# Social Resilience

## Critical Responses to Challenges and Change

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# Foreword

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Resilience saturates contemporary discourse. From NATO to self-help literature, from climate adaptation strategies to mental health interventions, the imperative to be resilient shapes how we are governed and how we govern ourselves. For scholars of social science, this saturation presents a problem: how to engage with it without becoming part of the problem? How to write and speak about it without reproducing its myths? How to achieve a critical distance from the concept while at the same time being attuned to the conditions which have engendered its rise?

This volume approaches these kinds of questions not by claiming to resolve resilience's conceptual and discursive difficulties. Such a feat would, in any case, probably be impossible at this point in time. What this volume does do is to offer its reader something more modest and yet useful: a mapping of resilience discourse's current terrain across multiple disciplinary sites and empirical contexts.

The editors have assembled perspectives from law, anthropology, sociology, and social work, examining resilience as it appears in diverse settings: among migrants navigating hostile legal regimes, farmers adapting to ecological change, LGBTQ+ workers confronting workplace discrimination, entrepreneurs weathering economic crisis. This breadth is instructive. It demonstrates resilience's conceptual diversity and its capacity to travel across contexts. Reading it, we learn that resilience means different things to different subjects, and serves varied and often contradictory purposes.

What strikes me about this collection is less its theoretical coherence than its ethnographic attentiveness. The strongest contributions show us resilience as it is actually lived and practiced rather than as it is abstractly theorized. We see people doing resilience: buying dollars and hiding them "under the mattress" in Argentina, cultivating support networks in Swedish church cafés, navigating the gap between official immigration law and its arbitrary implementation in Russia. This is useful scholarship. It refuses the abstraction that allows resilience discourse to float free of the material conditions and power relations that make it necessary in the first place.

That the volume does not achieve tight theoretical integration between its various chapters may itself be telling. Resilience resists coherence because it operates across incommensurable scales and serves contradictory political projects. It names both individual psychological endurance and collective social transformation, both adaptation to existing conditions and transformation of those conditions. A volume that perfectly synthesized these tensions might be more conceptually satisfying but less honest about resilience's actual functioning.

The editors acknowledge in their introduction the neoliberal undertones of resilience discourse. Scholars of resilience are very familiar with the ways it can be said to individualize responsibility for systemic failures, celebrate adaptation to conditions that should not be tolerated, and transform vulnerability from a political problem into a personal deficit. This critical awareness runs through several chapters, though unevenly. Some contributors remain more firmly within resilience discourse than others, treating it primarily as a capacity to be built or a resource to be mobilized rather than as a discourse of governance to be interrogated.

This unevenness, too, is instructive. Even scholars committed to critical analysis struggle to think beyond resilience's terms. The concept has become so deeply embedded in how we understand and respond to crisis that alternatives remain difficult to articulate, for scholars, as much as for everybody else subject to its influence. What would it mean to reject resilience entirely? What other frameworks might we deploy for thinking about human endurance, adaptation, and transformation without reproducing resilience's problematic assumptions? These are questions which will not go away easily, precisely because they are difficult to answer well.

For students and researchers entering this contested terrain, the volume provides a useful introduction to resilience's multiple deployments and the debates surrounding them. It will be particularly useful for those seeking empirical grounding for resilience's operations across different social contexts and for anyone wishing to understand how the concept travels between academic discourse, policy implementation, and everyday life.

The question that haunts this volume, as it haunts all resilience scholarship, remains unresolved: Why should people be resilient rather than replace the regimes that demand resilience from them in the first place? Until we can sustain that question without immediately translating it back into the language of resilience-building, we remain trapped within the very discourse we seek to critique.

This volume contributes to an ongoing conversation without claiming to settle it. That modest ambition may be all we can reasonably expect at this stage

of resilience scholarship's evolution, or devolution, depending on our perspective.

# Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the term 'resilience' has gained status as a buzzword in myriad realms, from policy making to the academia. A term capable of mutating according to the different discursive realms where it is employed (Brown, 2013; DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016), resilience has become commonplace in global development rhetoric; an integral part of diverse United Nations initiatives; a political tool in different national contexts, and a multi-faceted research subject across a plethora of academic fields (Harris et al., 2017). The popularity of the concept is hardly surprising. We currently live in an era marked by multiple risks and entangled crises that range from the increasing climate disaster risks coupled with global warming to wars and pandemics. It is therefore logical that both the need for and the use of a concept that speaks of human perseverance and adaptability have become so widespread. As resilience has seeped into everyday vocabularies from the vernacular to development and political jargon, it has birthed numerous sub-categories with different modifiers. Pointing to specific (research) aspects and potentialities within the generality of resilience, subjects such as urban resilience, climate and environmental resilience, or entrepreneurial resilience now populate scholarly arenas of investigation. A field that is both a stand-alone and a possible connector between resilience in general and the different subcategories is *social* resilience.

Social resilience is often treated as a social group's capacity to withstand and overcome hardship and adapt to new circumstances (Adger 2000; Folke 2006; cf. Moya & Goenechea, 2022). Rooted in the socio-ecological approach dating back to the 1970s, social resilience has traditionally focused on collectivities' ability to 'bounce back' and their capacity to transform. It foregrounds the significance of our social lives and relations in terms of how we collectively respond to changing –usually adverse– conditions. But researchers have increasingly begun to show that its composition and implications are more complex than that (Harris et al., 2017; Meerow & Newell, 2016). This complexity becomes particularly salient as we hone in on contexts marked by, for example, systemic inequalities, geographical and cultural variation, and both rapid and long-term change occurring over time. Focusing e.g., on inter-personal and inter-community relations, collective imaginaries, or how we operate in different social systems reveals the processual and fundamentally relational nature of social resilience (Preston et al. 2022). The concept thus emerges as both an analytical tool and a subject of research in itself that may help us better

understand why we act the way we do in the face of different perturbations or the possibility thereof.

This volume unpacks and analyzes social resilience from different disciplinary perspectives within social sciences, reflecting the multi-faceted nature of the concept itself. When we started to plan this volume, we had spent nearly two years working as postdoctoral fellows in the Social Resilience Research Initiative, in Lund University's Faculty of Social Sciences. Our role in the initiative was not only to analyze and develop our understanding of the concept; we also took as our task to innovate with its interdisciplinary characteristics. Coming from psychology, social work, and cultural anthropology, we brought to the table our field-specific contributions while at the same time drawing from adjacent disciplines such as gender studies, sustainability studies, sociology, and so on. As we navigated research on social resilience conducted across different fields, we also grew clearer about how we understand the concept. We recognize the importance of defining (social) resilience as an individual's/collective's capacity to recover from and adapt to adverse and rapidly changing circumstances, in line with the socio-ecological approach. But we also aim to go beyond this and analyze social resilience as an emergent concept that is processual, relational, and action-oriented (Beilin & Wilkinson, 2015; Harris et al., 2017). This means moving aside from its usual capacity-oriented applicability in academic research and focusing instead on how social resilience is *done* and practiced in changing sociocultural contexts and environments; how it manifests in different dynamic systems, and how those manifestations change over time.

In the planning phase of the volume, we decided to invite contributions that disciplinary- and subject-wise would differ from one another while at the same time their approach to the central concept would follow a similar orbit. This was to serve a double purpose: On one hand, given the range of subjects and research fields the chapters represent, the book would stand as a resource for scholars interested in particular disciplinary areas and topics. On the other hand, in offering a kaleidoscopic perspective to (social) resilience in its width and breadth, the book would turn into a compact source for students, showing the concept's multifacetedness and its migratory capacity. Thus, in aiming at disciplinary and topical diversity, our purpose was to compose an edited volume whose contents could cater to diverse interests and also offer a window to the empirical and theoretical flexibility marking resilience-related research. To equal measure, our intention was to reveal unity and similarities in terms of methodological approaches that undergird that flexibility. Consequently, this volume now reflects the explorations of diversity, flexibility, and perspective- and context-dependence that interdisciplinary reconciliation of the concept of resilience led us on.

## Critical Assessment

As the terms resilience and social resilience have gained traction in myriad discourses and institutional and public realms, they have also attracted much critique. Our aim in this volume is not to question the concepts' usefulness but rather explore their analytical potential from various directions. Nevertheless, we take into account the critique that resilience has garnered in tandem with its proliferation. For one, it is hard not to see the intrinsic link between contemporary neoliberal culture and the idea of resilience as a fundamental element of individual success, whether that success be measured in terms of, say, economic or cultural capital, or social stature (Chandler & Reid, 2016; Evans & Reid, 2013; Joseph, 2013). Resilience within the neoliberal discourse, as David Chandler posits, is a "key concept…denoting a positive internal attribute of being able to positively adapt to change" (2016, p. 14). In neoliberal terms, then, resilience emerges as a normative concept; an ideal human trait that is measurable in terms of one's/collective's adaptive capacity (Chandler & Reid, 2016, p. 15). This enforces social hierarchies through a (not always appropriate) comparative lens, leading to questions that often rest at the core of social scientific research on (social) resilience: *why* are some people/communities more resilient than others; what makes one person/community more effective than another in building resilience? Problematically, this can lead to excuses to continue oppressive behaviors, policies, laws, etc., since if a person or group can handle a particular perturbation, disruption, or pressure, then their causes may escape scrutiny. In contrast, when someone is not able to withstand perturbations, an easy way out is simply to blame them for not being resilient enough (Joseph, 2103; cf. Leitner et al., 2018).

At a more radical level, one might ask – is 'neoliberal resilience' in general, but a trait that sustains the idea of the survival of the fittest? On the flip side of this formulation, one finds the concept of vulnerability, which, as David Chandler and Julian Reid have pointed out (2016), has dovetailed the expansive trajectory of resilience research. They argue that resilience as the quintessential neoliberal trait is firmly anchored in the human condition of vulnerability (2016, p. 7). The neoliberal culture, often seeped into state policies, produces vulnerability while at the same time celebrating resilience as a capacity that enables one to overcome that very vulnerability. In this configuration, however, the individual/community can never become 'the fittest'. For the condition of vulnerability is in perpetual production –the neoliberal culture feeds from and into it– and hence the quest towards being/becoming resilient can never be fully achieved. As researchers, we must recognize this complex relationship between neoliberal culture, politics of power, resilience, and vulnerability. By limiting our research to descriptions and explanations to one isolated part of a

(socio-environmental) system, we may lose scientific rigor and, furthermore, exacerbate the "resilience as a way to overcome vulnerability" rhetoric.

But recognizing the neoliberal undertones in much of the resilience rhetoric, whether in academic or, say, policy-making domains, still does not signify that we should altogether do away with the concept. Rather, recognizing that critique enables us to better define the angle of our own research approaches and hence investigate its exploratory and analytical potential. Indeed, although we do not overtly challenge the neoliberal nuances that may easily mark the concept, our action-oriented approach tacitly critiques the notion of resilience as a normative concept.

## From Resilience to Social Resilience

To make sense of how social resilience has come to gain foothold in social sciences, it is necessary to examine its historical trajectory and its roots in resilience research. While the first entries of the term 'resilience' in English language can be traced back to the late seventeenth century (Gössling-Reisemann et al., 2018), its more systematic use began in physics and materials science in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During its infancy in physics and engineering, resilience was understood to be the "measure of material's ability to withstand impact" as a consequence of a sudden shock within the limits of its elasticity (Merriman, 1885, p.200). This formulation still reigns in engineering where resilience today is defined as "the ability of a material to absorb and release energy, within the elastic range" (Gere and Goodman, 2009, p.146). In the 1950s and 1960s, resilience started to attract attention in the field of psychology. Researchers and clinical practitioners within the discipline were growing increasingly interested in the human ability to withstand and recover from traumatic experiences. Resilience began to emerge as a measure of sorts to examine why certain individuals could overcome and thrive after experiencing (especially childhood) trauma while others could not (Denckla et al., 2020). By the 1960s, then, researchers in different disciplines could deem resilience not only a *material* but also a *human* property denoting flexibility, elasticity, and the ability to return to a state of normalcy after disruption and shock.

In the 1970s, resilience was co-opted by environmental and ecological researchers. Crawford Holling famously deemed it a measure of an ecological system's capacity to absorb impacts of various scales and still continue to exist (Holling, 1973). Soon enough, scholars started to accept that 'to continue to exist' was only a partial way to describe the outcome of a system's shock absorption; what also needed to be understood and assessed was how the system itself had changed during and as a consequence of that absorption. This

had an enormous impact on future sustainability studies especially concerning the environment, climate, and energy (Gössling-Reisemann et al., 2018).

