex relationship between a group of street boys and a travelling pastor (chapter 5, section 5.3.1.2 and chapter 6, section 6.2.3). Based on just one interview with the pastor, I had come to understand this relationship solely in the spirit of evangelisation, with the pastor reaching out to save these children’s souls. In fact, the pastor had explained the children were always eager to hear him preaching and he had downplayed the importance of the financial incentives he offered them. Based on insights from an interview with Boniem however (chapter 5, section 5.3.1.2), in which he stressed that “the pastor loves us”, I felt obliged to re-think the relationship in affective terms, contemplating its father-child-like features. A first moment of participant observation however, in which the children were loudly demanding food, instead of the Gospel, from the pastor, revealed a strong material side of the interaction which seemed to overshadow the immaterial aspects Boniem had pointed out earlier. Later still, the pastor’s response to the boys’ refusal to get baptised highlighted the pastor’s commercial interests as a spiritual entrepreneur competing in the Spiritual Field, seeking ways to make his business prosper. I thus came to think of the whole relationship as a mere ‘exchange of favours’ in a patron-client-like interaction. Finally, a follow-up interview with Boniem and informal conversation with his friends revealed a whole new, *moral* dimension to all of this, balancing the previously seen emphasis on material survival. It exposed these children as sense-makers, as complex existential beings, who prioritised another, more

important relationship over “satisfying the pastor”, choosing to nurture their relationship with God instead by avoiding hypocritical action, keeping the dream of conversion alive.

What I would like to stress here is that none of these emerging insights alone were incorrect yet they were incomplete. Unable to tie all the knots together after a first session of interviews, I continued to follow the interactions between the children and the pastor. A combination of methods, in this case expert interviews, individual interviews and participant observation that were organized *over time*, allowed for progressive insights and enabled me to gain a more comprehensive, in-depth and contextualized understanding of lived spirituality.

Besides highlighting the value of methodological triangulation, this example indicates two key strengths of doing prolonged ethnographic fieldwork. First of all it illustrates the importance of time, which should be seen as twofold. When studying lived spirituality, time is crucial to allow for progressive understanding, facilitating reflexivity from the part of the researcher but also from the part of informants who are asked to undertake an introspective journey, exploring *and* explaining their inner lives to a foreign researcher. Such introspective trajectories are only possible when informants feel safe and when they understand the research and want to contribute. This brings me to the second relevance of time: time is key for working with street children who have learnt not to trust. As Bemak (1996) argues: “work with street children is slow. It takes time to become an ethnographer, to understand the complex world of the streets and then to establish honest relationships with street children” (Bemak 1996, 155). Ethnography, understood as long-term fieldwork, is what facilitates such time and the building of trust and rapport, which was a prerequisite before any other method could be used.

A second strength of ethnography concerns its intertwined with notions of reflexivity and flexibility. Following this group of street boys in their interactions with a travelling pastor required patience and endurance, but also constantly challenging my presumptions and critically reflecting on my position as a researcher and fellow human being. Reflecting on my experiences with the epistemological “problem of belief” (Engelke 2002) in chapter 3 (section 3.5.3), I have pointed out a process of growth - both personal and as an ethnographer - which enriched my fieldwork. Through constantly and critically reflecting on all my presumptions, both conceptual and epistemological *and* spiritual and cultural, I managed to grow and adapt my methodological framework in such a way that it could address the particular challenges that emerged at different moments throughout the research process. Flexibility then became important in order to be able to

adapt methods to overcome challenges. For instance, being confronted with the inevitable limitations of doing participant observation among street children as a white, female researcher, I changed to organizing more ‘guided’ participant observation activities, such as inviting children to go to church with me. Also the creative methods were partially designed to compensate for the limitations of participant observation and interviews and to complement the insights they had derived.

Indeed, the participatory, creative methods were effective in complementing and enriching data from participant observation and interviews. They served as a solution to working in a highly unstable environment, giving me insights into places, times and actors I had no access to. Furthermore, inviting children to perform a drama or make a drawing implied giving guidance away, ensuring children’s lived experiences, instead of my interpretation of their lives, would be at the centre of analysis. Yet most of all, these methods were powerful ways to stir reflexivity, creativity and imagination, which was essential to allow me to access and understand children’s inner lives. The usefulness of what is sometimes called ‘arts-based methods’ in research with vulnerable groups and young people has already been demonstrated in scholarly literature (Lee and Finney 2005; Ho, Rochelle, and Yuen 2011). Recognizing these benefits, I would like to add they are enormously valuable as tools to unravel children’s (and arguably adults’) lived spirituality. Pictorial interviews for instance triggered embodied and affective reactions, somehow evoking “deeper elements of consciousness” as Harper suggests (2002: 13), inspiring children to strongly re-think their moral existence. Also the drawing exercise enhanced personal, introspective reflection, encouraging children to contemplate the self.

Whereas the drawing exercises and pictorial interviews were particularly appropriate to explore spirituality as moral survival, the theatre method was highly valuable for gaining an understanding of spirituality as a system facilitating material survival. As a collective creative exercise drawing on “dialogical interactions” (cf. Kenzin 1997), theatre offered an alternative platform of expression through which these children could narrate their lived experiences I could not easily witness such as their experiences of fetish use for stealing, being caught and beaten by the police, accused by a witchdoctor and ‘delivered’ by a pastor. Crucially, I noticed a heightened reflexivity in theatre plays which were all situated in everyday life while being sufficiently detached from it, allowing actors to take a unique social distance to reflect on their lives. In this light I agree with Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2008) that theatre leads to a “specific kind of knowledge” which is embodied, dialogical and illustrative. Furthermore, I sensed that

participating in the theatre was not just ‘fun’ for participants but in fact also empowering, in particular because they were given the opportunity to express themselves beyond the usual verbal framework in which they sometimes rather felt insecure.

This synergetic methodological approach raised specific and often unanticipated ethical concerns. While it was beneficial, from an epistemological perspective, that pictorial interviews generated emotive reactions for instance, this was questionable from an ethical point of view. In general, there were few ethical issues I could have prepared for before going to the field. Instead, most situations demanded a situational, ‘responsive’ approach to ethics. This has made me realise that, in ethnographic research, institutional ethical frameworks are useful as guidelines and to encourage researchers to reflect and anticipate challenges, whereas true ethical considerations are context and situation-specific. Building on Fletcher’s (1966) ‘situated ethics approach’ and more recent contributions (Dekeyser and Garrett 2017; Ansell and van Blerk 2005b; Cloke et al. 2000; Morrow and Richards 1996), I have therefore argued researchers should have the freedom, flexibility and responsibility to make their own ethical choices in cross-cultural research with children. This implies a re-thinking of the position of the researcher, and the unfashionable acknowledgment that it is the researcher who, in the end, makes ethical decisions based on moral dilemmas that arise in the everyday of the field. In this light, I have argued for acknowledging the importance of the researcher’s personal moral frameworks, an aspect which often remains underexplored. Doing ethical research requires a ‘balancing’ of institutional ethical agenda’s, the local ethos and those personal moral frameworks. In addition, I have highlighted the challenge of balancing empathy and disaffect in research with marginalized young people in a sometimes unimaginable unfair world. I thus argue continuous reflexivity on one’s positionality, background and moral presumptions as the best way of advancing one’s own ethical research.

