



## Examining Resilient Practices through Configuring Survivors' Lives at the Noodle's Kitchen in International Christian Centre (Edo-State, Nigeria)

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### ABSTRACT

*The persistent violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in Nigeria has resulted in profound trauma, affecting numerous individuals who struggle with its physical, emotional, and psychological aftermath. While existing scholarly works outline recovery pathways for these survivors, there is a notable lack of recognition and appreciation for religious-based recovery, particularly the role of God's grace and sacrifice. This research employs a qualitative approach, drawing insights from the Noodle's kitchen, to contribute to the current literature on trauma and resilience. Specifically, the study investigates resilient mechanisms within the context of a faith-based Christian Centre, focusing on how survivors' utilization of grace and sacrifice strategies embedded in socio-cultural and religious contexts, enhances our understanding of trauma, survival, and recovery.*

**Keywords** God's Grace, Sacrifice, International Christian Centre, Resilience, Noodle's kitchen

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### AUTHOR'S BIO



CHIDOZIE, Emmanuel Uchenna, is a doctoral researcher associated with the Social and Cultural Anthropology Research Unit within the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Leuven, situated in Belgium. His research interests primarily lie in the areas of trauma, violence, and processes of recovery. Notably, he has contributed to scholarly discourse through a publication titled "Echoes of Resilience: Retelling the Memories of Trauma among Survivors of Boko Haram's Violence at the International Christian Centre, Edo-State, Nigeria." Emmanuel received his undergraduate education at the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. Subsequently, he pursued his Master of Science in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Catholic University of Leuven, followed by an Advanced Master of Science in Anthropology and Development Studies (CADES). Presently, Emmanuel is actively involved with the "Home of the Needy" organization in Nigeria, which provides shelter and support to victims, particularly women and children, affected by the atrocities of Boko Haram. Within this setting, he works towards guiding and assisting these individuals in their journey towards processing trauma, rebuilding resilience, restoring faith and confidence, and expanding their life opportunities.

## INTRODUCTION

...Grace was evident in everything and it's that grace that showed them favour and they are here today. However, there are many of them who could not make it to the Centre. I mean like many of them have been wasted, many died of hunger, many died on the road, many died due to disease. It was a traumatic experience for them. But these ones (pointing towards the Noodles Kitchen) saw that God's grace was what was in place for them and that's what worked for their favour and lead to their recovery... (Pastor Folorunsho)

All my cares or worries are in God's hands...The grace of God saw me through all my ordeals...(Aminu)

The focal point of this research revolves around the narratives of trauma and subsequent recovery shared with the researcher by Pastor Folorunsho<sup>2</sup> at the Centre's Noodles Kitchen, including those of Gideon, a survivor of violence perpetrated by Boko Haram. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the study aims to provide insights drawn from the lived experiences of survivors who have endured the traumas inflicted by Boko Haram. Through an exploration of these experiences, this research contributes to the existing body of literature on trauma and resilience by elucidating the ways in which survivors utilize God's grace and self-sacrifice or enduring suffering as pathways to recovery (Herman, 1992; Maltby & Hall, 2012; Dura`-Vila`, Littlewood, & Leavey, 2013; Itzhak, 2022). Engaging with this work through the opening paragraphs of the vignettes presents Boko Haram's insurgency in terms of its far-reaching and diverse consequences, affecting government, security, peaceful coexistence, the economy, and precipitating loss of human lives and properties, thereby leading to dire humanitarian crises (Imasuen 2015; Adewale, 2016). Local communities have been displaced and those who survived, especially those in Internally Displaced camps, are left with enduring trauma (Vandi, 2023). How does the experience of trauma illuminate and fuel the understanding resilient practices?