Since the 1990s onwards, research on resilience as both a concept and an analytical tool has spread into a wide variety of directions. These directions range from the applied sector and political domains to crisis and disaster management, anthropological and sociological research, and environmental and urban sustainability studies, to name but a few. In this process, it has been vested with various modifiers that point to the concept's particular uses. For example, climate resilience, economic resilience, and institutional resilience, among others, have grown to mark the (highly porous and fluctuating) boundaries that supposedly separate one approach and research area from another. In this evolutionary process, social resilience has gained salience particularly during the shift from ecological frameworks to social contexts to address social dynamics and resilience strategies. Seen as a socioecological concept, the early operationalization of social resilience was focused on how communities withstand crises. Later that understanding was extended to integrate survival and growth during crises of different qualities and scales, such as natural disasters, and economic and political crises (Moya and Goenechea, 2022). Thus, though the ecological roots of resilience date back to the 1970s emphasizing the ability of ecosystems to maintain their functionality through changes, the critical understanding of resilience as *social resilience* extending its scope to larger social systems is a relatively recent development (Kirmayer et al., 2009).

Today's research on social resilience still heavily rests on Adger's socioecological definition of it as "the ability of communities to absorb external changes and stresses while maintaining the sustainability of their livelihoods" (2002, p. 358). Fashioning it that way, social resilience is the outcome of certain collective social resources and practices that when mobilized and/or accrued, help the community to weather crises of various scales. While the socioecological approach does not suggest that social resilience is necessarily a static *trait*, it nevertheless falls short of taking into account the dynamics of changing temporalities; that is, how social resilience is emergent and generative, and relative to the changing time and space in which it manifests itself. But the socioecological approach has also been critiqued for not accounting for the role of social institutions and structural inequalities in affecting how people deal with disruptions and respond to external threats (Joseph, 2013; Preston et al., 2022). How resilience manifests and what it means comparatively across different socioeconomic classes, for example, is a topic that has yet to be explored further. As mentioned above, the lack of more exhaustive investigation into the role that systemic inequalities play in social

resilience paves the way for it to be harnessed by institutional and political forces with a neoliberal socioeconomic agenda.

Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013) have provided a more complex understanding of social resilience, though one that is still anchored in the socioecological model. They propose that social resilience be understood as the sum of three different capacities: 1) Coping capacities – the ability to cope and overcome; 2) adaptive capacities – the ability to learn from experiences and adjust for future challenges; and 3) transformative capacities – the ability to craft institutions for individual welfare and sustainable societal robustness towards future crises. They relate these capacities to agency. Following this, social resilience has been re-conceptualized as reactive (coping), proactive (building competence), and reflective agency (responsive exercise) to deal with challenging situations (Peth & Sakdapolrak, 2020; Estêvo et al., 2017). This agency-specific conceptualization of social resilience thus refers to the agentic response in a given context in the form of coping, adaptation, and transformation (Dagdeviren and Donoghue, 2019).

However, while the notion of agency in defining social resilience can help to nuance the dichotomy between resilient and non-resilient individuals or groups, it still does not embrace the question of power relations as a fundamental factor that shapes agency, whether it be reactive, proactive, or reflective. Foregrounding agency can guide our understanding of social resilience as a multidimensional, process-oriented construct where resilience is practiced within its social context comprised of several environmental factors. Yet thinking about social resilience through the lens of agency that offers people transformative powers bears its risks. For it may lead us to deem social resilience a *responsibility* of a community, thereby feeding (again) into hierarchical organization of social groups on the basis of their ability to withstand adversity.

One way to challenge the normativity of social resilience together with its capacity-oriented approach is by conceptualizing it as constantly unfolding action taking place within complex social systems. Conceiving of social resilience as action does not necessarily sideline the importance of people's agentic response but rather foregrounds the dynamic social systems and changing temporalities in which that action happens. To use the concept of resilience as action helps us capture the totality of the 'social' and agency. It allows us to see social resilience as constantly reproduced social practices, marked by uncertainty and non-linear changes. In essence, it bears the hallmarks of a complex system, where one considers the influences of changing spatio-temporality due to it being embedded in political and economic processes as well as cultural and social environments.

### Social Resilience as a Dynamic and Relational Concept

In real life, responses arise from the complex interactions between environment, context, and person (and/or community). Hence, it is problematic to conceptualize resilience as a pre-defined ability that can define the adaptability of a response to corresponding challenges. This is particularly so since the causes of that response may often not follow simple, mechanical, and linear chains of effects. Once an event is ongoing, there are always context-specific aspects that alter the effectivity of any actions we perform to counteract detrimental effects; actions that, additionally, are also shaped by individuals' and groups' experiences. These human-environment interactions, experiences, and practices provide observation points about the events and direction changes that give rise to adaptations and transformations. During the process (of surviving, coping, overcoming), the interdependent connections between a dynamic social world and humans' transitory experiences cannot be interpreted following linear pathways (Hareven, 2018; Hutchison, 2010). In this perspective, social resilience explicitly accounts for non-linear processes, which probably are their most visible in abrupt crises.

Consideration of extending the scope of defining social resilience as a phenomenon contributing to the critical response to crises requires methodological rigor that can unearth the experiential and contextual meaning of social resilience. Following a bottom-up approach, qualitative methods can investigate the dynamism with which constructs like social resilience unfold over time. Preferably, this would not only involve careful consideration of what it is in a process that best portrays the state (or states) of the phenomenon but also motivate to measure as naturalistic situations as possible. The flexibility in understanding social resilience in practice and interdisciplinarily also informs about the critical components of social resilience, including different forms of social capital, such as social, psychological, and human rights-based capital; institutional and economic capabilities; knowledge-sharing practices, and inclusivity and equity (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). It is therefore important to showcase how this can be accomplished from a range of different disciplines and approaches to the subject matter.

Defining something as processual ought to have an effect on how we approach the events, people, communities, and phenomena that we wish to empirically explore. Together with positioning the subject matter as relational, a processual account also changes the level of analysis that we conduct our research on. Research that does not live up to these processual and relational premises can be called "component dominant" (Ihlen & Vereijken, 2010) and treats individuals as isolatable. From this latter perspective, it is appropriate to develop methods and measures that include questions targeting the individual.

Qualitative research has understood that when we ask such questions, people do not always answer in an isolated sense. They can answer in relational ways, in shared ways, and in ways that seem contradicting over time, and cannot be reduced to one dimension of the individual (Bowleg, 2008). This is not common in quantitative approaches because the type of data generated is much more restricted by the kinds of questions asked. There is no room to answer relationally when one is forced to respond with a number or frequency, which is why it can be difficult to assess, for example, how often one does something. It signifies something behaviorally different to go to many parties as the designated driver compared to just as a passenger. As Bowleg (2008) argues, the measure itself must be relational, and to accomplish that, the question needs to be relational. The answers are different if one asks isolationist questions and *infer* the relationship as opposed to asking the relational questions and measuring it directly. In this edited volume, the chapters come from different disciplines to avoid a hardline relational approach to methods. Instead, they show the natural variety of relationality that arises from our different disciplines' methodologies.

Putting relationality alongside a dynamic (or processual) account of a phenomenon usually shows that there are a wide variety of idiosyncratic patterns in how people deal with their realities. Emergence is a term that well captures the pattern that arises during the unfolding of an event, albeit quite difficult to predict beforehand. As many of the chapters explicitly or implicitly show, there is a patterned muddle that comes about during the dealing with, the going through, and the ongoing actions that people and communities produce to try to coordinate with all the changes occurring around them. As mentioned earlier, context and person are not isolatable but interdependent and are therefore appropriate to characterize as co-adapting or coordinating. However, this means that it is sometimes not possible to measure the person as an isolated component, as this would likely not explain the actions or behaviors in the first place. For what happens in the continuous cycle of coordination is a compromise, expressed in the relation and not the component. That is to say, the relation becomes the interface at which coordination happens and is the reason why actions are so important to orient around. The dynamic relation represents the ongoing coordination between human and environment, and does so in a richer way than just measuring one or the other in isolation: a relation points two ways or more (in the manner Gibson, 1979, discusses action possibilities).

Couching social resilience as a processual and temporally extended phenomena can thus become a deliberate attempt at breaking down the structure that a neoliberal version enforces. Temporal isolation allows for the erasure of history and the reproduction of harm based on effortless ignorance

(i.e. willful or not). Then, spatial isolation allows for the effortless demonisation and abnormalisation of individuals/communities, dividing people from people by squaring away a problem or sensitivity as a trait inside an individual or a community. Both of these work in favor of a 'survival of the fittest' style of social competition, where those already in power have the tools on their side to maintain it. We believe a processual and relational approach to not just social resilience, but life writ large, instead builds towards cooperation. It builds towards a process capable of identifying any part of a system as the cause of harm, as well as suggesting how to correct it.

## Methodological approaches

Understanding what resilience means in different contexts and how it manifests itself are pivotal questions that frame this volume. But as we tackle those questions, we also ask: how can resilience be studied; that is, what kinds of methodologies and data collection methods undergird different disciplinary and topical research? While some authors in this volume rely on an array of qualitative research methods, it is important to acknowledge the role and significance the quantitative research has played –and continues to play– across a gamut of disciplines.

In the field of psychology, which has historically dominated research on individual resilience, resilience measurement scales and data collection methods are common. Take, for instance, the Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (CD-RISC), which is among the most used in psychology. Consisting of 25 items, each item rated from 0 to 4, it has been used to assess resilience among patients suffering from PTSD, anxiety disorders, and primary care outpatients, to mention but a few (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), in turn, focuses on resilience as one's capacity to 'bounce back' from a condition of stress, thereby taking a more traditionalist approach to what resilience is understood to mean to begin with (Smith et al. 2008).

Ecological and environmental sciences, too, employ diverse scales to assess resilience (e.g., of an organism or an ecosystem). To name one, cross-scale resilience measurement serves to scrutinize the impacts that different kinds of disturbances may have on biodiversity or specific animal species. To place these disturbance impacts on hierarchical scales while considering the complexity of the system/organism – their different functional traits – helps to better understand the organism's adaptive capacities in different spatiotemporal conditions (Angeler et al., 2018). Yet it is not only the abovementioned disciplinary fields that use scales and measurement tools to evaluate resilience. Other fields, such as business and management studies (Sharma & Sharma, 2016), urban studies (Dianat et al. 2022; Yamagata & Maruyama, 2016), not to mention different engineering fields (Yodo & Wang,

2016) habitually lean on measurement tools that provide quantifiable results to explain the study unit's resilient capacity.

One of the criticisms against quantitative approaches is that linear and reductive theory, methods, and analyses cannot capture relational and processual phenomena (Hill et al., 2024), and correctly, something that can drive qualitative research on the same topics. However, as is argued in Nordbeck's chapter, this is amendable in quantitative research by reconceptualizing one's subject matter through theory, methods, and analyses that assumes it to be relational (e.g. through Ecological Psychology; Gibson, 1979) and dynamic (e.g. Dynamic Systems Theory as applied in psychology; Kelso, 1995). We hope to showcase this through Nordbeck's and Lundberg et al.'s chapters where the former attempts to base a definition of resilience in a way amenable to both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and the latter showcases how qualitative approaches need to support linear measures to get at relationality and dynamicism.

Quantitative approaches to assessing resilience doubtlessly afford important research data ranging from risk prevention models to diverse subfields of psychology (Ge et al. 2024**).** When mobilized through a dynamic and relational lens, as Nordbeck and Lundberg et al. demonstrate, they can also become intertwined with qualitative research processes. When quantitative methodologies are used in linear and reductive ways however, they can only offer us limited understanding of how different sociocultural idiosyncrasies shape, inform, and even determine the contingencies of different human behaviors and practices. To amend this, it becomes important to rely on qualitative research approaches that can offer such understanding.

From an epistemological perspective, instrumentalizing qualitative methodologies implies concentrating on the social significance and *meaning* of resilience. Using data collection techniques such as participant-observation, interviews, document analysis, or even extended, qualitative surveys afford us the possibility to produce knowledge that transcends the merely descriptive; it certainly pushes us to go beyond approaches that deem resilience a static trait or an a priori quality that is measurable and thereby has comparative value. In fact, such qualitative methods enable us to go as far as to scrutinize the very existence of what we conceptualize as resilience. This, in turn, makes it possible to observe what people do, how they act, what kinds of strategies they come up with, and what kinds of improvised tactics they employ to navigate sudden crises or chronic everyday challenges alike.

The variety of qualitative research methods that the authors in this volume use is telling of the range of directions and perspectives that one can embrace in the wide field of resilience studies. At the same time, the similarities between qualitative methods and relational-processual ones –as discussed and

theorized in Nordbeck's chapter–, serves as one of the threads that bind the contents of this volume together. That thread also shows how epistemologically, the different chapters making up this volume challenge the normativity of the concept of resilience. Mobilizing methodological approaches that allow us to shift the focus from normativity to situated practices is a key to deconstructing measurement parameters that establish resilience hierarchies.