7.3 The lived spirituality of street children

In this thesis I have explored the role of spirituality in the everyday lives of street children in Bukavu. In chapter 4 (section 4.2), I have straightforwardly defined ‘spirituality’ as “people’s thoughts and practices related to (interactions with) the ‘supernatural’”. In my analysis I have employed the term ‘lived spirituality’ to emphasize a) the person-centred rather than systemic character of my exploration and b) my focus on the manifestation of spirituality in the everyday. Basically my inspiration for using this term is twofold: First, the shift in street children studies from producing mainly descriptive accounts on

characteristics of street children to the current focus on the everyday lives and experiences of these children (Hecht 1998; Márquez 1999; Young 2003; Van Blerk 2005; 2006; 2012; Conticini and Hulme 2007; Conticini 2008; Evans 2006; Butler 2009; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010; Bordonaro 2012; Drybread 2013; Oppong Asante and Meyer-Weitz 2014). A second source for my inspiration comes from the field of ‘lived religion’: a relatively new, cross-disciplinary - yet mostly sociological - stream of scholarship studying how religion is *lived* by ordinary people in their everyday lives (Ammerman 2016; Bender 2011; McGuire 2008; Hall 1997; Orsi 1985). This approach on ‘lived spirituality’, which is about real people engaging in spiritual activities and making sense of their lives, inevitably implies a focus on ‘practice’. *Practice* is indeed the key notion also in this novel field of lived religion (Ammerman 2016; Aune 2015; Bender 2011; Hall 1997) yet ‘practice’ is not sufficiently theorized. Because of this lack of theorization and also in the light of the debate’s narrow focus on lived religion in the West, I have not embedded my analysis in this field of research, despite being inspired by its use of the term ‘lived’.

Instead, I have developed Bourdieusian practice theory to adequately address and analyse ‘practice’ as the core concept of lived spirituality. Bourdieu (1977) explains practice as the outcome of the complex interplay of field, *habitus* and capital (see chapter 2, section 2.5.1). I have employed in particular the concepts of field (chapter 4), and to a lesser extent *doxa* and capital (chapter 5) to structure my analysis. Yet despite the explanatory power and worth of these concepts they were too limited to allow a full-blown analysis of the lived spirituality of street children, in particular because they do not account for children’s intentional action and reflexivity that surfaced prominently in my data. I have therefore complemented field and capital with two other concepts as employed by practice theorist Ortner (Ortner 2006; 2005): agency, which I used both in chapter 5 and chapter 6 and subjectivity, which was the core concept in chapter 6.

As a whole, this theoretical framework that I used shows that practice is highly context-specific and depending on the position of individuals. I have analysed this in chapter 4 in particular, where I have sketched the Spiritual Field of Bukavu as the non-physical, highly diverse *conceptual* space in which lived spirituality unfolds. As any other Bourdieusian field, the Spiritual Field is characterised by power/competition and an economic logic. As specific to the Spiritual Field however, we find its ‘spiritual essence’, fluid boundaries, great diversity and its division into two mutually reactive subfields which I have named ‘the subfield of religion’ (or ‘the Divine’) and ‘the subfield of witchcraft’ (or ‘the Dark’). I have used the concept of field in particular because it reveals

how people are socialized into a spiritual system which is heavily local and this helps to explain their practices as it links to the experience (and reality) of opportunities, constraints, and threats. Specifically, the notion of field explains existing opportunities and limitations for street children in two ways: on the one hand there are practical restraints and opportunities that come with the organization of spirituality in Bukavu. For instance: competition is manifest in the Spiritual Field as denominational competition among others. Hence Catholic and various Protestant churches compete for adherents and offer material benefits such as small amounts of money, food or clothes, as an incentive to potential newcomers. These incentives are practical opportunities that street children capitalize on.

On the other hand, the field's opportunities, but also boundaries, are not just practical but also social: people *internalize* a certain cultural system. So because of growing up in a particular place and time people internalize rules and principles that come with traversing a certain field. This is implicit knowledge that helps one to determine options, define strategies and 'sense' limitations and experience threat and anxiety. An illustrative example can be found in the current heightened risk for street children in Bukavu to become victims of witchcraft accusations (chapter 4, section 4.4.3). This risk should be seen as the result of sociocultural and historic processes: witchcraft has always existed in the DRC, but in the wake of social change and globalization, the notion of the child witch emerged as the materialization of a cultural imaginary of social and economic crises (de Boeck 2005). Another example of such an internalized principle concerns the local credo that "I am a hammer in God's hands" (chapter 4, section 4.3.1 and chapter 6, section 6.2.2). This is a social rather than a practical boundary to children's sense of agency which is as real in its consequences, delimiting the autonomy these children experience, as practical constraints can be.

A first conclusion thus concerns the importance of sociocultural contexts (in time and space) as well as people's position in society, for determining how spirituality is lived. Hence the social, cultural, political and economic context of contemporary Bukavu combined with the social position of street children as highly marginalized and excluded beings leads us to a specific kind of lived spirituality which is quintessentially a 'street spirituality' oriented towards the immediate goal of day-to-day getting by. I have therefore analysed this as 'the spiritual practice of survival', which can be operationalised in two broad, complementary themes: the spiritual practice of *material* survival and the spiritual practice of *moral* survival. I have emphasized the sociocultural component of

these repertoires of survival by dissecting how practice (material practice) is structured by implicit internalized knowledge of the rules of the field (chapter 5, section 5.2) and by revealing the way in which perceptions of the self in the world as well as indications of a desired self in the world (moral practice) are determined by local ideas of normality (chapter 6). In sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2 I will further elaborate on the key findings from my analysis of the spiritual practice of material survival and the spiritual practice of moral survival respectively.

7.3.1 The spiritual practice of material survival

Spirituality, particularly in the West, is often categorized at the final level of human needs, becoming important only when physical and social needs are fulfilled. For instance: it is the capstone of Maslow's pyramid of the hierarchy of human needs (Maslow 1943), ranging from basic physiological and biological needs such as food and water to self-actualization- and, only in a later adjustment (Maslow 1964), transcendence- needs at the very top. However, my data reveals that the lived spirituality of Congolese street children is not inferior to but completely intertwined with (attempts to satisfy) physiological, biological, social, emotional and self-esteem needs. In Bukavu's street context of existential insecurity and a chronic lack of prospects, spirituality featured prominently in my data as a tool for material survival.