Individuals who have witnessed acts of violence are

more likely to have trauma-related symptoms such as despair, anxiety, and intrusive thoughts (Werner & Smith, 1982). They desire to reclaim their sense of self and return to their usual lives. Earlier research on coping strategies or resilience was aimed at identifying personality traits and external influences that protect one from adversity, and resilience was framed as a set of capabilities that one either possesses or does not possess (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Rutter, 1979). Since the 1990s, the emphasis on resilience has switched to studying the processes that enable people to recover from life-threatening experiences (Wagnild & Collins, 2009; Walker, 2011). As opposed to static features, the definition of resilience has increasingly expanded into sets of diverse and dynamic practices that grow over time in individuals (Rutter, 1999; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Roisman, 2005). Adversity's meaning has also been reconsidered considering its reliance on subjective perspective (Luthar et al., 2000). As a result, academics have been asked to include individuals' perspectives while doing resilience research (Hazvinei, 2013). According to Harvey (2007), it is critical to expand research on the psychopathology of trauma with studies into contextual and developmental interventions of resilient response, as well as the types of facilitators capable of nurturing resilient practices in traumatized individuals and communities. The goal of resilience research is to determine what factors contribute to the development of a successful and well-adjusted individual (Hazvinei, 2013).

Several research on resilience, for example, have stressed the relevance of family, friends, and community in enhancing refugee resilience during the resettlement process (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Similarly, Sossou et al. (2008, p. 366) emphasized the importance of "spirituality expressed in the form of non-organized religion, and the availability of community social support services" in assisting refugees in adjusting to resettlement processes, in addition to the supportive role of the family and extended family. According to Fernando and Ferrari's (2011, p. 70) research, the process of adjustment or integration in the larger community comes to define resilience as "coping practices" that provide refugees with



“structure, encouraged cognitive restructuring, acceptance of the trauma,” as well as cultivating a sense of control and promoting sets of rituals. Similar studies conducted among Sudanese refugees (Sweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007) and Afghani women (Welsh & Brodsky, 2010) depicted their coping strategies as being contingent on religious beliefs, focusing on future aspirations and wishes, and relying on their inner strength. The research by Khawaja, White, Schweiter, & Greenslade (2008) shows how IDPs in Azerbaijan used coping methods such as asserting hope, emphasizing the future and good things in life, and displaying remarkable fortitude in the face of daily hardships in the camp. Bayo et al. (2017) conducted study among IDPs in selected camps in Abuja (Nigeria) to highlight how Boko Haram victims employed emotion focused coping (humour, for example) and issue focused coping (seeking social assistance) as coping tactics.

This study is situated within the scholarly frameworks established by Khawaja, White, Schweiter, and Greenslade (2008), as well as the contributions of Bayo et al. (2017), Chinwokwu and Arop (2014), and Ejoke (2017) regarding the psychological impacts of Boko Haram's brutal attacks. In doing so, this research advances the adoption of a resilience-based approach to address trauma, with particular emphasis on the pivotal roles of God's grace and self-sacrifice. It distinguishes itself from existing scholarship by focusing on the intricate mechanisms through which survivors employ resilient strategies, shaped by a convergence of socio-cultural, psychological, and religious dynamics. Exploring this convergence, leads to the resignification of trauma through the means in which Christian currents are interwoven in the rhythms of everyday life at the Centre, especially at the provisional structures of the Noodles (Indomie) Kitchen<sup>3</sup>, into knots of recovery and survival. Next, we will provide a brief conceptualization of how the utilization of grace and sacrifice, deeply ingrained within socio-cultural and religious contexts, contributes to the comprehension of resilience.

### **Social-cultural theories (Culture-Specific embedment)**

Social-cultural theories which was developed by several thinkers in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and psychology, place a strong emphasis on how society and cultural elements affect how trauma is experienced and understood. They emphasize how social support, religious and cultural expectations, and historical context affect how people experience and deal with trauma (Visser, 2015). Within the context of this research, Boko Haram survivors' have used varieties of resilient coping mechanisms to navigate through their traumatic experiences. These mechanisms which draws on Christian principles are socio-culturally embedded. Illustrative of these are the notions of grace and sacrifice:

Grace (Itzhak, 2022, p. 35): This is understood as God's undeserved kindness and favour for humans. It frequently plays a significant part in the healing process because survivors may find strength and comfort in the idea that God's grace might enable them to get through their difficulties and achieve recovery.