## Chapter Outlines

This volume shows how different disciplines can contribute to a holistic discussion on resilience in its manifold manifestations. Collectively, the chapters reflect the scope that characterizes the myriad research approaches to the concept while also evidencing its scientific potential that stems from rigorous empirical and methodological groundings.

Coming from the disciplines of psychology, social anthropology, sociology of law, social work, and legal studies, the authors discuss diverse issues ranging from resilience in relation to migration and sexual minority stress to economic and environmental crises, the resilience of law, and resilience in the context of dynamic systems theory. Besides this disciplinary and topical diversity, the authors also embrace different ways of conceptualizing social resilience in their research. While, for instance, Aldini & Urinboyev and Whitaker & Giorgi take the more capacity-oriented path focusing the transformative potential of social resilience, Kauko and Qamar emphasize the processual and practice-oriented qualities of social resilience. Further, Dienelt interrogates the boundary between resilience and social resilience purely in relation to a legal system and its applicability in practice, while Nordbeck explores if a boundary of such kind is warranted at all.

The volume opens with these theoretically and methodologically oriented inquiries, exemplifying the prism through which radically different disciplinary perspectives reflect equally self-standing analytical frameworks. The first two chapters by Nordbeck and Dienelt, respectively, examine social resilience through its relationship with and functions within different socioenvironmental systems. In her chapter, Dienelt focuses on resilience in relation to the German legal system, law, and the state. She distinguishes between two different perspectives of inquiry within legal studies of resilience. First, the internal one, which concerns resilience of the law itself, and second, the external one, which explores the law as a 'resilience tool' of the state. Her discussion, which centers on the latter, foregrounds the significance of a legal theory of resilience that will help us understand how the state, the society or the *rule* of law can employ the law as an instrument to buttress the structures of the mentioned sociolegal systems. As such, her chapter also points to how, when discussed in the context of the institutions of power, the concept of resilience as opposed to *social*

resilience may be sufficient to point to important social consequences of how those power institutions operate.

Nordbeck discusses (social) resilience in relation to systems theory as a complementary perspective to Dienelt's. Rather than isolating different systems, whether these be social, legal, political, or environmental, he argues that for a meaningful exploration of resilience as a relational concept, it is important that we conceive of the system as a whole and not as isolated parts. Two levels of the same system could therefore be empirically investigated jointly, as opposed to individually. Also, building on examples from feminist theorizing in the context of harm reduction (Kaba, 2021; maree brown, 2017), Nordbeck illustrates what it might look like when one considers a "psychological" system to not only include the individual but the environmental and institutional structures and their histories. In this perspective, (social) resilience becomes an observable pattern not reducible to the individual or community but to their actions in a continuously unfolding context.

Studies on social resilience in relation to immigration are a research field currently in expansion, reflecting the political tendencies, debates, and societal discussions across geocultural borders. Chapters three, four, and five aim to contribute to the growth of this field through focusing on Uzbek immigrants' dealings with immigration laws in Russia, the contentious question of immigrant assimilation in the context of Sweden, and post-migration experiences among individuals from South- and East-Asian backgrounds in the United States.

With a focus on the capacity-oriented nature of social resilience, Aldini and Urinboyev's article examines how Central-Asian immigrants employ informal tactics and techniques to navigate the Russian legal system and specifically, its immigration laws. By telling the stories of two Uzbek immigrants, they inquire into the blurry boundaries between the official immigration law, the implementation of that law in practice, and how from different spaces of informality, documented an undocumented immigrants must find ways to pilot around it. In so doing, the authors nod towards Dienelt's chapter concerning the flexibility and resilience (or the lack thereof) of a given legal framework and the actual working of the laws it includes.

Qamar conceptualizes social resilience as a kind of agentic response (to hardship); a process that connects perception (of risk), social experience, and context (e.g. migration). He sets out to explore the significance of a church café in southern Sweden as a facilitator in the often-confusing processes of settling in a new country. He shows how the relationships built between recently arrived immigrants and volunteers in the café cultivate resilient approaches to navigating local bureaucracy. While this may not result in immigrant 'success

stories', the café nonetheless offers a nexus for information exchange, support, and empathy, which the author interprets as bases for social resilience.

Continuing with the theme of immigration, Shi and Josyula discuss immigrants' experiences of stress, agency, and resilience in post-immigration context in the United States. Besides addressing the colonial legacies in (Global South) immigration and minority studies and the victimization approach this often implies, they foreground the role of desires and wisdom in giving shape to social resilience. The two authors take an auto-ethnographic approach to exploring these experiences, thereby adding an important qualitative component to psychological research on the subject.

The study of social resilience in relation to LGBTQ+ people is still very much in its infancy. The chapter by Lundberg et al. offers an important contribution to this nascent area of research. The authors focus on the Swedish Anti-Discrimination Act (2008) and experiences of minority stress at workplaces in Sweden. They specifically explore the transformative potential of social resilience and how the Anti-Discrimination Act enables (or not) workplaces to foster legally determined equal opportunities. In that sense, Lundberg et al. share some analytical groundings with Dienelt regarding (social) resilience in relation to a sociolegal system and law and places these in a concrete social context. From a constructivist perspective, social resilience reveals itself as an instrument employed by both managers and workers to aim for the law to serve its purpose.

One of the perhaps most common contexts for social resilience research are crises. Natural disasters, armed conflicts, and economic downturns among many others offer settings that are particularly well-suited for the study of human (resilient) behavior in the face of outstanding adversity. Whitaker and Giorgi's chapter provides a view into the different practices people resort to in order to cope with hardship in the contexts of climate crises. Focusing on small holder farmers and beekeepers in the Italian Alps, Whitaker and Giorgi explore social resilience as a sum total of ecological, social, economic and political, and individual pathways. These pathways that help build social resilience, they argue, contribute to Alpine farmers' changing farming strategies and ways to earn a living. In facing growing social and environmental pressures on and disruptions to 'traditional' farming practices, the farmers must constantly renegotiate their relationship to their surrounding natural environment. In this process, social resilience is showcased most clearly as a continuous adaptation through reorganization of material and social resources and strategies for survival.

In her chapter, Kauko explores social resilience in the context of an economic crisis in Argentina. Conceiving of social resilience as constantly evolving, context-specific actions, she discusses different practices and strategies that

people device to cope with historically recurring, severe economic constraints. Parallel to this, she also focuses on how people *imagine* these practices to be like and what they mean, thereby shedding light to the mutual constitution of social imaginaries and collectively shared resilience practices that feed into local understandings of 'Argentine resilience'. Her work also offers an understanding of resilience as *doing* rather than as *being*, thereby closing the chapter contents with inquiries that bring us back to the origins of this volume: an analysis of (social) resilience as a process-oriented, relational, and generative concept with situated meanings and manifestations.

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Chapter 1

# (Social) Resilience as an Emergent Property

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**Abstract**

Emergence is a concept tied to particular ontological and epistemological assumptions. Here, (social) resilience is presented from a process-relational ontology and what the consequences of such a definition entail for quantitative research processes. On one side, understanding (social) resilience as a process creates demands on methodology to measure the concept as it is dynamically unfolding, and on the other, a relational definition invites study of environment and context as co-constitutive together with the individual or group of people. Importantly, taken altogether, resilience becomes an *emergent phenomenon*, a property of an ongoing process that is neither written into its components nor their additive sum. Resilience is thus observable on the basis of when and which sources are drawn upon while there is some pressure acting to constrain (and potentially end) a specified functional relation (or relations). This means that while (social) resilience can have a discipline-spanning definition, it is up to the researcher in their field, for their chosen system and particular phenomenon, to argue for how resilience can be detected. When it comes to the behavior of individuals, my suggestion is to analyze the action possibilities within a particular situation for particular individuals. Relevant action possibilities become indicators of how an individual and their environment relate. In turn, this can uncover if any of the possibilities are useful to maintain function while under particular pressures, or if wider re-organization of sources is required so as to enable other possibilities. This is exemplified through various subject areas like animal behavior, sports psychology, and feminist theorizing. Lastly, under this definition, resilience becomes a non-normative concept, as the same process can describe systems whose functions are to the detriment of, as well as those contributing to, for example human survival. This is an advantage, since it allows the focus of a research project to

be on discovering which sources may aid in the maintenance of a process, or, which additional pressures that could cause the process to cease.

**Keywords**: emergence; dynamic systems theory, ecological psychology, systems, processual, relational.

* * *

In common language, emergence refers to "the act of becoming known or coming into view" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), which does not do the technical term justice. Technically, within Dynamic Systems Theory 'emergence' is taken to mean that there are properties of an ongoing process that arise from the interactions between a system's components (Kelso, 1995; Vallacher & Nowak, 1997; *system* refers to the collection of components, and relations between them, that are relevant to explaining whichever phenomenon one is investigating[1]). Emergent properties are more than just the sum of their parts, which means that as applied to behavioral patterns of organisms, communities, and societies alike, the explanation of their emergence does not reside in the structure of their component(s) but rather the relations between them: to "talk about the patterns, we step back from things themselves and concentrate on the *relations* among things" (Kelso, 1995, p.3). It is tempting to think that this only applies to humans, but emergence is taken to be universal. For example, ants release pheromones when they find a food source that then guide other ants to the same place (Deneubourg et al., 1990). Curiously, when given a choice of pathways to a food source, ants tend to find the shortest route (von Thienen et al., 2014), which can be conceived of as an *emergent property* of an ant-environment-context system. This is not due to central organization with a fore-ant measuring path-distances and guiding its fellow ants. Instead, they simply begin walking down each pathway to the food, release pheromones, then other ants pick up the scent and start walking down them too. Over time, more trips will be taken through the shorter route, which means that the pheromone concentration will increase faster for that pathway, and so more ants switch to the shorter route, until all do. Ants are not programmed to

[1] System is notoriously difficult to define (Richardson, et al., 2014) but usually includes the components and their relations relevant to explain a particular phenomenon. Here, regardless of what is literally mentioned in the text, a system always includes not only the organism (or human), but the environment they are in, the many relations between them along with the constraints that affect both the number of relations as well as how particular behaviors in the given situation that can be carried out. All of which contribute to produce the emergent phenomenon of a particular behavioral pattern when describing an organism's activity, or a society when describing communities of organisms' activity.

find the shortest route, it emerges from the interaction between the simple rule to 'follow the strongest pheromone gradient' and 'release pheromones when food is found', then add many repetitions (or simply, time) for the 'shortest route'-property to emerge. While it may seem odd to begin with an example of ant behavior, I have deliberately tried to vary the examples throughout this chapter to show the universality of the principles behind the emergence of patterns (be they behavioral at the individual level or communal at the societal level). Importantly, as the example above shows, the particular pattern of behavior that emerges relies on repetitions over time (i.e. dynamics). Each repetition is guided by the relations within the system and gives rise to properties that cannot be explained or predicted through prior knowledge of components alone. This chapter describes an account of (social) resilience from these principles, that is, as an emergent property of various processes and their consequences. In the final section of the chapter, I identify how (social) resilience can be observed in the context of justice and harm.

Emergent properties are particular because of the necessary shift in fundamental assumptions about one's subject matter. First, while the components of a system are not discardable or unworthy of attention, it is the functional relation that is key to understanding a particular pattern. Second, the pattern must be maintained (repeated) over the period of time (and/or space) of the event. That is, an emergent property (e.g. a particular behavioral pattern) is predicated on both a processual and relational conception of the phenomenon of interest. Also, whatever the phenomenon we observe, there will always be influences that serve to close down or open up the range of behavioral possibilities in which we can act in the given situation, context, or task (Gibson, 1979; Chemero, 2009). These can, for example, be the layout of the environment (Davids et al., 2016), contextual aspects like timing (Nordbeck et al., 2019), group or team dynamics (Silva et al., 2016), societal norms (Pearse & Connell, 2016), cultural traditions (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007), the particular organisms or animals involved (Barrett, 2016), and so on. Collectively, they can be referred to as constraints, which act to limit or guide the ways in which a functional relation can be acted upon in a given situation. Laboratory experiments are themselves a clear example of where a lot of planning goes into establishing strict constraints so that a participant only responds in a prescribed way. Societies are similar, where asymmetrical power allocation, for example, restricts social and career mobility for people at the intersection of multiple marginalized dimensions (Combs, 2003; Rapa et al., 2018; Terman, 2020). Constraints aren't purely deterministic however, since even if a constraint takes the form of a rule or law these still do not restrict everyone from acting against (or despite) the rule. Although constraints can inform how behavioral patterns arise and help understand what kind of underlying relations, between which kinds of components, make up and

maintain the entire system. Figuring out how a particular system is maintained (or can be disrupted) by identifying which specific combinations of relations work to maintain it can thus guide practical implementations to strengthen or weaken those systems.