In chapter 5, I outlined such functioning of spirituality as the spiritual practice of material survival, which, I argued, is quintessentially a relational practice. Street children engage in relationships with spiritual beings, such as God and the Devil, and spiritual experts such as pastors and witchdoctors, with the goal of facilitating day-to-day survival. I have explained this relational practice as being goal-oriented, pragmatic, eclectic, often precarious and functioning along a logic of exchange, although the exact manifestation differs. This difference can be explained by *doxa*, here manifest in the important intuitive dichotomy between (rules regulating) relationality and inherent exchange in the subfield of religion versus the subfield of witchcraft. In short: God is said to answer slowly but surely and his provisions, when finally given, are unconditional and unlimited. In contrast, the Devil responds fast and easy but his 'goods' are conditional and limited. In addition, there are much higher risks and higher costs associated with support from the Dark. Whereas children's engagements with pastors already reveal precarity, for instance when children run into 'fake pastors', data demonstrated that risks tend to increase when the exchange partner gets 'darker'. Generally, what children get out of these relationships

are minimum provisions that keep them alive for the day: a meal, a few hundred francs (\$0,50) etc. Therefore, I argue we cannot speak of these provisions in Bourdieusian terms of ‘economic capital’, which is rather associated with (the accumulation of) something more substantial. Instead of ‘capital’ they aim for ‘coins’ or -with a Biblical term - ‘daily bread’. Arguably the only exception here would be negotiations over *kuzimu* life-long wealth which concerns significant sums of money. In contrast to economic capital, the term social capital would be adequate to refer to the (desired) outcomes of children’s established relationships with spiritual others. Nevertheless, I have chosen analytically to work with the term ‘relational practice’ because it allowed a more in-depth exploration of all aspects of relationality as a process, including children’s strategic reasoning and reflections behind (efforts to) establishing relationships, instead of only focusing on the outcomes.

Crucially, my analysis of the spiritual practice of material survival reveals a specific kind of agency exercised by street children. Whereas I agree with Shand et al. (2015) that African street children generally have very limited possibilities to exercise agency, in particular in relation to economic opportunities, my data show that spirituality provides an alternative framework with opportunities for survival in which ‘real’ and ‘assumed’ opportunities exist. Within this framework, agency is exercised particularly in the way street children build and manage inter-personal relationships with spiritual beings and experts. I have called this type of agency ‘alternative agency’ because these relations belong to a distinct field of practice that implies a social realm that expands beyond the conventional, narrow confines of a street child’s stratum. This alternative agency should be understood as a manifestation of Ortner’s understanding of agency-as-power (Ortner 2006): manoeuvrings in the Spiritual Field reveal such agency in the way children are capable of establishing and maintaining relationships and exploiting inherent opportunities for survival.

However, from the perspective of a Western researcher, opportunities (and threats) in the spiritual realm are both ‘real’, such as material incentives given by pastors and sheikhs and ‘assumed’ such as the magical assistance of a fetish or the availability of large sums of money from the bottom of lake Kivu. Tactics aimed at generating these goods may never lead to significant gains or - at best - the precise causality of the whole process will always be debatable. Can we, then, still speak of agency when the power to act is imagined and when the desired goods to which this action is oriented may be illusory? I argue we can and should as long as we aim to understand the lives of our

informants and when we argue their lived experiences have informed our analysis. In this light, and building on Ortner (2006. See also Campbell et al. 2015) I have come to define agency not as an objective position in a field of power and as recognized by others, but as the subjective “*experience and pursuit of possibilities*” (see chapter 2, section 2.5.2). This experience and pursuit should be seen as independent of feasibility, actuality and (unintended) outcomes. My informants rarely ever felt completely powerless because they knew that if life would really turn unbearable (which it already was from my perspective, but then I am nowhere as strong as they are), they could always decide to employ spiritual means to manipulate reality. I saw how this thought in itself, an option we may judge as surreal, really comforted and empowered them. Some of them had already sought refuge in witchcraft for instance, and always with high levels of self-reported success, whereas others decided - *on moral grounds* - to refrain from it.

This self-conscious decision, to - against all odds - *not* use witchcraft is, in fact illustrative of Ortner’s second modality of agency: agency as intentionality and the pursuit of (culturally constituted) life projects. This kind of agency strongly surfaced in the spiritual practice of moral survival, to which I will now turn.

7.3.2 The spiritual practice of moral survival

Besides being a system facilitating material survival, spirituality proved central to practices and processes of sense-making, profound introspective reflection and, most of all, children’s contemplation of the moral self in time and place. This sense-making is logically rooted in the everyday experiences of these children traversing the field. I have argued that at the core of these experiences we can find their awareness of their own marginal position: informants felt different, stigmatized and excluded from mainstream society. Rooted in this awareness of exclusion and strangeness, they *all* had a deep wish to become included and to be normal. It has been previously observed that street children have remarkably mainstream norms and aspirations (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003; Swart and Swart-Kruger 1990). Instead of having mainstream aspirations however and in line with the argument of Butler (2009), I have pointed out that my informants have the aspiration to *be* normal. This is what the spiritual practice of moral survival ultimately entails: it provides a ‘normalizing’ frame allowing, eventually the experience of inclusion.

I argue the wish to be normal and hence, included, indicates the essence of “the local logics of the desirable” that structure life projects in the light of Ortner’s analysis

(Ortner 2006). ‘Local’ should in this case be understood as the local *street* context of Bukavu and ‘the desirable’ as relating to cultural ideas about ‘the good’ and that part of ‘the good’ you don’t have. Hence, it follows logically that for those who are excluded, being included forms (a substantial part of) what constitutes the desirable. Now, in a society in which the ultimate good seems framed as religiosity and socially positioned explicitly opposed to witchcraft as the ‘non-good’, street children’s desire to be normal is likely to have moral connotations. Hence, whereas inclusion is “the local logic of the desirable” for a street child in Eastern Congo, religiosity can be seen as the culturally appropriate pathway towards this good, or, in Ortner’s terms, religiosity is “the local logic of how to *pursue* the desirable”.

Such inclusion should be seen as twofold: children want to be included in the eyes of God and in the eyes of other people. Regarding the first pursuit, being included in the eyes of God, I have outlined three strategies that are employed by the street children to come to terms with the moral discomfort they experience living a lifestyle that is not in line with the cultural and religious norms that are so important in Eastern Congo. A first strategy implies the conscious rejection of personal responsibility for immoral conduct, seeing themselves as a mere instrument in God’s hands. A second strategy concerns the avoidance of hypocrisy and lying to God. This strategy can be seen as a partial moral solution to inevitable immorality, based on children’s awareness that they are unable, at the moment, to abandon sinning altogether. Revealing extraordinary rich reflexivity, this strategy was illustrated for instance in the way Batumike temporarily avoided church attendance and in the way Boniem and his friends escaped an illegitimate baptism. In these cases children’s self-contemplations clearly manifested in action oriented towards the aim of maintaining the moral self: physically staying away from church (Batumike) or actively sabotaging someone else’s plan (Boniem). A third strategy concerned the contemplation of the positioned self-vis-à-vis God. I showed how street children ascribe themselves a special subject position which is a position of exception: they know that they are children of God, as everyone else and they know that they are highly deprived, like no-one else and as such they believe to be (partially) pardoned by God for their current moral transgression. In fact, these three mechanisms can be seen as ways of dealing with the current non-realization of normality: children claim to be normal themselves yet forced to operate in a context of deviance. They resonate that God will understand and forgive them, as long as they continue to pursue true conversion in the long run.