Notions of Sacrifice/Suffering (Itzhak, 2022, p. 35): As a reflection of the idea of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for humanity's redemption, Christianity believes that suffering may have salvific characteristics. Using this as a springboard, survivors may discover significance in their own suffering and recovery process.

### **Methodology**

The study followed ethnographic paradigm and was conducted among the displaced persons at the International Christian Centre: Christian and missionary organization in Ughohua, Edo-state, within the framework of a doctoral research. Qualitative data were collated through in-depth interviews with selected survivors and key informants who were the coordinators of the Christian Centre in Edo-state. The choice of the International Centre in Edo-state zooms in on the paucity of research regarding the experiences of trauma perpetuated by Boko Haram within the context of a faith-based organization (Iweze, 2022). Also, in-depth-interviews with the survivors followed unstructured and semi structured

approach. This approach ties together the miniature of flexibility with individual circumstances, thereby facilitating the emergence of themes or theories (Ní Raghallaigh, 2011). Personal contacts, participant observation, and interviews with survivors and Centre administration were all used in the data collecting process. With permission from the Centre's coordinators, sixteen Boko Haram victims—eight young women (ages 18 to 22) and eight children (four boys and four girls) under the age of 14—participated.

Pseudonyms were employed to anonymize names, and the Centre's administration was also interviewed, except from the coordinator of the centre, who asked that his true name be used throughout the interviews. When required, pidgin English was interpolated during interviews. The interview material was transcribed utilizing coding in qualitative analysis, emphasizing participant voices by concentrating on lengthy paragraphs and informal discussion (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ní Raghallaigh, 2011), a view also emphasized by similar research focussing on vulnerable population (Chase, 2010; Miller et al., 2008). This method, especially when seen through a Christian perspective, revealed a variety of narratives, including ones that detailed psychological trauma and coping techniques.

### **The Indomie Kitchen: Where God's Grace Meets Social Dynamics**

You see those children, cooking and having a taste of their own food? They couldn't do it in Borno, but now they can, it is all the grace of God (Folorunsho)

Pastor Folorunsho interprets the operationalization of God's grace through the appropriation of the Indomie's kitchen spaces. Elaborating on this, the children gathered as one, in narrating personal or mundane stories in front of the kitchen, such as imagining better futures for themselves, while some were simultaneously chattering endlessly and stirring the Indomie in conspicuous little pots and others looked on simultaneously daydreaming and waiting patiently for the Indomie's cooking process to be complete and shared. The actions of preparing

and eating food together amidst storytelling and poking of fun can offer security, empowerment, and a sense of community, according to Abbots (2012; 2016), who has investigated how food shapes migrant subjectivity in the Ecuadorian Andes and elsewhere. Also, their experiences are consistent with Meah and Jackson's (2016, p. 514) and Ehn and Löfgren's (2010) observations that kitchens are intensely personal spaces where encounters with food and other objects play an important part in reducing worries, tensions, and anxieties while keeping daily life moving as well as constituting strong force in social life. Also, through the space of the Indomie Kitchen, the children were able to replicate another mini home in the Centre in the ways they enacted freely their culinary regimes and styles albeit informally. It was this sort of recreation and the children's appropriation of their spaces that Pastor Folorunsho interpreted as the working of God's grace.

The Indomie kitchen showcases interactions and communal solidarity, evident in gatherings where survivors share stories, envision future aspirations, and provide mutual support. Within this setting, attributes associated with God's grace, such as generosity, compassion, and love, become apparent within social dynamics. Through our research on the Indomie kitchen, we illustrate how God's grace translates into practical implications for fostering social cohesion.

### **The Indomie Kitchen: Sharingsufferings/sacrifices, Embracing Mentorship.**

You know, the Bible already talks about persecution and all that in one way or the other we suffer and make sacrifices for what we believe in. Like me, I went through persecution when I gave my life to Christ. And all that happened, and I share it with them. Yes, thank God, I survived it, and it didn't lead to death, but many did not survive it and they died in the process. So, we share all these experiences of sacrifice and

sufferings of others too making everybody know that whatever it is, however, there is a terminating point to their suffering if they make the needed sacrifices. God's grace will always manifest in their sacrifices (Folorunsho)

I could not sleep at night. I feel like I cannot breathe at night. I saw my dad (killed by Boko Haram) in my dreams...The man of God (referring to Pastor Folorunsho) taught us to see our experience (of Boko Haram) as sharing in the sufferings of Christ and his apostles. So, when we cook together, we shared with one another our suffering and the sacrifice we made to follow Christ (Sarah).