### Relational Ontology and 'Bouncing Back'

Papers on (social) resilience usually begin by noting the many differences in definition, but that a commonly shared idea is to 'bounce back' from some stressor (Bryan et al., 2019; den Hartigh & Hill, 2022; Hill et al., 2018; Pincus et al., 2018; Vella & Pai, 2019). That is, some performance metric is threatened or thrown off by a perturbation (i.e. a pressure or stressor) and when performance remains at a desired level or returns to previous values then the performer is considered resilient. For example, a football player may have stopped scoring goals, and if changes can be made to re-establish this then the player is said to *be* resilient.

Closely related (but able to be distinguished from resilience; den Hartigh & Hill, 2022) are the terms resistance (e.g. Luthar et al., 2000; and Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014) and growth (Richardson, 2002; also named anti-fragility, see e.g. Silva, 2017; or Kiefer et al., 2018). Resistance refers to rejecting an imposition, or a refusal to coordinate with (or accept) how one is being related to. At societal level, this can take the form of public protests; at the individual level it can simply involve continuing a behavior that is at odds with, for example, social normativity; and at the bodily level, it can be exemplified by the tensing of a muscle when carrying an object against the force of gravity. In all these examples, resistance can be seen as a form of tensioning or freezing a part of the system. For example, a group of workers going on strike has the (intended) effect of freezing production until demands are met. Similarly, at the bodily level we (and particularly novices) freeze the movement of a joint in one or multiple dimensions to try and control a movement (called freezing 'degrees of freedom'; Araújo et al., 2009; Bernstein, 1967). Resistance and resilience are related in that resistance is a response to a perturbation that can work to outlive the perturbation. However, resilience is not its opposite; resisting and outliving a perturbation, in fact shows resilience because it can maintain function. Both affect the probability of maintenance of a particular function (like performance in sports contexts).

Growth (or anti-fragility) means to go beyond "just" returning to some previous performance level and instead additionally improve in some way after a perturbation (Kiefer, 2017; Silva, 2017). This can for example take the form of becoming physically stronger than one was before an injury. Growth is thus similar to resilience in that there is some performance level that is the goal to return to, although with the addition of some extra factor (or indeed surpassing

prior performance). However, underlying all these descriptions of reactions to perturbations is the assumption that there is a desired continuum from prior to future states. Despite that (particularly in sports psychology) *the way in which* performance is maintained or increased changes. Taking the example of an injury caused by a particular way a movement is carried out, resilience would rather be shown if the player *changes to a new movement* instead of returning to the previous one which played a part in the injury to begin with. Or taking mental health as an example: if one's life contained trauma or mental health issues throughout childhood and adolescence, then there may not be a state to return to. If there is no prior state worth returning to, then resilience needs to be conceptualized differently than 'bouncing back'. It also does not help to focus on the return of an outcome level, since the processes it relies on may have changed, and additionally, changed to a way of maintaining performance that is only successful in the short term. Essentially, the debate needs to go beyond the dichotomy of previous and future states by recognizing the multiple, parallel ways of accomplishing things. Resilience research has often focused on a normative performance, way of life, behavior, well-being, etc., can be maintained, instead of focusing on the multitude of ways of accomplishing the same thing (Nordbeck et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2019). When multiple diverse alternatives are present, a given system has the possibility to re-organize to a different solution: *coordinate its resources in alternate configurations*. This places the importance on *how we maintain a functional relation* and shifts focus from prior and future states (and bouncing back) to the process of coordination with circumstances under which a system (an organism in an environment and situation) is going through.

An astute reader will have noticed that "social" has so far been put in parentheses. Under a decontextualized and detached perspective of resilience, one can reduce and isolate factors to the structure of a component and then 'add in' sociality. This conception is based on a modular, mechanical, and additive view of function, where you just need to describe the internal, isolated module to have provided a full explanation of a phenomenon. Context in this perspective is simply an input to the system, if acknowledged at all, as are any other "outside" components and relations (the weak form of relational ontology; Slife, 2004). This component-dominated, additive perspective is not compatible with emergence. Emergent phenomena cannot be reduced to their components, isolated away and measured, and then additively put back together to explain, for example, the experiences of oppression of multiply marginalized people (i.e. intersectionality[2]; Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989;

[2] Beyond the scope here, intersectionality and emergence have similarities and differences that require more comprehensive explication, however, see maree brown

1991; Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016; Lorde, 1984). Emergent properties are not isolatable *things* but are observable when the specific functional relations for the particular task at hand are unfolding over time. That is, because relationality within a given organism-environment system is fundamental to the existence of emergent properties, then the resilience displayed by systems that include humans and/or other organisms are never social, or they always are.

### Processual Ontology and Resilience Dynamics

Being ontologically processual means that a phenomenon must be observed over time to follow its movement through different states. For example, while one can prepare for a difficult conversation, the way that conversation goes cannot be fully pre-determined. The reason for this is simple enough: you could prepare what you want to say, how to say it, and pre-empt some of the other person's responses. However, because of the many interacting parts, at least some of those are always outside of one's influence. One cannot force the other person to react in certain ways, and even so, not the way that they express themselves. This can mean that the way that you wanted to say something becomes inappropriate and so you would need to alternate to another way during the unfolding of the conversation. Also, one always contends with situational or contextual factors, like how the environment or space that the conversation takes place changes while one inhabits them, who else occupies that space, and so on. Perhaps one person begins whispering to not let others hear, creating unanticipated frustration since the listener must put more effort into hearing, impacting communication, and so on having follow-up consequences throughout the event.

Theoretically conceiving of resilience as a process that changes over time is not novel (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Hill et al., 2018; Stroink, 2020) although there are different approaches to what 'process' means. As Hill et al. (2018) discusses, it is not taken to mean the linearly causal chain of individual components, but instead the continuous unfolding of the interaction between components. A common way of empirically conceiving of the linearly causal chain is by setting up before, during, and after perturbation measures of components and comparing their averages (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015). While this can show general trends and group-level probabilities, it does not capture the temporal change by which individuals move between these states or why they arise in the first place. Averages hide inter- and intra-personal differences, which are crucial to

(2017) for connections to emergence and Paxton et al. (2019) to Ecological Psychology. Also see Nash (2008) for historical dependencies of intersectionality, and Smiet (2020) for traces and uses back to Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech "Ain't I a woman?".

understanding individuals' behaviors (van Orden et al., 2003). For example, it is easy to imagine how little information the average note of a song gives a listener compared to detailing the sequence of notes across time -nonetheless picking out a relevant constraint like which instrument the sequence is played on[3]. Or take a movement physiology example: posture (and controlling one's posture) is essential to being able to remain upright and can be measured two-dimensionally as the center of pressure one produces underneath oneself on the ground (Krishnamoorthy et al., 2003). Given a small push, it is likely that the person adjusts their weight by resisting to be pushed too far so as to fall over. Even just closing your eyes while standing upright can be detected in the pattern of variability of a person's center of pressure over time (Riley et al., 1999). To understand such phenomena, one cannot simply measure and average a performance variable, one must characterize how the body moves - quantify its pattern of variability (Bernstein, 1967). Measuring a phenomenon over time allows for this, resulting in quantitative time-series that can be characterized to reveal functional and qualitative changes in the pattern.

**Putting Process and Relation Together for a Definition of Resilience**

The term coordination captures well the process of a pattern of behavior that is disrupted and as a result re-organizes by shifting reliance to other sources to be maintained. Coordination is an observable marker of a resilient system and requires a variety of ways of producing the same functional relation (Kiefer et al., 2018). For example, the probability of (literal) survival of a community is increased if it relies on several sources for food (i.e. wider crop diversity; Massawe et al., 2016). Variation itself is important and can give insights into the functioning of a system, a principle that for example has altered coaching pedagogy. Deliberate practice has long been seen as a golden standard of coaching, involving principles like finding one normative solution (e.g. an exact movement sequence to throw a ball) and then endlessly practicing the specific movement with feedback until (ostensibly) all variation in the movement is removed (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2008). Instead, Nonlinear Pedagogy (Chow et al., 2015) focuses on *re-organization*, where variation and diversity of movement is central. Having access to a diverse range of movements for the same end goal (e.g. throwing toward a target; Wilson et al., 2016) allows for flexibility. If the movement is disturbed in some way, then the player can rely on flexibly varying their movement to still throw accurately. This means that a re-organization must happen to keep coordinating with the circumstances and maintain performance. So, while a performance level may be returned to, the

[3] I am grateful to Dr. Brian Eiler for this example.

focus is still moved to *how* it is maintained and not that the "same" state is returned to.

Any given state is constantly in flux and varies, which means only approximate stability can be had (Kelso, 2019). This casts further doubt on if there ever is a previous state to return to, even if a performance level could be returned to. Returning to a previous way of solving a task when having gone through a re-organization to deal with a perturbation means that a second re-organization must happen. The latter then includes experience of both the first "initial state" and the second way of solving it. We must then understand how this happens, as re-organization becomes central to both understanding why something was maintained and what to prepare for in the future. Diversity of (re)sources to draw from once a perturbation sets in is therefore important in psychology as it is in other fields of research. The consequence of these principles is that inherent variation implies that there is no exact previous state to go back to, no 'bouncing back', and so it must be left out of the definition. A working definition of resilience as an emergent property could thus be *the maintenance of function through relational re-organization.*

### Consequences of a Process-Relational Definition

The first part of the definition pertaining to 'maintenance of function' has two particular influences on understanding resilience from this ontological perspective. First, maintenance is meant to implicate time as fundamental; that if the term 'dynamic' is applied, it goes beyond the measurement of particular states (e.g. start and end states, or their difference). It does not simply mean to measure more states but to measure as densely as is required to understand the process by which the phenomena emerges from. Second, the focus on the functional relations within a system is an attempt to establish a broad enough conception of content matter to apply interdisciplinarily. In psychology and anthropology, it may be important to observe how individuals coordinate with their circumstances. In sociology, it may be important to observe how a society, or interconnected societies, coordinate. The second part of the definition stating 'relational re-organization' centralizes on the one hand, coordination as a determinant of how perturbations disrupt the functioning of a system, and on the other, that it is the relations between components that drive the emergence of resilience. This does not exclude describing or measuring components, but to understand emergence, interactions and relations cannot be abducted but need explicit definition and measurement.

### Historical Dependence

The relational aspect of a dynamic system also bears on the history of relations that the system has gone through to end up where it continuously is. The

history of relations within a system can deepen its reliance on certain behavioral patterns rather than others. History does not act as a guarantee for particular behavioral patterns to emerge again in the future, but they can increase the probability of certain ones over others. Taking a societal constraint as an example, gender norms in Western, contemporary, societies allow the use of trousers by women, but the use of skirts by men remain rarely observed. This particular constraint restricts how men can relate to clothing by restricting use of skirts, and if the constraint is resisted then it is noticed by other members of society and affects how they relate to the resister. Importantly, to explain the constraint and its emergent consequences requires delving into the function of textiles contextualized by historically changing gender norms (Auslander, 2015). Going into historical details may not always be the most relevant for descriptions of all functional relations, but are useful to identify when one wants to reveal prior coordinative patterns of the system. The timescale needed varies depending on the phenomenon of interest: a relatively short timescale of seconds or minutes may be enough for a particular body movement, and a relatively longer one is needed to understand how race relations in contemporary United States culture links back to justifications of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and genocide (Hudson, 2004; Kelsey, 1965). Knowing the history of the system also allows for an analysis of whether there is a former state one considers worth trying to reinstate. Colonialism is a non-reversible theft of human value, autonomy, and self-determined futures, leaving the past with no states that the colonized would want to return to. However, in the case of colonization, even without a clearly desirable past state, there can still be many varied, desired future states of being (some of which are referred to as Afrofuturism 2.0; Barber, 2015; Eshun, 2003; maree brown, 2017). For the case of a process-relational resilience, since current states of the system are affected by past states, this implies that history has weight, carries momentum into current and future states, and therefore are important to be accounted for. Importantly, non-reversible processes imply the inability to return to a prior state and fruitful discussion can be had about what reversibility is and what processes are considered such.

**Irreducibility**

A relational and dynamic conceptualization works to disallow reduction (and consequently isolation) to components. As a consequence, internalized and static conceptions of resilience are not available (i.e. as a trait, ability, or capacity). Context is not just another isolatable, external, factor to be added in later, but constitutively interacts to produce the pattern to begin with. This allows for 'higher' scale phenomena to be appropriately characterized at that level, and while components or 'lower' scales are not irrelevant or uninteresting, it implies that reducing a higher scale phenomenon to those

levels is not necessary for fully explaining it. The experience of a person is thus not necessarily better explained by deconstructing it into parts, to be analyzed separately, and then added back together. Rather, the phenomenon of interest to the researcher can be investigated at the level it is found, which also implies scale independence for what one considers a higher or lower level in a particular analysis (Kelso, 1995). This is to say that a higher order structure at one level of analysis could act as a component at another level of analysis. For example, communication between two individuals could be investigated by taking the individuals as components and observing the conversational rhythm (i.e. emergent relation) between them. However, to understand sound production, the component level could be taken to be body parts and the sound that an individual produces becomes the higher scale. Researchers also do not need to be confined to one level but could measure multiple ones at the same time (e.g. Nordbeck et al., 2019). In any case, the level of measurement is relative to the phenomenon and choice of investigatory method and analysis.