In fact, such pursuit of religious conversion connects spiritual inclusion with this-worldly inclusion. On the one hand it allows children to feel worthy (enough) of God's mercy, feeling included in His eyes. On the other hand as argued, religiosity is key to how informants imagined the route towards social inclusion, being included in the eyes of other people. Specifically, children dreamt of conversion in the form of adult-baptism, imagined as a "total rupture" (Daswani 2013), seen as a transition from being "unstable" or even working for the Devil, to serving God; "a complete break with the past" (Meyer 1998). Their imagining of such form of conversion clearly reflects the Pentecostal promise of becoming 'born-again', which is manifest locally (see chapter 4, section 4.3.3.2) but also identified across Africa (Daswani 2013; Engelke 2004; Meyer 1998). The way children have incorporated this Pentecostal notion of rupture in the spiritual practice of moral survival reveals the importance of a historical and cultural consciousness for understanding (the formation of) subjectivities.

Although deeply wished for, such conversion was constantly postponed in the light of daily existential insecurities. I analysed this conscious postponement of conversion as a fourth and final strategy of the spiritual practice of moral survival. This postponement has a dual working that reveals an interesting engagement with temporality: it allows them to dream of a better future, as such offering comfort and hope, and it helps children to resolve current moral discomfort, because their *intention* alone of converting to the Kingdom of God makes children better able to live with their present (im)moral selves. As such, this reveals the intertwinement of present circumstances and future aspirations at the level of individual sense-making, revealing these children as moral beings and becomings.

Importantly, this function of spirituality enabling normalization of the moral self, is only provided by religion and never by witchcraft. Whereas witchcraft offers immediate tools to manipulate reality, such as in the form of a fetish, it can never offer ultimate solace and it never fits local cultural ideas about 'the good' and 'the desirable' precisely because religiosity is an intrinsic part of 'the good' and witchcraft is the 'anti-good'.

Finally and interestingly, although the afterlife was very important to research participants and salvation was often framed in terms of preparing a good ending for oneself, their most essential and most ultimate desire was worldly and not spiritual inclusion: they aspired to be (recognized as) human among humans. In this light I have argued spiritual inclusion can be seen as a detour - not quite a shortcut - to worldly normality. In the novel scholarly field of 'lived religion', researchers have demonstrated

the intertwinement between the spiritual and the material (Houtman and Meyer 2012; Engelke 2012; Orsi 2012; McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2007). Although this connection with the material features in my study as well, it would be more precise to emphasize the interlinkage between the spiritual and the social. Indeed, the way spirituality is lived by the marginal young people from my study ultimately appears as subordinate to and serving mundane, intrinsically social goals (i.e. social inclusion of those who are excluded). In the next and final section I will reflect on the scholarly relevance of my study and its contribution to different fields of knowledge. I will also identify shortcomings and mention recommendation for future research.

7.4 Scholarly relevance and recommendations

In this final section, I will directly address the four research objectives of my study as outlined in chapter 1. Besides indicating where and how my study has contributed I will also identify shortcomings and potential areas for further research. The overall aim of this project was to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of ‘spirituality’ in the lives of children and young people (aged 14 – 20) growing up on the streets of Bukavu, DRC. To achieve this aim, I identified four specific objectives, numbered below. I will discuss the realisation of these objectives and I will identify limitations as well as areas for future research.

1. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of spirituality in street children’s everyday lives.

Despite the recent focus on street children’s lived experience in the wake of the Sociology of Childhood (cf. James and Prout 1990) street children’s spiritual lives and experiences have received very little attention in academia (Thomas de Benítez 2011a). This is surprising given the fact that spirituality, as both religion and witchcraft, plays an important role in the cultural contexts where a majority of street children live, particularly in Africa. Through an exclusive focus on the overlooked theme of spirituality, I contribute to a growing body of literature exploring street children’s lives in general and street children’s lived experiences in particular. A focus on lived experiences required studying street children with ethnographic depth and vision, as Gigengack (2008) plead for, to allow a thorough empirical contemplation of their subjectivities.

Doing this, I found that studying children’s inner spiritual lives truly allowed putting the children’s lived experiences at the centre of analysis because one’s inner spiritual life

is a realm where thought and practice and feeling and calculation meet and where experiences are thus truly felt and lived. However, studying spirituality was not just a way to access children's lived experiences, it also revealed the very prominent place of spirituality within these lived experiences. Crucially, I have found that spirituality is not something that pops up once physical needs are fulfilled but rather spirituality is completely intertwined with and essential for all kinds of aspirations and abilities, also those concerned with meeting most rudimentary needs such as food, shelter etc.

As outlined in the introduction of this chapter, exploring the role of spirituality in street children's lives revealed the prominence of spirituality in street children's everyday quest for (material and moral) survival. The spiritual practice of material survival (chapter 5) in particular highlights how, in a context of extreme marginality, spirituality is 'lived' largely in goal-oriented and pragmatic ways. Bourdieu in fact, has stressed this same point:

“[...] magical or religious actions are fundamentally 'this-worldly' (*diesseitig*), as Weber puts it; being entirely dominated by the concern to ensure the success of production and reproduction, in a word, *survival*, they are oriented towards the most dramatically practical, vital and urgent ends” (Bourdieu 1990, 95, emphasis added).

However, an exploration of this particular role of spirituality which features so strongly in my data on African street spirituality seems largely absent in the relatively new and emerging field of lived religion which focuses, almost exclusively, on Western contexts (Ammerman 2016; Edgell 2012; Orsi 1985). My comparative analysis of existing data from *Growing Up on the Streets* showed clear parallels between the role of street spirituality in Bukavu with other African cities of Accra (Ghana) and Harare (Zimbabwe) (Krah et al. 2016). However, more comparative research is needed to understand the width and depth of the relation between spirituality and the struggle for survival on the streets in Africa and beyond.

However, besides these goal-oriented and pragmatic employment of religion and witchcraft, the spiritual practice of moral survival (chapter 6) revealed a very different way in which spirituality is lived by street children. In particular, data revealed an interconnection between spirituality and profound reflexivity and self-conscious contemplation of children as young as fourteen. This provides further evidence for the claim of Butler (2009), Ennew and Swart-Kruger (2003) and Hecht (1998) that the street

is certainly not a place devoid of values and morals. In contrast, spirituality is employed by my informants in their quest for a morally meaningful life, whilst being imaged as an intrinsic part of such life. As data indicated, in some situations children clearly prioritized moral survival, being able to live with oneself morally, above material survival, despite precarious living conditions. Employing creative tactics and strategies to maintain one's moral self, for instance through the rejection of accountability or the avoidance of hypocrisy, children realised self-acceptance and the feeling of spiritual inclusion. In this light, my research evokes an encouragement to take serious street children's existential complexity as sense-making agents. We should not just consider these children as being solely preoccupied with physically making it through the day, but we should see them as "beings who feel and think and reflect, who seek and create meaning" (cf. Ortner 2006, 110).