Beginning from Pastor Folorunsho account of suffering in the bible as well as his own persecution and survival and transitioning to Sarah's account of trauma, including the mentorship of Pastor Folorunsho, and her resolve to embrace suffering, these stories reveal the dimension of resilience and the pathways to recovery, as delineated in our research findings. In essence, Pastor Folorunsho deploys his own experiences of persecution and subsequent commitment to Christ as a central motif and a model for children who have gone through similar circumstances of suffering to explain the dimensions of wellness and their cascading effect on the path to recovery. In foregrounding his survival and recovery, the Pastor mirrored and spoke of his suffering or persecution through the grammars of sacrifice, as the price he paid in exchange of giving his life to Christ as a born-again Christian. The idea of sacrificing or surrendering one's suffering to God is not specific to Pastor Folorunsho or the survivors, such as Sarah, who survived the onslaught of Boko Haram.

Accordingly, Csordas (1994) observed that

charismatic Catholics in the United States of America frequently surrender their difficulties to God as a way of relieving themselves of their burden or commending their challenges into God's hands. In the same vein, Bialecki (2008) catalogued parallel practices among American Evangelicals in which unacceptable habits, relationships, work, or positions one failed to attain are handed over to God as sacrifice. Thus, the concept of sacrifice, remains a useful category orienting the lives of several Christians across the globe (Mayblin & Course, 2014). Specifically, in the instances of Pastor Folorunsho and the children at the Indomie Kitchen, the offering of one's suffering, or more precisely traumatic experiences echo the idea of becoming born-again Christian as well as been an 'alter Christus'-another Christ, whereby one aspires to imitate Christ ultimate sacrifice on the Cross: the giving up of his life for the redemption of humanity. As some of the survivors rehearsed the ideas of been persecuted by Boko Haram to me—an explanation influenced or derived from Pastor Folorunsho's biblical teachings, their sufferings became analogous to Christ sacrifice on the cross, thereby making traumatic experiences attired and exchanged for God's grace (Bandak, 2017). In this sense, our research findings demonstrate that survivors' sufferings or traumas mirrored through acts of sacrifice became understandable, acceptable, and so healing originates according to anthropologist Itzhak in “an act of grace or gifting on the part of God” (2022, p. 35).

### **The Noodles Kitchen: Rethinking Trauma, Resilience and Survival**





Indomie Kitchen showing some girls and boys preparing Indomie meal (Photo Queen B).

Through in-depth-interviews, observation, and informal discussions with survivors, our research elucidates how the process of preparing, cooking, and subsequently sharing Indomie noodles facilitates the reassessment of trauma, resilience, and survival, underscoring their socio-cultural embedment.

The emergence of the Noodles Kitchen can be contextualized within a specific historical epoch. In essence, the Noodles Kitchen embodies the ethos of what is colloquially termed the *Indomie generation*. This generation, born approximately from 1995 onwards, coincided with the rise of Indomie instant noodles as a prominent cultural icon in Nigeria. Moreover, this era paralleled advancements in technology. The Indomie generation is characterized by a penchant for convenience and instant gratification. The presence of survivors, especially young women and children, congregating at the Noodles Kitchen epitomizes this generation's affinity for swift and effortless solutions. Thus, the preparation of Indomie noodles symbolizes a lifestyle ethos that resonates deeply with the values of the Indomie generation, highlighting its transformative value.