Reduction to components and additivity are rejected here and joining them is the rejection of causal reductionism (Reed, 1996). Reducing the complexity of experience and other emergent phenomena to mechanical cause-effect chains is a simplification that takes away from their explanation and understanding. Causality in a complex, dynamic system is usually not straightforward, as Thelen and Smith (2007) classically states it: small influences may have disproportionately large effects (and vice versa) due to non-linear relations within the system. Non-linearity does not mean one cannot test for influences of a factor, even linear ones, but one should be careful to a priori limit the analysis to one particular model (Richardson et al., 2014). Just knowing that a more complex causal relationship may exist, non-linear or not, could open up the possibility to identify them as such. The practical consequence of this is that when something is named resilient from this perspective, it does not imply guaranteed success (or, maintenance of a functional relation). Even if an individual is provided with all the available resources to withstand a potential perturbation, there is no guarantee that the individual will pick the ones that will work in relation to the particular perturbation. What can be done however, is to increase the probability of coordination with the circumstances one is under. If rain is predicted, it is not a bad idea to bring an umbrella, but if rain is accompanied by thunder, one would likely do better not to use it after all. Bringing both rain clothes and an umbrella provides more options and thus a higher chance of being able to coordinate with the conditions. However, there may be particular constraints that restrict these choices, like if the destination is a concert where umbrellas are not allowed. Besides, in the effort to stay dry, what is to say a car does not happen to drive by next to you straight through a puddle. It is thus specific to any given phenomenon what an alternative solution or (re-)source is, but with

the implication that to increase the probability of maintaining a function, then practical application relies on increasing and diversifying resources.

**Non-normativity**

One of the larger benefits of a process-relational definition is that any process can be analyzed for its resilience, which disallows identifying something as resilient to simultaneously stand as a normative claim that it is good. A process-relational definition separates the concept from the consequences of its process. For example, resilience has been used to support growth models in Economy (Andersson et al., 2021). A claim can be that, since a nation can increase its exploitation of natural resources and labor and thus increase their GDP and be more competitive in the global market, then this increases a country's (economic) resilience and is a normatively "good" proposal. However, this claim could not be made under a process-relation definition since the isolated research object is not enough to base the claim on. Either a normative judgment is not made, or a separate argument must be made referring to the history and context of the system. To do so, discussing what and how something is preserved is necessary, particularly in light of the consequences up and down in scale from the chosen level of analysis. Increasing the rate of growth in a country from the Global South as a solution to economic resilience would then need explicit explanations of how, for example, the history of slave trade and colonization played a part in draining resources from African and South American countries (Bruhn & Gallego, 2012; Nunn, 2008). Relational conceptualizations thus demand that if a normative claim is to be made, they need to come from an analysis of the broader context, history, and content of the project-specific case. Thus, one could, for example, not make the claim that more intense exploitation of nature or a workforce is normatively good because economic growth justifies it.

The perspective taken here may make it seem like 'coordination' is a normative claim in and of itself, that it is inherently "good" to coordinate. However, this bears with it the assumption that the underlying process is always worth maintaining. No such assumptions are made here; rather, the theoretical starting point of the concept is explicitly non-normative, meaning that if one wants to say that a process is resilient and normative, then one cannot simply name it resilient (or coordinated). These arguments can be traced back to the assumptions of ontology that one uses, the first of which in the perspective taken here is relationality. Resilience is always *for someone* and *for some time* and/or *place*. Taking a literal relationship as an example, if you are surviving an abusive relationship, a common way of perspectivizing one's role in it is to see oneself as 'strong' and 'being able to withstand the abuse', like a badge of honor (Hill, 2020). This maintains one's self image, allowing

coordination with the relationship, tempting one to define it as resilient, particularly since studies on violence against women show that women become expert strategists to survive abuse (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Di Basilio et al., 2022). The flipside is that it potentially maintains an abusive relationship, which in the long term would not be considered resilient. The reality of phenomena like this can seem contradictory when they actually are just complex, and to not do them a disservice in explanation a perspective that combines relationality and processuality (or dynamicism) is needed. Considering time as a real and important factor of the process means that different behaviors at different times can show resilience, not show resilience, both, and neither. This is not contradictory but rather correctly describes the phenomenon of interest as emergent, as something that is revealed (or comes about) during the process. In the case of violence against women, what a temporal perspective gives, is the insight that choosing to stay in the relationship for a little longer allows for survival *at all*. That is, the continuous choices that women who are abused make are not whether to leave or stay, but to stay and survive (Meyer, 2012). Whether it will result in surviving for long enough to reveal the small space-time opportunity of both leaving and surviving is not something that can be known beforehand.

## Identifying Resilience

At the most general level, there are two requirements for resilience to be identified in a given process. First, as explorers of phenomena we must choose a function of interest to understand, whether that be for its continued maintenance or destruction. For example, a clinical psychologist might see mental well-being as a functional relation worth maintaining and a human rights scholar might use human dignity. This broad conception can include quite disparate phenomena, e.g. the maintenance of an economic system, the survival of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices, sustaining quality of life for migrants, or performance in sports. Second, there must be a threat to the possibility of repeating the actions necessary to maintain the function. Characterizing the re-organization that is required to maintain the function lays bare the process of coordination with the particular circumstances of the task, context, and/or situation. Often, studies are set up to look at explicit threats, like climate change in crisis studies (Turner et al., 2022). However, there need not be an explicit, concrete influence to count as a threat. Because of the fundamentally dynamic ontology, just the passage of time is enough to perturb the functioning of a system. Time ensures that doing nothing is also meaningful, doing nothing is never nothing.

To understand which ways a system can remain coordinated (and alter the probability of maintaining function) in the face of perturbations, it becomes

important to identify which alternative sources or solutions can support the function. Constraints acting on a system can affect the way a system coordinates and draws from different sources or shifts between different solutions. In essence, they alter the way in which a system *relates* to different sources and solutions. Indeed, a perturbation is a kind of constraint that is directly related to the maintenance of a function of interest. Exploring which constraints are in effect and how they alter the possibility of drawing from one or more (re-)sources is central to understanding how and why re-organizations are made.

### Example: Justice in Harm Reduction Processes as an Emergent Property of a Resilient Society

The understanding of an individual as inherently (or unchangeably) harmful is counter to a relational-dynamical ontology. As adrienne maree brown puts it in Emergent Strategy (2017), most of us, whether we like to admit it or not, are capable of both being harmed and causing harm to others. A punitive system of justice uses different ways of punishing a harm doer, centering on the individual as a component to be restricted in some way. This could, for example, take economic form, having to pay damages, or physical restriction, such as being put in prison and isolated from one's community. In either case, the assumption behind a punitive system is that to prevent further harm (or harm in the first place), the state must sanction some form of harm themselves. This is to say that the proposed solution of more harm is not orthogonal to the problem of caused harm, it is an extension of it. In domestic relationships, if the root cause is how the abuser relates to power in the context of intimacy, e.g. as a means to restrict and control another person, then sending them to prison and isolating them from others does not change how they relate to power when they are in possession of (or expecting) it. Punitive systems of justice do not display resilience because they become part of creating a culture of harm and therefore instead compound the problem by strengthening the phenomenon it is trying to curb.

Mariame Kaba (2021) initially saw restorative justice as a way to pick up on the root causes of harm and to alter the fundamental relations that interacted to produce harm in the first place. Here, the needs of the harmed person are centered in order to begin the healing process, and harm reduction takes the form of restoring consequences of harmful actions. It is an interpersonal process that aims to alter how both parties relate to and are affected by harm. However, even though a restorative justice perspective centers on the relationship between harm doer and harmed, it fails to insulate it against other punitive influences (Kaba, 2021). This is due to that it relies on a weaker form of relational ontology: the focus is, rightly, on the interpersonal harm-relation,

but it is treated in isolation from other relevant relations within the system. In essence, it only deals with one relation within the system. In this case, the relations include and surpass harm doer and harmed and includes connected structural systems in the US (justice system, prison system, etc.). Since restorative justice isolates harm to only one relational dimension, it runs the risk of being misused and co-opted by punitive perspectives (Lorde, 1984). It also risks being harmful by disregarding the wider context in which harm is created by placing responsibilities and burdens on both the harm doer and the harmed that actually reside elsewhere. As adrienne maree brown (2017) exemplifies, if someone stole a purse because they could not pay rent, returning the purse with an apology does not alter the root cause of lack of money for housing in the first place. Restorative justice therefore does not fulfil the criteria for a process-relational resilient harm reduction process.

For a harm reduction process to be resilient, not only must the interpersonal relationship be considered, but also the relations between individuals and higher order systems that constrain them. That is, the changes needing to happen are not only at the scale of interpersonal relations, but also between scales (i.e. between individuals and societal structures). Restorative justice therefore evolved into transformative justice, where the relational foundation was more comprehensively considered (Kaba, 2021). For example, directed withdrawal of resources and opportunities, societal and cultural norms and practices from punitive ideals, and so on, constrain the possibilities for action for a targeted individual and within interpersonal relations. With a harm reduction process that explores and follows the connections at whichever scale it connects to, allows for identifying influences from the wider system, and a pathway to understanding what re-organization must happen to affect change. With this understanding we can avoid artificially high responsibility placed on harmed and harm doer. We also gain a higher probability of allowing the harmed healing from re-organizing the way they relate to the harm that was done; allowing the harm doer to take accountability for the harm they caused; tracing harm to societal-structural resources to enable scrutinization; as well as both finding alternative resources to draw on and (in the meantime) re-organize the current ones. The latter serving not only the isolated instance but prescribing to not engage in harm doing in the first place and also discourage re-engaging. Including the wider system of relations, particularly ones tied to societal, structural, and systemic influences, can thus in the next step guide work on how the current system can be re-organized, or how new systems can be created, that inherently discourage harm. Transformative justice therefore displays a resilient harm reduction process because it can drive re-organization in any part of the system to reduce and discourage harm (and implied, without using harm to do so).

## Conclusion

A process-relational definition of resilience means that one comprehensively considers the multiple scales of relation and their dynamics (past, present, and future) as a continuum that has a bearing on the phenomenon of interest. Under this perspective, simply the maintenance of something (calling something resilient) does not have normative implications. Rather, it becomes the burden of the researcher to explicate history, context, and cost of maintenance that a particular functional relationship has. Also, a process-definition disallows the use of resilience as an a priori component that is somehow meant to guarantee maintained functional performance. A strong relational stance disallows its use to isolate a part of the system to make a generalized claim. A process-relational definition of resilience bears on what the system is *doing*, and when repeated over time, what the extended consequences are throughout the system. While the definition restricts resilience from being a component itself, the focus changes to instead learning how to increase the probability of coordinating with new circumstances and maintaining a particular function (and thereby displaying resilience). To do so, the space of possible ways to re-organize between must be made as wide as possible, increasing both the amount and diversity of resources to draw on.

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Chapter 2

# Bouncing Back, Bouncing Forward, or Bouncing Back Better? Reflections on a Legal Theory of Resilience

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**Abstract**

This chapter looks at how law can deal in a clear and structured way with the idea of resilience, which has become very important but is used in many different and sometimes confusing ways. It asks a central question: how can we develop a legal theory of resilience that uses ideas from other disciplines, and at the same time helps law strengthen the resilience of the State, society, and the rule of law?

To answer this question, the chapter first shows how the concept of resilience developed in other fields such as materials science, psychology, ecology, and the social sciences. It explains how the focus shifted from "bouncing back" after a shock (stability and robustness) to "bouncing forward" (adaptation and transformation), and from mainly describing resilience to treating it as something we should actively aim for. It then gives an overview of the current debate on resilience in German legal scholarship and shows that most work so far looks only at how resilient laws or legal systems themselves are (an internal perspective). The chapter argues that this internal view is not enough. It should be combined with an external perspective that sees law as a "resilience tool" or "resilience mechanism" that helps make the State, societies, and the rule of law more resilient. Building on this, the chapter suggests a first draft of a legal theory of resilience with five steps: (1) identify what is supposed to be resilient (for example the State, society, the rule of law, or an institution), (2) describe the external or internal stressors that put this object under pressure, (3) decide which resilience dimension is at stake (stability, flexibility/adaptability, transformation/anticipation), (4) identify the relevant legal "resilience toolbox" (the legal instruments and mechanisms available), and (5) analyse the legal processes and results. The chapter concludes that this framework can help find

concrete legal points of intervention, support targeted adaptation and transformation (including “bouncing forward”), and foster exchange between law and other disciplines. At the same time, it stresses that resilience concepts need to be carefully adapted to legal contexts—especially because law often has to deal with stressors that come from within the system—and that the framework is meant as a starting point for further critical discussion rather than as a finished theory.