Furthermore, my study shows that in highly deprived contexts, spirituality, in particular faith in God ('s mercy) and the aspiration of spiritual change through conversion, is an important aspect of what motivates and inspires marginal agents to not give up on life. By postponing conversion and working, both in their minds as well as in their actions, towards (keeping) this option (open) they keep the dream of a better future alive.

Further research in other contexts, including Western contexts, may find out whether spirituality facilitates material and/or moral survival among marginal young people such as homeless youth, detainees, young refugees or (ethnic) minority groups living in the West.

Finally and crucially, more research is needed to fully understand the nexus between spirituality, survival and gender. In my study, girls were underrepresented (with 14 participating girls compared to 61 boys). This imbalance complicated comparative analysis and it has made me hesitant to say much about gender dynamics in lived spirituality. Ideally, perhaps, my study would have included as many female participants as male participants. However, according to PEDER, the numbers included in my study are roughly representative of the estimated percentages of boys and girls living on the streets of Bukavu. There are indeed far fewer girls than boys on the streets. An additional difficulty concerns the fact that girls are often a less 'visible' group on the streets, 'hiding' in (night) clubs for instance, which complicated my attempts of including more girls in the research. Yet, there were some references in my data to a (self-ascribed) difference in moral positioning of boys and girls, which seems to have implications for understanding

lived spirituality and moral survival. We have seen, for instance, that girls were generally more pessimistic about their future possibilities of making a total break with their pasts, to be forgiven by God and to become (recognized as) normal human beings (chapter 6, section 6.3.2). This may be explained by pointing at society's stronger moral disapproval of sex work, which is street girl's main commercial activity, compared to theft which is more often boy's survival strategy. However, this is something I would like to investigate further.

2. Re-conceptualise (structure and) agency of street children through an empirical assessment of spirituality.

It would be no exaggeration to argue that 'agency' has become the most important yet definitely not uncontested notion in the wake of the influential Sociology of Childhood which emerged in the 1990s. Consequentially, the notion of agency gained prominence also, perhaps particularly, in debates on children operating in marginal settings such as child sex workers, child migrants, young carers, orphans, child soldiers and street children. In a direct response to the encouragement of the Sociology of Childhood to recognize children's agency and rights, researchers have been eager to seek 'proof' of agency particularly in challenging situations, thereby underplaying structure. Through an empirical assessment of spirituality I aimed to contribute to existing conceptualisations of street children's agency as well as the structures shaping agency.

In this light, my study first of all shows how both structure and agency depend on particularities of time and place. The full meaning of structure-agency dynamics cannot be grasped without taking their embedding in local sociocultural contexts as the point of departure. In particular, my focus on spirituality shows how enculturation into local systems of religion and witchcraft mediate between children's agency and its outcomes. One example is the prevalent belief in Bukavu across all socioeconomic strata in the existence of child witches. This belief can be seen as one of the many 'structures' limiting children's abilities as agents, particularly because young people's active participation in social life is associated with increased chances of being accused of witchcraft.

Regarding the precise relationship between lived spirituality and children's agency, my study shows that in contexts of extreme marginality, spirituality allows children creative ways of 1) experiencing power as well as 2) constructing meaningful subjectivities. From this we can deduct three insights relevant to debates on (marginal)children's agency.

The first concerns the complexity and multi-layeredness of agency. Despite a growing recognition of the concept's intricacies, agency is still too often reduced to 'a thing' one either has or has not (Gallagher 2008). However applying such as conceptualisation of agency to children living at the very margins of society such as street children appears to be problematic, particularly because such children are intuitively categorized among the 'have-nots' and the quest to empirically prove the opposite continues to remain awkward. Researchers who apply this one-dimensional, what can be called 'vertical' notion of agency ultimately analyse street children's agency as 'thin agency' for instance or as 'limited' or 'constrained' agency. Yet I argue a broader definition of agency is needed which takes aspirations and intentionality into account. A good starting point is Ortner's (2006) conceptualisation of agency as two different (yet related) modalities. She distinguishes between agency-as-power and agency-as-(culturally constituted)-life-projects. My analysis provides empirical content to this conceptualisation while encouraging to rethink agency further.

The second insight builds on the first. The way in which spirituality allows street children's creative expression of agency reveals a subjective sense of power. This extends Ortner's conceptualisation of agency-as-power by taking into account what can be called 'illusory agency' from an outsider's perspective. As argued in chapter 5, the 'alternative agency' I analyse revolves around a combination of real and assumed options for survival. However, as argued above (section 7.3.1), if the aim is to understand children's agency *from their perspectives*, it makes no sense to differentiate between what is real and what is assumed from our point of view. This implies however, taking a new direction in thinking about children's agency, urging us, for instance, to reflect on subjective vs. objective power.

Finally, a third insight derives from the way children's agency relates to how spirituality allows the expression of agency through the construction of meaningful subjectivities. This function of spirituality recounts to Ortner's agency-as-projects as it concerns the pursuit of children's life projects which, in a context of exclusion and otherness, essentially concerns the desire for inclusion and normality, as I put forward in chapter 6. In fact, my analysis of agency-as-projects can be seen as one way of paying more attention to "the factors that mediate between agency and its outcomes", as Campbell et al. (2015, 62) urge us to do, by paying "particular attention to children's own accounts of their hopes for the future, and children's own visions of what would constitute a "good life" from one social setting to another" (Campbell et al. 2015, 62).

This agentic process of my informants aimed towards the realisation of a state of normality reveal that the capacity of reflexivity is a pre-requisite for children's intentional agentic practice, which encourages us to rethink the importance of reflexivity for agency. Based on insights from my study I thus call for a broader notion of agency, rooted in the awareness of the existential complexity of agents and taking full account of intentionality, subjectivity, aspirations and the pursuit of life projects that are constituted in time and place.

3. Provide methodological insights on how to study (street) children and spirituality

Throughout the research process, I encountered different methodological and ethical challenges studying the lived spirituality of street children. In section 7.2, I have reflected in detail on these challenges. Here, I aim to deduce some implications and recommendations based on my synergetic methodological approach.

Specifically, my methodological contribution concerns the solutions to project-related challenges of 1) studying spirituality as something deep-seated, exposing the inner, 2) children with low literacy levels as research participants, 3) vulnerable and hard-to reach children as research participants, 4) a field-site being characterized by high levels of mobility, instability, risk and obscurity which made (participant) observation difficult and limited. With the solutions to these issues I described in section 7.2 I aim to inspire other researchers undertaking research either on spirituality (religion or witchcraft) from a person-centred perspective *and/or* participatory research with children or youth *and/or* qualitative research in challenging settings in which conventional methods do not suffice. Concrete; my methodological approach underscores the benefits of:

- A. Doing ethnographic fieldwork to allow the building of trust-relationships with street children and in order to be able to facilitate progressive understanding and reflexivity of both from the researcher and the informant, which is indispensable if one aims to grasp the full meaning of, and expose one's inner life. It also allows for serendipity and a holistic approach to spirituality, understanding its embedding in sociocultural and historic processes.
- B. The use of a synergetic approach, combining multiple methods (triangulation) contributes to a comprehensive understanding as methods complement each other's weaknesses and contextualize and enrich insights. I recommend in

particular a combination of experimental, creative methods embedded in a more classic ethnographic research structure.