And so, through the collaborative activities of preparing, cooking and sharing the indomie meal, they exercise certain forms of agency or informed decisions, seek moments of normality and construct a sense of community of shared experience and ideals. In terms of 'political' activity, these forms of agency might not be revolutionary in nature, proactive, or purposeful (Cabot, 2013). According to Saba Mahmood (2005), agency should be understood as "a capacity for action that specific relations to subordination create and enable," rather than just as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination (Mahmood, 2005, p. 18). Instead of focusing on subversion, Mahmood proposes that we examine "the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited" (2005, p. 23). Similarly, when the survivors, appropriate the kitchen's spaces and inhabits its norms of cooking and sharing meals together, they become agentive in taking control of

their lives despite their former experiences of trauma. Following the work of anthropologist Verdasco (2022, p. 207) among unaccompanied refugees in a Danish asylum system, this work demonstrate that children are agentive and demonstrate a propensity to create social relationships and look for the familiar in uncertain and perilous settings as they cook and eat together their indomie meals. It is in their engagement in communal dining experience including everyday activities around food, that the prosaic of reliance and recovery unsettles the experiences of trauma.

### Discussion of Research Findings

"God's grace will always manifest in their sacrifices" ---Pastor Folorunsho

The findings of this research emanate from a qualitative methodology that delves into the lived experiences of survivors, examining both their traumatic encounters and their coping strategies. At the core of this exploration is the intersection of trauma and resilience, viewed through the lens of Christian principles, which highlight the socio-cultural integration of God's grace and the concept of self-sacrifice or endurance within the context of the indomie kitchen (Itzhak, 2022). In other words, sacrifice and the grace of God are identified as foundational elements that shape resilience, agency, and the process of recovery when navigating through trauma.

Throughout the course of our research, the excerpts of the survivors show how the gaining of resilience and subsequent recovery from trauma are operated through acts of sacrifices or sufferings rooted in God's grace, as indicated by Pastor Folorunsho. This understanding is consistent with the research of Pitt-Rivers (2017 [1992]) who showed how grace operates through the concept of gratuity's derivatives, not just in the religious sense but rather with its ability to create social bonds. Itzhak (2022, p. 43) draws on the work of Pitt-Rivers, in conceptualizing grace, as 'gratuitous giving': 'Grace is a 'free' gift, a favour, a demonstration of respect and the yearning to please, a byproduct of the arbitrary will, human or divine, an unaccountable

love. This claim is supported by Pitt-Rivers' (2017 [1992]) observation in everyday contacts where no exchange other than gratitude is expected, grace appears linguistically. Highlighting on this linguistic repertoire, Itzhak (2022, p. 43) shows that this is evident in some European languages, such as Spanish, Italian, where 'thanks' evokes the religious terms of grace (*gracias* and *grazie* respectively). Alternative revealing fact in this regard is also the usual statements of thanks in some European languages—for instance, “the Spanish *de nada*, the French *de rien*, the English 'don't mention it' or 'it was a pleasure'”—are denials of any favours that have been provided (ibid). However, this is more of an affirmation of the gratuitous motive underlying the gifting act, insisting that nothing is sought in exchange, than a denial of the favour itself.

Therefore, in calling attention to an exchange not anchored on reciprocity, but rather on mutuality, enjoyment and appreciation, Pitt-Rivers (2017 [1992]) argues that gratuity is at the heart of human sociality. Also, it is gratuity rather than reciprocal relationship, that defines the gifting or sacrificial acts. In doing so, he upholds the idea of freedom or agency subpoenaed by grace. Thus, he argues that gratuity is at the core of grace's operation, and as a result, the performatory responsibilities of grace are found in regular instances of free giving, even if he does not equate the two concepts (gratuity and gifting) as same. He agrees with anthropologist Mauss (1990 [1950]; Hubert & Mauss 1964 [1898]) that both gift and sacrifice must be articulated within their reciprocal valences yet does not discard gratuity as a sociological illusion in tandem with Mauss. By this, he makes less the constraints imposed by gift-giving practices. Nonetheless, he emphasizes the paradoxical character of making sacrifices and gifting, which are acts that are grounded in both reciprocity and gratuity at the same time. The theoretical insights of Pitt-Rivers (2017 [1992]), therefore, sheds light on how the survivors merited God's favour kept them alive and brought them together at the Noodles kitchen to cook and share *indomie*. It was God's free gift to them. At the same time, it shows how this grace of God are gained through a

reciprocal act of resilience that are rooted in sufferings or sacrifice of the self. This sort of paradoxical positioning of grace and sacrifice can help us understand the process of recovery more generally, in situations of trauma and loss and perhaps beyond. More so, the exemplars of the survivors at the *Indomie Kitchen*, such as therapeutic connection or relationships offers scaffold in staging resilience and recovery through the prism of grace and sacrifice.