**Keywords:** resilience; law; legal theory; resilient State; rule of law; crises and disasters; socio-ecological resilience; prevention; precaution; preparedness.

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Crises, disasters, disruptions and the associated risks in various forms are part of our everyday lives. The last few years alone, with the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic and far-reaching infringements in fundamental rights, the effects of climate change and numerous natural disasters and the related discussion of a State's duty to protect its people from such events and harm, as well as political attacks on democracies and the rule of law worldwide, illustrate the continuity of crises and disasters and interrelated legal implications. How do the State and society cope with these events in a resilient manner? What role can the law play in this context?

Resilience is often described in simplified terms as "the ability to withstand shocks and continue to function in a similar way" (Walker, 2020, p. 10). However, there are different understandings of resilience or resilience concepts in various disciplines, which include attributes such as stability and robustness (often described in terms of a ‘*bouncing back*’), but also adaptability and transformation (‘*bouncing forward*’) (Thorén, 2014, p. 303). From materials science to ecology, psychology, and the social sciences: Over the last few decades, resilience has become a buzzword, not only in the media and politics. It has been adapted by various natural, technical, and social sciences to their contexts and needs. While resilience in materials science is understood as elasticity and describes materials like yarn that yield to resistance in the short term but return to their original form (Hoffman, 1948), the psychological understanding of resilience focuses on the functional adaptability of individuals. In psychology, the notion of resilience is therefore more concerned with dealing with stressful life events in the sense of adaptive or integrative functioning after a traumatizing experience (Werner, 1989); a return to the original state plays no role. Consequently, even in the two disciplines, which are often described as the first disciplines with a resilience concept (Thorén, 2014), there are already differing understandings of resilience. This makes it even more important for a discipline that is not yet familiar with resilience,

such as the legal discipline, to work with (understandings of) resilience in a conceptually differentiated and reflective manner.

In law, or the legal discipline, the same phenomena are considered: Crises, disasters, disruptions, and the associated risks. Legal orders and individual laws and statutes deal with them or are confronted with them. On the one hand, disasters and risks are addressed by the law. For example, disaster control law addresses disasters in terms of preparedness for disasters and dealing with catastrophes, Infection Protection Acts across States contain measures to deal with pandemics. Based on the precautionary principle in (international) environmental law, States are obliged to install measures and means to catastrophic situations even in light of scientific uncertainty. On the other hand, the law and the legal order itself may be disrupted and in a situation of crisis, namely due to poor implementation of legislation, outdated or inadequate content of laws, or threatened by populism more generally.

So far, however, a legal theory of resilience, addressing the aforementioned aspects, does not exist. The phenomena, as well as tools offered by legal systems and laws, could be combined in such a theory with the aim of identifying intervention points to enhance resilience.

Since the discourse on resilience and law is only at its beginning, there are several alternatives on how to conceptualize it. For instance, the identification and description of a disturbance, as well as the object that is being disrupted (e.g. society, the legal order, a specific law, or democracy) allow for two different perspectives on the topic of resilience and law: First, one can use and instrumentalize the law to optimize the resilience of a State, taking an *external* view on the law. From this external perspective, it is explored how the law is used by States to protect against disturbances and deal with disasters, for instance. The law is hence used as a 'resilience tool' or a 'resilience mechanism'. The *internal* perspective, on the other hand, analyses the resilience of a law in the light of a disruption; the law itself is being disrupted and its resilience is being tested.

Both perspectives differ in the research object: The *external* perspective focuses on the resilient State as a research object. This perspective allows to analyse how the State can use the law as a tool to regulate and enhance its own resilience. From the *internal* perspective, the research object, or resilience object, is a law or a legal system, e.g. a law or a legal system whose resilience is tested (Ries, 2023). The latter represents a more limited view and might result in a pure legal discourse, while the exploration of a resilient State allows for more interdisciplinary perspectives and contributions. Hence, first and foremost, the development of a legal theory of resilience raises the question of the specific research object, or more exactly, the 'resilience object'.

In light of these observations, this paper first describes the history and content of a selection of different understandings of resilience, before briefly outlining the current state of the German legal resilience discourse, followed by a rough outline of a legal resilience theory and a conclusion.

## Same Same but Different? Selected 'Resilience' Understandings Across Disciplines

The concept of resilience was first established as a concept in material science. It has been transferred and adapted to other disciplines in recent decades. In the following, a selection of some notions of resilience is briefly described to better understand the different resilience concepts and their similarities and differences.

### Origins of 'Resilience'

From a chronological perspective, resilience appears to have first developed in materials science with regard to timber (e.g. generally on the resilience of materials: Young, 1807; more specifically on timber: Tredgold, 1818; 1822; US Navy, 1947), and later on relating to specific textiles. While Tredgold (1818) described resilience in terms of "bending but not breaking" (p. 218), Hoffman observes in 1948 that resilient or adaptable textiles exhibit a certain elasticity in the event of external disturbances but return to their original state. They can be stretched and pulled but will eventually return to their original state in the sense of a '*bouncing back*' (often referred to as "*engineering* resilience"; Hoffman, 1948). This understanding of resilience can be measured, it also allows for an optimization by technical or engineering means (Scharte & Thoma, 2016).

In psychology, the concept of resilience appeared in studies assessing individuals who were confronted with adversity, stress and trauma. Their reactions to these events were analysed to identify protective factors and protective mechanisms for coping with crises (Rutter, 1985). Werner's long-term study of 698 adolescents on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, published in 1971, is particularly prominent in this regard. In this study, which was started in 1954, she and her team followed the group of adolescents for several years during their childhood and analyzed the effects of a variety of biological and psychosocial risk factors, stressful life events and protective factors on their individual development (Werner et al., 1971). Among other things, Werner focused on the individual's ability to adapt to different stages of life, crises and events.

In ecology, resilience was discussed in a publication by Holling in 1973 in connection with the persistence of ecosystems (Holling, 1973). Holling's

understanding of resilience changed over the years and was extended by him and his team to other disciplines. He developed the original *engineering* resilience, which focused on a return to the original state and a '*bouncing back*', into *ecological* resilience (Holling, 1996). The latter does not require a return to the original state, but instead emphasizes the maintenance of certain ecosystem functions to survive disturbances in the sense of a '*bouncing forward*' (Adger, 2000). The aim is to maintain the ecological balance of a multi-layered ecosystem. For the first time, a resilience notion addresses complex and dynamic systems; it can be understood as a departure from the focus on actors or groups of actors as it exists in materials science (Blum, 2006).

In another "evolutionary" step of the resilience concept, building on ecological resilience, ecosystems are combined with social aspects, and adjusted in form of a '*socio-ecological*' resilience (Folke, 2006). This notion conceptually addresses the interrelationships and dependencies between ecosystems and social systems. Socio-ecological resilience includes an institutional dimension, namely *institutional* resilience, which contributes to the resilience of communities (Adger, 2000). Socio-ecological resilience thus combines scientific approaches to resilience with social aspects. This paves the way for the transfer of resilience to social sciences and society in general. The potential of resilience as a potentially unifying concept between technical, natural, and social sciences becomes apparent (Thorén, 2014).

**From Ecological Resilience to Social Resilience**

The transfer of the resilience concept(s) has expanded to other disciplines in recent decades, including the social sciences. With each transfer from discipline to discipline, the concept is adapted to the respective discipline and research object, and its notion becomes more diverse. To illustrate the diversity of resilience adaptations in the social science, the transfer of resilience to sociology is outlined below (in a simplified form, a more detailed description of resilience as an observational perspective for the analysis of socio-historical processes can be found in Endress, 2023).

In social sciences, different notions of resilience have emerged over time (Blum et al., 2016). In general, the understanding of *social* resilience is about the ability of social units or systems such as societies and communities to cope with challenges and threats without losing their identity and ability to function (Blum et al., 2016). This understanding thus ties in with *ecological* resilience and the maintenance of functions. In sociology, the inclusion of transformation processes and "future-oriented learning from crises" forms part of the resilience discourse (Blum et al., 2016, p. 152-153). This understanding goes

beyond mere adaptation (included the 'ecological' understanding of resilience), it rather corresponds with an approach of '*building back better.*'[1]

More recent and less explored resilience research in social sciences is based on socio-ecological resilience but focuses more on the role of social capital, including structural and cognitive capital, as a guiding concept in shaping resilience (Qamar, 2023). It appears as if this research combines several dimensions of resilience, from a psychological dimension to a social one (cf. Qamar, 2023). Social resilience, as defined by Adger, regards the "ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change" (Adger, 2000, p. 347). It focuses on social behavior during and after a crisis, and how individuals and communities "withstand shocks and stress without significant upheaval" (Adger et al., 2002, p. 1). These reactions have been categorized in terms of reactive, responsive, and proactive resilience (Carmen et al., 2022; Jordan, 2015; Mngumi, 2021; Ntontis et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2012), thus including the approaches of preemption, precaution, and preparedness. In connection with the sociological risk debate of the 1980s, preemption, precaution and preparedness play a role in today's sociological resilience discourse as modes of governance and approaches to action (Blum et al., 2016). Research on social resilience can also address the role of social capital in resilience-building strategies (Azad & Pritchard, 2023; Hagedoorn et al., 2019). At the same time, the notions of socio-economic and social resilience offer a starting point for the legal discipline, as laws often address risks; national and international law also includes the principles of precaution, prevention and preparedness today, such as in environmental law or disaster control law (cf. Klafki, 2017).

**Same Same but Different! Similarities and Differences**

This excerpt-based overview of some notions of resilience across disciplines is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, it illustrates that resilience understandings have adapted and changed with each transfer to another discipline. The understanding of *engineering* resilience is not identical to that of *socio-ecological* resilience; at its core, however, it is always about coping with disruptions and the continued existence or functioning of actors or systems.

Overall, an analytical, descriptive understanding of resilience dominates in material science and ecology; the persistence of a system despite disruptions is described in a non-normative way. In contrast, in social sciences and also in psychology, an evaluative and normative concept of resilience exists that

[1] In contrast to bouncing back and returning to the original state of material science resilience or engineering resilience and the value-free bouncing forward in ecology.

addresses an aim to be achieved, namely resilience when confronted with a crisis (Blum et al., 2016).

The measurability of resilience, which is fundamentally a given in material science, is difficult to achieve in other disciplines, especially the rather normative social sciences. However, this could provide an incentive for the legal discipline to establish a normative understanding of resilience with an additional analytical dimension in law (this is probably also in line with Endress' sociological understanding of resilience, 2023). Interdisciplinary interfaces with law, such as in the research field of *law & economics*, could make an insightful contribution to the analysis and measurement of resilience in the legal context.

## Current Discourse on Resilience in Legal Scholarship

The German legal scholarship on resilience is still in its infancy (Barczak, 2020; Isensee, 2016; Klafki, 2020; Kovács et al., 2018; Lewinski, 2016; Lindner & Unterreitmeier, 2020; Rixen, 2021; Riznik, 2019), while research and publications on resilience and law are already increasing internationally (Arnold & Gunderson, 2013; Contiades & Fotiadou, 2015; Daya-Winterbottom, 2020; Finke, 2019; Garmestani et al., 2019; McDonald, 2017; Ruhl, 2010; 2021; Cosens et al., 2023). In general, legal scholarship differentiates between national and international law. Even though international law influences national law and *vice versa*, both are distinct and most legal scholarship focuses on either or. This contribution will focus on the German domestic legal order and its resilience discourse. Other domestic legal systems and related resilience scholarship will not be considered, but legal systems under the rule of law in liberal democratic orders will demonstrate similar features.

### State of the Art in German Legal Scholarship

In German legal scholarship, some publications deal with the resilience of fundamental rights and the constitution in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (Barczak, 2022); legal populism discourse also refers in part to the resilience of the Basic Law (Klafki, 2020). However, the German legal scholarship so far fails to define a legal concept of resilience, and it remains unclear what should characterize resilient laws or a resilient legal order; are they robust or adaptive? *Isensee*, for example, defines resilience in a first, more fundamental conceptual publication the 'resilience of the law' as "the ability of the law to assert and defend its claim to validity against real resistance" (Isensee, 2016, p. 33-34). A monograph by Barczak on security law takes a more

in-depth look at the concept of "normative resilience"[2] (Barczak, 2020, p. 612). In both cases, the focus is the resilience of a law or statute. Rixen, contrary to the others, understands "resilient administrative law" (in face of the covid-19-pandemic) as law that avoids and reduces vulnerability within society, the so-called "gesamtgesellschaftliche Resilienz" (Rixen, 2021, p. 42); he goes even further and identifies a "resilience guarantee" of the State who owes the responsibility for resilience vis-à-vis the people based on the principle of the welfare state and fundamental rights as codified in the German Basic law (Rixen, 2021, p. 49). His view is more in line with the external perspective chosen by the author, even though the terminology Rixen uses is misleading ("resilient administrative law").