- C. The use of creative, arts-based methods is suitable for research with children/young people as it is different and ‘fun’ and it takes their relatively short attention span into account. In fact, the use of methods that provoke non-verbal ways of expression such as theatre and drawings are particularly suitable for children and/or young people who are less educated/literate and not necessarily used to communicate experiences and feelings through words.
- D. Creative methods proved particularly useful to explore the theme of lived spirituality as they stir reflexivity, imagination and creativity and facilitate the communicative process; exposing and translating the inner. In other words methods such as pictorial interviews, theatre and drawings inspires children, and possibly adults, to undertake an introspective journey and externalize subjective thoughts and feelings through creative and/or performative expressions. In particular a combination of individual and collective creative methods proved successful in learning about different ways in which spirituality is lived, taking into account spiritual interactions and power plays which surfaced in collective theatre performances but also personal sense-making which surfaced in children’s individual drawings.
- E. Being facilitated by a local NGO (in my case PEDER) with years of field-experience was a solution to working in a challenging and unstable environment. Furthermore, such an NGO (or other local knowledge institution) can serve as a gate-keeper as well as ‘cultural advisor’. Particularly useful in my case were the pre-existing trust-relationships between this NGO and my research group. Also the embedding of my study in the wider research project of *Growing Up on the Streets* worked very much in my advantage. My research participants had experience participating in research and six of my key-informants had even been trained as researchers by *Growing Up on the Streets*.

A final recommendation derives from something I recognize as a limitation to my own study. Although I put effort in learning two new languages (French and Swahili), my Swahili never reached the level of holding conversations beyond what should be seen as ‘small-talk’ and very simple interviews. As a result, I had to work with interpreters which, from my perspective, is always unfortunate. First of all I believe my relations with

informants would have been even better if I could have communicated directly with them. This would have reduced the distance between us. Second, I was less independent, as a researcher, in the field. Third and inevitably, some information gets ‘lost in translation’, particularly in interviews and some potentially relevant linguistic details have likely not made it to my analysis. Although it is sometimes unavoidable, I encourage researchers to do research in countries where they speak the language or to stay long enough to learn it properly.

Other limitations to how my study was designed derive from the collaboration with PEDER and GUOTS. As reflected on in chapter 3 (section 3.5.1), I only worked with street children that were known to PEDER which may have resulted in a potential bias. It is not impossible for instance that Catholic children were overrepresented in the research because of PEDER’s Catholic identity. Nevertheless, the number of Catholic informants was representative of the percentage of Catholics in Bukavu. Furthermore, a large majority of my informants were already GUOTS research participants and as such they were, to a certain degree, experienced with participating in research. This may have contributed to a higher tendency towards giving socially accepted answers or mentioning things they thought researchers would be interested in. Seen the relatively low-intensity of GUOTS however, with ‘only’ four focus groups per year for most participants during a period of three years, it would be an exaggeration to see these children as ‘over-researched’ subjects.

4. Inform (inter)national policy and practice concerning African street children and youth

A final objective concerned the impact of my study for policy and practice. Street children’s spiritual lives have not only been neglected in academia. Also most policies aimed at addressing street children’s needs focus primarily on meeting physical and social needs (shelter, food, family), neglecting emotional and spiritual needs while it has been noted before that street children and youth themselves often seem to highly value emotional and spiritual aspects, sometimes putting them before physical support (Conticini 2005; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi 2010). In this light, my research highlights the centrality of spirituality in street children’s lives, its importance for impacting physical, social and emotional well-being and the value that these children themselves ascribe to spirituality and morality in their life. Although more comparative research is needed to understand the breadth and depth of the importance of spirituality for street life in other

places than Bukavu, Harare and Accra (see Krah et al. 2016), I argue attempts to contribute to the well-being of street children should generally concern a more comprehensive perspective on their needs, so that a broader range of needs can be addressed. These needs do not just concern material and immediate social needs (home, food, shelter and safety) but also emotional and spiritual needs.

A next step requires more practice-oriented research to gain insights into how this study's and other social scientific insights about the importance of spirituality for street life can be translated into policy and practice to help street children better. In the light of this effort, close collaboration between academics and practitioners will help to boost the efficacy and appropriateness of interventions.

For a start, and besides presenting my work at international academic conferences, I have disseminated my research findings in the UK at two Annual Research Conferences of the Consortium for Street Children (2015 and 2017), a global network of practitioners, policy-makers and academics. However, I have also organised dissemination activities in Harare (Zimbabwe) in December 2017 and in Bukavu (the DRC) in May 2018. On these two occasions I could share and discuss my findings with a group of international and local NGOs, local government officials, lawyers, academics and religious leaders (priests, nuns, pastors and an Imam). From the discussions during these meetings, three different potential impacts of the dissemination could be deduced: First, the participants of both sessions started to re-conceptualise what a street child is, deconstructing presumed differences between street children and other children, but also between street children and themselves. Most notably, they agreed they should put more effort approaching street children as ordinary human beings who are existentially complex. For example, someone admitted he had not realised street children can be spiritual.

Second, and based on this first realisation, participants said they started thinking about new ways of approaching street children and of incorporating spirituality into their programmes. In Bukavu in particular, it was suggested to further share my research findings with local communities who generally have negative ideas about street children, discriminate against them and who do not believe they can be religious. Interestingly, in both cities there were discussions about whether it was best to prioritize fighting against the threats of spirituality, in particular child witchcraft accusations, or capitalizing on the opportunities offered by spirituality, in particular the possibilities of faith and religious engagement for leaving the streets. The organisation of a meeting with different churches

to increase awareness about and discuss the threat of child witchcraft accusations was suggested.

A third impact concerned comparative insights that were shared through the dissemination. In Harare specifically, participants reported they were now aware of the ‘trend’ of child witchcraft accusations in other countries, in particular the DRC, so they would ‘recognize’ it if these kind of accusations would come to Zimbabwe and immediately unite and react against them.

Next to these meetings with institutional representatives in Harare and Bukavu, I have also disseminated my findings with my young research participants from Bukavu: the *Biles*. Through PEDER, who organised all dissemination activities in Bukavu (May 2018), a group of thirty-seven street children was invited, consisting of those children who had been particularly important informants, including the key informants who were still alive and able to come. To share my findings with this group, I used ten different ‘statements’ based on the research that the children could agree or disagree with. Examples included: “God does not help street children”, “street children do not go to church because they lack the right clothes”, “in *kuzimu*, there are opportunities for street children”, etc. To keep their attention and to make it interactive, I asked them to go to one corner of the room (in one of PEDER’s centres) if they agreed with the statement and to move to another corner if they would not agree. I would then briefly explain what my interpretation was based on the data and there was room for discussion. Generally, children’s opinions about and reactions to the statements resonated very well with my analysis. There were always some individuals who argued otherwise, but most of their nuances are also covered in this thesis. For instance, discussing the statement “the main reason for street children to go to church is to benefit from material support”, some children disagreed because they said they also go to church to steal. Reflecting on this method for dissemination with (street) children I believe it was an effective way to engage children in the dissemination process in contrast to only giving them a summary of the main findings for instance. It was interactive and they seemed to enjoy participating. The statements were framed to provoke a reaction and it led to interesting discussion between the children (who had chosen to go to opposing corners). Besides serving as a final verification of my analysis, the statements were a useful way of communicating the essence of the research to the children. I argue it was important that there was an opportunity for them to disagree with my analysis, to doubt, to discuss and to nuance. At the end, there was room for questions.