Next, the research underscores the gradual manifestation of survivors' recovery within safe spaces, notably the *Indomie Kitchen*, alongside the significant roles played by the Pastor and his assistants in fostering therapeutic relationships. The concept of safe spaces, also recognized as protective factors by Masten and Obradović (2008) and Masten and Narayan (2012), has been documented concerning children affected by armed violence. Within these safe spaces, relationships are emphasized, and the reciprocal acts of giving and sacrificing between survivors and God are socially mediated, contributing to the recovery process. This process incorporates elements of scriptural rhetoric, charisma, and lived experiences of persecution, exemplified by Pastor Folorunsho. Recovery pathways for survivors align with the notion of sacrificing the self, a concept vitalized through Pastor Folorunsho's leadership. Similarly, the sacrifices made by children symbolize the exchange of pain, suffering, or trauma for God's grace, as elucidated by Itzhak (2022). Central to the recovery process is the disposition to receive God's grace, which encompasses favour and love. Indeed, the act of receiving this divine gift becomes reciprocal, involving the exchange of suffering or sacrifice for grace, as illustrated by Pastor Folorunsho's interpretation within the context of the *Indomie Kitchen*.

In this way, the children's example brings our attention to the more general theme of receiving, specifically what it means to be the chosen recipient of a gift. By doing so, it further draws attention to the significance of examining grace generally for recovery and transformation processes (Itzhak, 2022). It accomplishes this by spotlighting the ability of receiving the (God's) gift in and of itself to

transform someone, but it also – and perhaps more importantly – reminds us of the ability of graceful acts to affect people. It is these sorts of graceful potentials which have shaped the recovery of several survivors that has informed and structure the management of the Centre to favour a sociocultural understanding of trauma rather than a PTSD model. In essence, by combining locally distinctive spiritual and religious beliefs, the Centre's management produced a relevant framework that has occasioned the recovery trajectories of several survivors.

### Conclusion

This study conveys the signification of trauma through the mingling of religious practices, underlining the conjunction of God's grace with sacrifice or suffering in mapping the contours of resilience. In assessing these practices of resilience, our findings show how a socio-cultural and religious dynamics manifested in the preparation, cooking and eating of indomie at the Indomie Kitchen orients towards survival or what the pastor terms as the workings of grace anchored on sacrifices. In emphasizing this linkage, our results show its paradoxical mooring wherein God's gift are freely bestowed on several survivors interviewed, thereby unfolding as conduits of God's undeserved kindness and favour for humans, through which the quandaries of everyday life are confronted and signified (Itzhak, 2022). In doing so, the empowered or resilient self-broadens the horizons of recovery wherein Christian currents are interwoven in the rhythms of everyday life at the Centre, into knots of recovery and survival. These mechanisms serve as valuable resources for psychologists, social workers, and religious ministers, providing insights into the challenges encountered by internally displaced persons (IDPs) during displacement.

Author's notes. This paper is a portion of a broader PhD study at the International Christian Centre in Nigeria that examines the lived experiences of Boko Haram survivors. The author attests that he made the choice to submit the work for publication and that he has full access to all the study's materials. The writer claims to have no conflicting

agendas.

### End notes.

The author is indebted to the works of: Chidozie, Mandolessi, & Devlieger (2024). Echoes of Resilience: Retelling the Memories of Trauma Among Survivors of Boko Haram's Violence at the International Christian Centre, Edo-State (Nigeria). *African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issue*, 1(27), 112-129

All the subsequent names in this paper are pseudo names to maintain anonymities. However, the coordinator of the Centre, Pastor Folorunsho requested that his real name can be used in this research.

The Indomie (a kind of instant noodles) kitchen was created for the males and females (children) outside of the general kitchen. The reason for the creation of the Indomie kitchen was to make the survivors happy.



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