Instead of focusing on the resilience of the law, this contribution argues that the discourse on resilience and law should also include a discussion of the law as a 'resilience tool' or a 'resilience mechanism' to contribute to a resilient State, namely the external perspective described above. The research object is hence the State, and not the law as such. Eventually, the resilience of a law or legal order will also be considered when researching a resilient State.

**A Change of Perspective: Looking at the Law From the Outside**

As a starting point, one has to be clear about the research object and the related perspective: Is the law analysed from an internal or external perspective, or more specifically, is the assessment about the resilience of a law or a resilient State (using the law to enhance its own resilience). At this early stage of the resilience debate in German legal scholarship, mainly one possibility of a legal resilience discourse has been addressed to date: The resilience of the law itself, hence the internal perspective. On the one hand, the topic "resilience and law" allows to analyse resilience of a specific law, such as the German Basic Law ('Grundgesetz') or a federal statute (cf. Ries, 2023; see also Isensee, 2016). On the other hand, there is no constitutional mandate to create resilient laws; the legislature is not required by the Basic Law to pass resilient laws (but see Rixen construing a "resilience guarantee" (2021, p. 49). It is also not obvious why the German Basic Law itself should be resilient. This is neither stated in the provision of the Grundgesetz nor in the preamble. The derivation of a "resilience mandate" for the legislator could be conceivable as a component of the rule of law and/or the principle of democracy, but this has not yet been discussed. Others have proposed to use the principle of the welfare State and guarantees of fundamental rights of the German Basic Law to construe a

[2] This term may be somewhat ill-chosen in the light of the interdisciplinary discourse, since the (sociological) "normativity" of resilience is controversial in interdisciplinary resilience research, and the term 'normative' can therefore be misleading.

"resilience guarantee" (Rixen, 2021, p. 49). Nevertheless, the resilience of the law from an internal perspective can be linked to other debates on constitutional law: The constitution's ability to defend and fortify itself ('wehrhafte Demokratie'), the perpetuity clause of the German Basic Law (Art. 79[3]) and the associated international debate on militant constitutionalism, or the requirement of different majorities when adopting legislation under the German Basic Law are relevant in this context, as are the discourses on constitutional change, the state of emergency and emergency constitutional law. These previously separated discourses on constitutional law could be brought together under a legal theory of resilience with the possibility to generate new insights and, in combination, possibly also reveal previously unknown levers.

The other option is the external perspective on the law: Law as a 'resilience tool' of the State. This view allows to reflect on the contribution of law to a resilient State, a resilient society or a resilient rule of law. It is consequently more about the bigger picture and the contribution of law to the State and society. This rather functional view of the law can also consider the adoption of (more) resilient laws. However, the law is not seen as an end in itself, but as a regulatory instrument of the State, which broadens the view on the law and its function and also expands the legal discourse on resilience. An external perspective on the law, namely by exploring a resilient State and the role of the law to foster and enhance the State's resilience, allows for a broader perspective and is more inclusive regarding resilience findings from other disciplines.

Based on this external perspective, the systemic connections between law and society correspond to the socio-ecological understanding of resilience, which is concerned, on the one hand, with the interaction of systems, but on the other hand also focuses on maintaining the function of the system itself, including social interactions. This external perspective on a resilient State also includes the assessment of resilient legislation as a subsystem of the State. According to Luhmann, the subsystem contributes to the preservation of the entire system (Luhmann, 1993); a resilient State can be strengthened by resilient legislation. The external resilience perspective also includes the institutional dimension of the State, as it is being discussed in research on social resilience. In line with the sociological definition(s) of resilience, this approach includes various actors within (and to some extent outside) the State. This external perspective can also better address the anticipatory resilience attributes, meaning aspects of precaution and preparedness. Precautionary and protective factors and mechanisms are indispensable in the face of current challenges. This anticipatory and preventive approach to resilience can be very beneficial to the legal context and could lead to a fruitful transfer of resilience to the legal discipline due to the proximity to the social sciences. The external

resilience perspective is therefore more in line with the potential of interdisciplinary resilience discourse. Within the framework of a legal theory of resilience, the complex legal realities and current challenges can also be systematized in legal terms.

## A Legal Theory of Resilience: Initial Thoughts

The proposed legal theory of resilience aims at creating a framework to legally discuss resilience (and vulnerability) vis-á-vis the resilience object, which can be a State, society or the rule of law, to name just a few. Within this framework, several aspects need to be identified first to assess resilience in a legal context. This scheme aims to optimize resilience by questioning legal means and their application in practice. Optimizing the resilience of a State can mean more, less or better legal measures, depending on the resilience object. Based on this framework, it might even be possible to measure resilience in a legal context. Some initial thoughts on such a framework are shared below with the aim of initiating a discussion in law and beyond.

As a starting point (1.), the resilience object needs to be identified: What object is being stressed and hence analysed in terms of its resilience? In a second step (2.), the disruption or stressor is identified: Where is the stressor originating from that is challenging the resilience? In a third step (3.), the resilience dimension needs to be classified: Does resilience in this specific case refer to stability, adaptability, or transformation? This also includes examples of implementation of these resilience dimensions on law. In a fourth step (4.), the legal theory of resilience connects points 1. – 3. in a 'resilience toolbox' by assessing the specific resilience mechanisms and/or resilience in law: What facilitates or hinders a resilient response of the resilience object in that specific case? Finally (5.), the legal theory of resilience results in a description of legal processes, allowing for a final assessment of the resilience of the research object.

### Identification of the 'Resilience' Object

In a first step of the debate on a legal theory of resilience, a research object, or resilience object, must be identified. Studies from philosophy and philosophy of science show that, during a specific resilience discourse, it is necessary to determine exactly whose resilience is being analyzed (Blum et al., 2016; Thorén, 2014; Walker, 2020). From the perspective of a legal scholar, there are various interesting resilience objects one could assess: From the State, society or the rule of law as a principle of governance, all of them use the law and its ordering function. From a constitutional point of view (and this is not only true for the German Basic Law), there are several objects of resilience to choose from. First, in many constitutions, the people are the sovereign, who democratically

legitimize all State action (cf. Art. 20(2) German Basic Law). Consequently, within a legal theory of resilience, a resilience object could be a resilient people as the resilient sovereign. Ultimately, all State action by the three branches of government can be attributed to the people as the sovereign. It is therefore not farfetched to include a resilient people as the sovereign in the starting point of the legal discourse on resilience. The people have given themselves the State as an organizational form, which acts through the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Second, the object of resilience could be identified via the basic principles of a State's structure, such as the rule of law, the form of government, or the welfare State. The rule of law is included in many democracies across the globe (cf. Art. 20[3] German Basic Law). It could serve as a resilience object and object of research. The State under the rule of law uses the law as a tool to regulate the relationships between and with the people under its jurisdiction and itself; it could also use the law as a 'resilience tool' to promote its own resilience with the subsystem, the law. The resilience of an institution, such as a constitutional court, can also be the resilience object. Currently, the German parliament – faced with populism and political extremism– is discussing a law fostering the resilience of the German Federal Constitutional Court, for instance. Other institutions, such as the parliament itself, could be the object of resilience research as well. Moreover, the resilience of society could be a good starting point for a legal theory of resilience. Society can be interpreted as being very similar to "the people." From a legal perspective, society is a broader term that the people as stated in most constitutions, includes all people living within a State, and is not limited to the citizen of a specific State (cf. Art. 116[1] German Basic Law). In sum, several resilience objects which may be relevant in the context of resilience and law can be identified. Depending on the research question, one has to be clear whose resilience is being analysed.

**Identification of an (External) Disruption or Stressor**

As important as the identification of the resilience object is the identification of the disruption or stressor. Legal resilience tools can only be considered when it is known what is causing the disruption or stress. Be it specific adverse effects of climate change, such a flooding or heatwave, or anti-democratic right-wing threats to the election process of justices of a constitutional court, depending on the stressor the coping mechanism in terms of the law varies. Only when both steps have been specified, an exact analysis of legal responses is possible. Climate change as such is not a specific stressor, since it can take different forms. The same is the case with populism that is "stressing" the rule of law. Depending on the context populist parties or members of parliament can disrupt the system is various ways.

In most disciplines with a resilience concept, the disruption or stressor is *external* and does not come from within the entity whose resilience is assessed. *Psychological resilience* mainly deals with external stressors on individuals, such as extreme heat, icy roads while driving or the loss of a significant relationship, financial stress, or social threats like discrimination (Oken et al., 2015). In material science, *engineering resilience* is tested when external factors such as pulling a thread or bending wood to make a boat is measured. In the same line, Adger's definition of social resilience also relies on external stressors: "the ability of communities to withstand external shocks to their social infrastructure" (Adger, 2000, p. 361). When assessing the resilient of the rule of law, democracy or a State, it is often an internal stressor that is challenging the resilience object. In a State as well as in a democracy, parties form part of the state, but parties can test the resilience of a State and democracy at the same time. The nomination and election process of the justices of a constitutional court by the political parties or a parliamentary can disrupt a democracy, but they form part of the democracy at the same time. For the legal resilience discourse, it might be one of the necessary adjustments (compared to the other resilience concepts across disciplines) to allow for internal stressors and disruptions in a legal theory of resilience. In addition, ecological resilience also includes internal as well as external disruptions of ecosystems (Ungar, 2018). Returning to the example of the nomination and election of justices of a constitutional court, the resilience of the constitutional court is disrupted by external factors in that specific case, namely by an external political party or parliamentary group who is nominating and electing new justices, while from the perspective of a democratic State, the disruption comes from within, illustrating the importance of the determination of resilience object and stressor.

### Classification of the Resilience Dimension (and a Translation into Legal Terms)

The resilience dimensions of stability/robustness, elasticity/flexibility, adaptability/adaptation, transformation as well as an element of anticipation –as stated above– play an important role in the resilience concepts presented, but vary from discipline to discipline. These five dimensions could therefore also be relevant for the legal discourse (Barczak, 2020; on the tension between stability and flexibility) and be made fruitful for the legal discipline.

Resilience can refer to stability and transformation at the same time; depending on the discipline its meaning varies, as carved out above under II. In a legal theory of resilience, it seems important to differentiate more precisely at this point. Once a resilience object and a specific disruption or stressor challenging the resilience have been identified, the one of the five specific

resilience dimension needs to be classified. When talking about the resilience of a constitutional court, does this refer to stability or the transformative character of the court? Should a constitutional court when disturbed 'bounce back' or 'bounce forward'? Once classified, and depending on the resilience dimension, different legal resilience tools are available to protect and enhance resilience. Hence, the linkages between the different resilience dimensions and their translation into legal terms shed some light on legal resilience tools a state or legislator can employ when enhancing resilience. Below, some impressions on legal resilience tools based on the resilience dimension are given to get a general idea of the potential of a legal theory of resilience.

**1st dimension: Stability/robustness**

In terms of law, stability and robustness can be translated as legal certainty. In a State under the rule of law, legal certainty plays a crucial role. According to Radbruch (1990), legal certainty consists of two components: first, it refers to "the ability to identify the subject matter as a legal norm," and second, it also regards "the certain enforcement of what is identified as law" (p. 45; as translated by Alexy, 2015, p. 443). Legal certainty as a function of the law should not be handled too flexibly, it should rather be understood as "robust", otherwise its meaning and purpose can be undermined easily.

**2nd dimension: Flexibility**

Nevertheless, the law should also allow for dynamic processes and include a certain degree of flexibility. Legal systems are not as static as many may often assume. A legal system contains specific elements of flexibility, both methodologically and dogmatically, which can allow for an adjustment to foreseeable, but also unforeseeable situations. Based on flexibility within the law, it is possible to reach a fair decision in individual cases.

The interpretation of the law represents such an element of flexibility. The four methods of **norm interpretation**, namely interpretation according to the wording of a law, systematic interpretation, historical interpretation, and teleological interpretation, can lead to a flexibilization of existing law within the limits of the respective wording, so that at the same time stability and legal certainty are guaranteed. Indefinite legal terms in laws, such as the "state of the art" in environmental law, for instance, allow for automatic adjustments to be made to new technical and scientific developments, without changing the law.