From these dissemination activities in particular and the wider study in general, it can be concluded that the relationship between spirituality and street children's well-being is clearly two-sided. Having emphasized the value street children attach to spirituality, I certainly do not want to deny or downplay the negative impacts of spirituality on street children's lives. In line with practice-oriented and activist research (Priest 2015, Battarbee, Foxcroft, and Lancaster 2010; Foxcroft 2003), I acknowledge the harmful effects of spirituality in the form of witchcraft, with child witchcraft accusations as a primary example. I also recognize the relation between religious structures and the exclusion and victimization of street children, think for instance of the church as an unwelcoming place, a place of differentiation and a confrontation with abnormality. However, those structures and the socio-cultural belief in child witches are things we cannot change. What we can adapt are policies and practices aimed at addressing street children's needs, for instance aimed at helping them to shield against those vulnerabilities. Yet, my data ultimately indicated that spirituality offers faith, hope and solace as it allows those living at the margins of society to experience power and to construct meaning, keeping children's dreams alive. Hence, I argue policies aimed at addressing emotional and spiritual needs should start with taking seriously the existential complexity, contemplations and strategies of these children as sense-makers.

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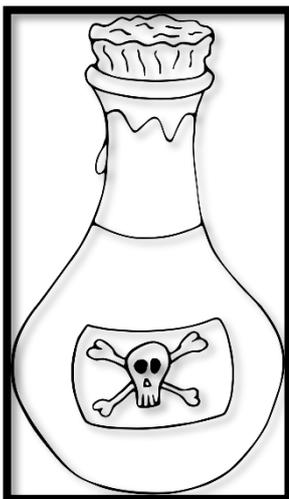
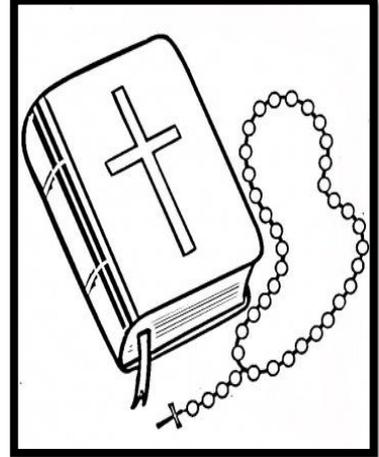
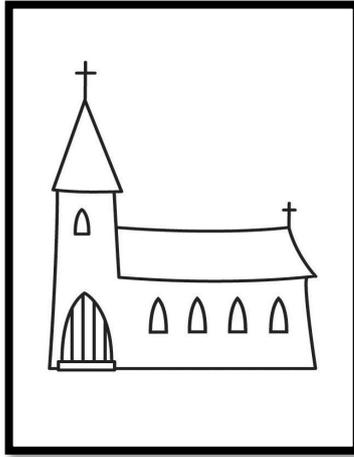
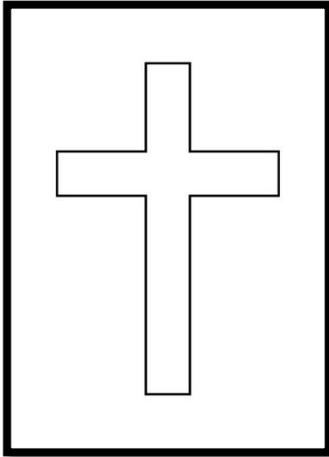
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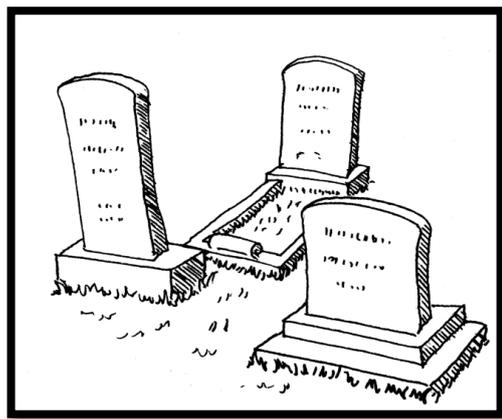
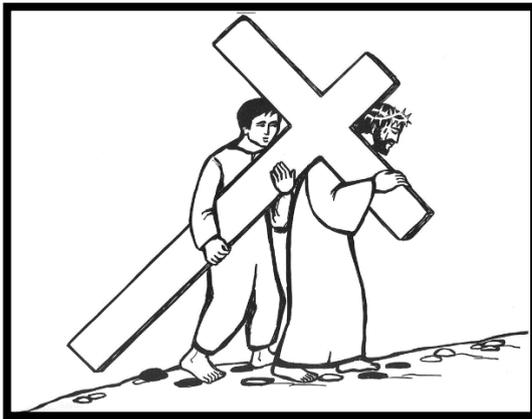
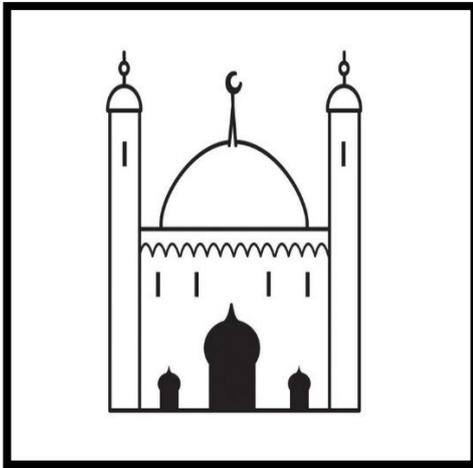
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Appendix 1: Images used in pictorial interviews





Appendix 2: Specific ethical guidelines for research involving street children & youth



1. *The purpose of the research*

It is important to make sure research participants are fully informed about the research they are taking part in. The researcher will make it clear to all potential participants the **purpose** of the research, the **questions** to be asked and the **methods** that will be used. This will be outlined in a participatory **information session(s)** – which may involve eating together or playing sport/games.

2. *Costs and hoped-for benefits*

It is necessary for the project team to think through and discuss whether there are any likely costs to potential research participants and be fully aware of the correct methods to deal with these. If the research is likely to cause embarrassment, intrusion of privacy, sense of failure or coercion, or fear, the research **will be sensitive to this and deal with it appropriately**. The researcher will make all participants aware that they can **withdraw** from the research at any time. This will be contained in the **information session**. The researcher will make clear to all participants that any **distress or disclosure** (such as distressing thoughts raised through discussing difficulties, or disclosure of abuse) will be **facilitated** through appropriate counsellors via the PM/streetworker. The PM is a trained counsellor and will offer debriefing and support more generally throughout the research.

3. *Privacy and confidentiality*

Privacy and confidentiality is important for ensuring **no harm** may come to participants and researchers because of their involvement in the research project. To protect the researcher no research will be conducted in unsafe spaces and will be guided by the cultural advisor/translator regarding this. The PM will ensure selected researchers will not abuse their position of responsibility and cause harm to others. To protect the children/youth all names will be changed to hide identity and no un-anonymised data will be available to a third party. All participants will be asked to consent to their data being used in the project dissemination including reports, websites and other academic and policy materials arising from the research.

All research support workers and translators working on the project must adhere to the ethical guidelines and ensure confidentiality at all times. Any information obtained through the course of the project must not be discussed or repeated outside of the project team members. Any information, notes, photographs or files must be destroyed or deleted at the end of the translation/support work.

4. *Selection, inclusion, exclusion*

The researcher and PM will work within the project structure to access children on the streets. The researcher will explain to all participants why they have been selected for inclusion in the project.

5. *Funding*

The researcher/PM will ensure that children/youth are not out of pocket for participating in the research and the project will provide any necessary materials for taking part. This will be explained in the **information session**.

6. *Review and revision of the research aims and methods*

The project aims and methods will be discussed with the children/youth and their input considered. The RA/PM/SMT will adapt the project in line with the children/youth's ideas if not detrimental to the overall outcome (e.g. selection of participatory methods, inclusion of important issues).

7. *Information*

An appropriate form of **information sharing (leaflet, talk, game etc..)** will be produced which is aimed at participants. This will outline all aspects of the research and explain important terms such as 'consent' and 'opting into the research'. The leaflet will be delivered in clear, simple language which the children can understand.

8. *Consent*

Appropriate consent will be obtained from all participants before they are allowed to participate in the research. The consent will be **informed consent** meaning that they will have had the research explained to them in a manner that they understand. This process will take the form of **opting in**. This means children/youth will be told that they can choose to take part in the research if it interests them but they do not have to participate.

9. *Dissemination*

The researcher/PM/University partner will **return** any materials produced by the children/youth to them after the research has finished if they wish. Otherwise the materials will be **destroyed**. The findings will be disseminated to the children/youth in participatory workshops and in print, **at least** by sending a copy of the final report to the host organisation along with accessible materials.

10. *Impact on children*

The researcher/PM will ensure that the research does **not harm** any participants and throughout the process will treat them with **respect** and **dignity**.

I, Eva Kraak..... adhere to the guidelines outlined above and have discussed.

Signed [Signature]..... (RA) Date 11-02-2015.....

Project manager:

Signed.....

Print name..... Date.....

University Partner Agreement:

Signed.....

Print name..... Date.....

Dr Lorraine van Blerk

University of Dundee

Appendix 3: University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee Approval Form



University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

University of Dundee,
Dundee,
DD1 4HN.

12 December 2015

Dear Eva

Application Number: UREC 15225

Title: Growing Up on the Streets

I am writing to you to advise you that your ethics application has been reviewed and approved by the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee.

Approval is valid for three years from the date of this letter. Should your study continue beyond this point, please request a renewal of the approval.

Any changes to the approved documentation (e.g., study protocol, information sheet, consent form), must be approved by UREC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Schloerscheidt', on a light-colored background.

Dr Astrid Schloerscheidt
Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 4: Survey questions

1. General

- Sex
- Age
- On the street since when
- Why are you on the street (in 1 sentence)
- Sector (place)
- Level of education

2. Spirituality (*formal*)

- What is your religion?
- Do you believe God exists?
- Do you believe the Devil exists?
- Where do you go after you die?
- How often do you pray?
- What do you pray for?
- How often do you go to church/mosque?
- Why do you go there?
- How often are you visited by a pastor on the streets?

3. Spirituality (*non-formal*)

- Do you believe witchcraft exists?
- In your life, have you ever been the victim of witchcraft?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*
- In your life, have you ever been accused of witchcraft/being a witch?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*
- In your life have you ever used a fetish?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*
- Have you ever used witchcraft?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*
- Have you ever used freemason?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*
- Have you ever evoked ?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*
- Have you ever been to kuzimu?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*
- Have you ever been delivered by a pastor?
 - **IF YES:** *Give example*

Appendix 5: Topic List Expert Interviews with PEDER staff

A. Street children Bukavu general

- Definition of ‘street child’
- Percentages boys/girls
- Changes in phenomenon street children in Bukavu
 - Numbers
 - Ages
 - Sexes
 - Making a living
 - Violence (state/police)
 - Reputation/stigma (public opinion)
- Different categories of street children
- Roots of the phenomenon of street children (probe: urbanization, changing family relations/values)
- Other organisations helping street children in Bukavu
- Difference in street life boys/girls
 - Making a living
 - Stigma (ask for gendered opportunities to re-verse/change stigma)
- Terminology of ‘child’, link with culture (probe: child until marriage?)
- Ethnic background street children (percentage of Bashi children)
 - Shi culture in street life
 - Place of origin (urban/rural)
- Relationship between the wars and street children
- Future of street children

B. Spirituality in Bukavu

- Spiritual context of Bukavu
- Categories of spirituality, your definition
- Changes in spirituality (probe: relation religion – materiality, relations between different religions, relation religion-witchcraft)
- Percentages Catholics, Protestants, Muslims..
- Protestant denominations
- Islam
- Islam and witchcraft in public imagination
- Categories of witchcraft
- Differences between witchcraft here and in other places DRC (probe: rural/urban)
- What belongs to witchcraft? Categories.
 - Relationship with Shi culture
 - witchcraft changes (probe: materialism)?
 - Transnational influence/relations on witchcraft. Rwanda etc.
- Belief in witchcraft
 - The root of witchcraft
 - Definition of witchcraft
 - Of spirituality

C. Street Children and spirituality

- Spirituality in GUOTS data
 - What kind of things do you think were mostly in the GUOTS data? (probe: especially witchcraft?)
 - Prominence of spirituality in Bukavu compared to other cities
- Children's lives is different than adult lives. How does this result in a different way of relating to church and witchcraft? (probe: prominence of witchcraft in belief and use, syncretism, pragmatism, absence of knowledge)
- Enculturation children witchcraft. Sources of witchcraft knowledge (probe: family, friends on/off the street, pastors, organisations)
- 'street spirituality vs. 'home spirituality'
 - Link with morality (ask why stealing is not a sin)
 - Link with PEDER
 - Catholic identity of PEDER and influences on policy
- Influences on religious affiliations children (do children convert?)
- (Im)possibilities for faith in street life.
- Quest for survival versus quest for meaning
- Threats of spirituality
- Spirituality as an asset (empowering)
- Impact spirituality for future street children
- Becoming a pastor as a job opportunity for street children