Another element of flexibility represents the principle of **proportionality**, which requires a balancing of possibly conflicting interests in the law-making process, but also when applying the law to individual cases. During the pandemic, for instance, legislators were weighing the interests to protect the people from a possibly deadly virus against the freedoms of individuals when

passing pandemic laws and taking pandemic measures. Due to proportionality, when applying a law to a specific case, such an application of the law is meant to result in an appropriate and fair decision.

Moreover, sometimes, based on the wording of provision, there exists **discretion** in the application of the law; sometimes the administration can take a decision based on the law, but does not have. This so-called **discretion** gives them flexibility in their daily practice as law appliers.

### 3rd dimension: Adaptability

Based on treaty interpretation and the related flexibility, adaptability can be an outcome. To illustrate, the meaning of family in fundamental rights has changed in many legal systems over time, without changing the wording of the relevant fundamental rights. In 2015, the European Court of Human Rights in a case against Italy held that "relationships of cohabitating same-sex couples living in stable de facto partnerships fell within the notion of 'family life' within the meaning of Article 8" (European Court of Human Rights, Oliari and Others v. Italy, appl. no.18766/11 and 36030/11, judgment from 21 July 2015). Base on changing definitions of wording, the law can be adjusted and adapted to changed circumstances, such as societal change and changed values in society.

### 4th dimension: Transformation

In general, law can also contain adaptive elements to promote adaptations and even transformations. With regard to climate change, for instance, some national and international human rights courts have affirmed a **positive duty of States to protect** life and health from the dangers of climate change (e.g. based on Art. 2[2] sentence 1 German Basic Law). As a result, governments are obliged to reform their climate protection regulation to include higher climate protection standards (e.g. European Court of Human Right, *Verein Schweizer KlimaSeniorinnen v. Switzerland*, judgement from 9 April 2024), illustrating the transformative dimension of law as well as the transformative role of the judiciary.

### 5th dimension: Anticipation

Furthermore, resilience can also include an anticipatory element, as anchored in social resilience (Blum et al., 2016; Carmen et al., 2022; Jordan, 2015; Mngumi, 2021; Ntontis et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2012). The legal precautionary principle, or precautionary approach, has been developed within environmental law in the 1980s to address similar situations. In addition to environmental law, other areas of law that deal with risk management and uncertainty (here, too, is a parallel starting point to sociological resilience)

often follow the precautionary principle as well. The legal principle of **prevention** also forms part of the body of law across the globe.

### 'Resilience toolbox': Resilience mechanisms and factors in law

Based on the five resilience dimensions describes above and the related translations into law, the 'resilience toolbox' contains a variety of legal means and approaches to law-making and the application of the law. Once the relevant resilience dimension has been classified, a bouquet of legal options is available that needs to be further assessed to match the needs of the specific situation. Depending on the needs, the legal means can be adjusted, strengthened, or retracked.

#### Description of the legal process

Once the resilience object and its stressor have been identified, and the relevant resilience dimension has been classified, the recourse to the resilience toolbox of legal means allows for a description of the legal processes involved. Who were the actors and stakeholders involved? When did they react, and on what legal basis? What legal means did they employ, and what challenges were they faced with? What was the outcome? Based on this final assessment, legal challenges can be identified to critically question their contribution. Did the legal response facilitate or hinder a resilient approach to the stressor? Can this be improved or enhanced? Depending on the outcome, it might also be possible to measure the reaction on a resilience spectrum.

### Conclusion

A legal theory of resilience helps assess the resilience of a specific object vis-à-vis a disturbance or stressor based on legal means. Within this framework, one can explore how a State, society or the rule of law use the law as a 'resilience tool' to enhance and optimize their resilience by questioning legal means and their application as a reaction to a disturbance. Such an optimization can mean more or less legal means, such as laws, or a different content of laws, different legal options. Consequently, a legal theory of resilience offers the possibility of identifying individual points of intervention in law and in the State. For instance, it can bring about or at least support targeted and informed transitions or transformations by legal means. Depending on the resilience dimension concerned, this can mean a 'bouncing back', or a 'bouncing forward', a green transformation. The identification of legal intervention points and the legal method or technique to address these points and change the levers in a State represents one of the aims of the theory. At the same time, the theory facilitates an inter- and transdisciplinary exchange of resilience findings.

Concurrently, these considerations also highlight the difficulties of translating the concept of resilience, which varies from discipline to discipline, and illustrate the divergences that can arise. A transfer to the legal discipline might require adjustments of the concept: As shown above, the disturbance might originate from within the system, allowing for external and internal stressors contrary to engineering resilience or social resilience understandings. These considerations are merely an initial thought experiment. They should serve as an impetus for reflection and initiate a critical discourse across the disciplines.

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Chapter 3

# Social Resilience, Law, and Informalities in a Hybrid Political Regime: A Case Study of Uzbek Migrants Navigating the Russian Legal Landscape

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**Abstract**

In this chapter, we use the notion of social resilience as a heuristic device to explore the shifting boundaries between legality and illegality in the context of migration to a hybrid political regime. Our case study focuses on the creative and multifaceted ways Uzbek migrants navigate the Russian legal landscape. Drawing on the life histories of two Uzbek migrants who relocated to Moscow, we show how, within a hybrid political regime, the boundaries between legality and illegality are continuously negotiated through the interplay between official laws and regulations, their interpretation by public officials, and migrants' own ingenuity in navigating them. We illustrate how, by strategically mobilizing resources and social networks, Uzbek migrants sustain their lives within a legal environment that often pushes them toward illegality, yet still manage – at least ostensibly – to legalize their stay. The chapter reveals that, in the context of migration to a hybrid political regime, the blurred boundaries between legality and illegality emerge from the interplay between institutional ambiguity and a migrant's agentic capacity to navigate an uncertain legal environment.

**Keywords**: Social resilience, law, hybrid political regime, migration, illegality.

* * *

In the last two decades, Russia has emerged as a key immigration hub, witnessing a massive inflow of migrants with low qualifications and no legal right to work or stay[1]. Many migrant workers originate from the three Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. According to the 2022 statistics, there were about 1.45 million Uzbek, nearly one million Tajik, and 562 thousand Kyrgyz nationals in Russia (KUN.UZ 2023). The large majority of Central Asian migrants are young male with secondary education, originating from the rural areas of Central Asia where unemployment rates remain exceptionally high (Abashin, 2014). Frequently they have a poor command of the Russian language, and primarily work in construction, trade, transportation, service, agriculture, housing, and communal services.

Although Central Asian migrants enter Russia legally, owing to the visa-free regime under a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agreement[2], the legal status of a Central Asian migrant is characterized by volatility and unpredictability. In fact, immigration laws change at a high speed in Russia, which makes it difficult for Central Asian migrants to maintain a 'fully legal' status (Urinboyev, 2020). For instance, between 2012 and 2015, Russian authorities adopted more than 50 laws aimed at reducing undocumented migration through severe administrative and criminal penalties (Denisenko, 2017). The millions of Central Asian migrants who have undocumented status end up working in the shadow economy, where they can do so without immigration documents and language skills (TASS, 2021). Working in the shadow economy often puts migrants in a precarious position, with a constant sense of insecurity associated with a fear of discrimination and abuse by the authorities (Kuznetsova & Round, 2018; Eraliev & Urinboyev, 2020).

Public officials practice wide discretion in the interpretation and implementation of the official law on migration. Many of these legislative interventions are written ambiguously, in generic terms (Schenk, 2018) that do not match an empirical reality (Kubal, 2016), and are often accompanied by corrections and additions that undermine the spirit of the original law (Urinboyev & Eraliev, 2022). Typically, in fact, an institution or the body

[1] No consensus exists among migration scholars and experts regarding the actual number of migrants residing in Russia. Figures provided vary, with the number of migrants living in Russia somewhere between 9 and 18 million individuals depending on the source used.

[2] On December 21, 1991, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, at a meeting of the heads of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine, the Almaty Declaration and the Protocol to the Agreement on the Establishment of the CIS were adopted. Among many other principles, the Almaty Declaration established a visa-free regime among CIS member states.

responsible for implementing the laws issues an internal decree (podzakonniy akt) suitable for its own interests. Internal decrees are often not communicated outside of the institution where they are created (Urinboyev, 2020). This lack of information then creates fertile ground for state officials to interpret and implement laws as they wish. Varied interpretations of laws, arbitrary enforcement, and discretionary administrative practices lead to the emergence of an informal immigration legal regime that significantly differs from the one prescribed by official immigration laws. The implementation of this regime is left to the discretionary power of public officials and street-level bureaucrats, thus creating an inconsistent immigration regime. That is, the boundaries between legality and illegality are difficult to identify in the Russian immigration regime. This discrepancy between accessible information on immigration law and its capricious implementation makes compliance with migration law a hard endeavour for a migrant. Furthermore, as we pointed out above, this space for informality does not emerge *despite* the official law, but *thanks* to an official law that is drafted in vague terms.

The blurry boundaries between the official legal system and informalities can be observed by looking at the case of the underground printing houses in Moscow. While walking the streets of Moscow, a careful observer may spot individuals with migrant backgrounds who act as *intermediaries*, openly advertising and selling various fake and 'clean fake' immigration documents and offering 'legalization' services. It is possible to buy all types of documents from these intermediaries: residence registrations, work permits, migration cards, exit-entry border stamps, temporary and permanent residence permits, and even the much-desired Russian passport. Many underground printing houses operate in Moscow, particularly at the Kazansky railway station. While occasionally the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) carries out raids and special operations to capture intermediaries[3], document middlemen continue to operate under the protection of law-enforcement bodies, otherwise they would not be able to work so freely in public (Urinboyev, 2020). Accordingly, these intermediaries publicly offer several types of fake documents that, as we show in this chapter, have the potential of allowing Central Asian migrants to remain in the Russian territory. By resorting to the 'legalization services' promoted by intermediaries and printing houses, migrants can regularize their precarious status. The fact that these intermediaries operate under the protection of Russian law-enforcement officials (Malakhov, 2014), suggests that

[3] The primary aim of these operations is not to eradicate the illegal document market but to gather material for a TV show on "how FSB officials worked hard" and captured a group of "radicalized Central Asian migrants who create fake documents" (see Urinboyev, 2020).

it is the official legal system itself that allows for the existence of these pockets of illegality or quasi-legality.

The Russian migration regime thus creates a relevant socio-legal question, namely, what are the boundaries between the official law on migration and the informalities that shape its concrete implementation? Both examples of the laws' inconsistent implementation and printing houses show that it is the official legal regime itself that creates and maintains the space for informalities to arise. Yet, how this phenomenon concretely emerges and how it unfolds is a matter of empirical investigation. Therefore, focusing on the life trajectories of two Uzbek migrants in Russia, Baha and Zaur, we show that the boundary between legality and illegality is drawn following a migrant's contingent choices, accumulated experience, social network, and agentic creativity.

Here is where the concept of social resilience comes in handy for our analytical purposes. Social resilience is, in fact, a concept that focuses on an individual's capacity to navigate a certain crisis by resorting to the available resources. Methodologically, studying social resilience requires one to investigate a person's life trajectory, to spot the "continuity and twists" in their lives (Qamar, 2023, p. 3). To study migrants' social resilience, therefore, requires one to understand how they behave when there is a sudden change in their lives, and what the effects of these choices are.

The case of 'social resilience from the margins' analyzed in this chapter, therefore, takes the form of the lived experiences of migration faced by two Uzbek migrants, Baha and Zaur, who have resettled in Moscow, Russia. The ethnographic material was collected by the second author during 14 months of fieldwork in Moscow, Russia, and the Fergana Valley, Uzbekistan, between January 2014 and August 2018. These field sites were chosen because Moscow is the capital city and largest megapolis in Russia, featuring the highest number of migrant workers, whereas Fergana Valley is the primary migrant-sending region in Uzbekistan, given its population density and high unemployment rate (Laruelle, 2007). The ethnographic material was primarily collected through observations and informal interviews, supplemented with regular contact with informants over smartphone-based instant messaging applications such as Telegram Messenger, WhatsApp, and IMO. The material is presented through an in-depth description of their migratory experiences in Russia, a methodological choice that fits well our conceptual framework: by describing their life trajectory we show how, during each of the crises that occurred in their life, they managed to 'make do' by resorting to the resources available to them.

The rest of the chapter is organized in the following order. In the next section, we draw on social resilience literature to construct a heuristic device which we use to read the life histories of Baha and Zaur, presented in part three and four,

respectively. In part five, we draw out the implications of the ethnographic material for scholarly debates on law, migration, and social resilience.

## Conceptualizing "Social Resilience from the Margins"

We conceptualize social resilience as the capacity of individuals to withstand, adapt, and readjust in the face of crises in their lives, by resorting to resources at their disposal.

First, social resilience can be understood as a *capacity of an individual*. Despite this focus on individuals only, resilience is still a *social* process, as factors such as social, political, legal, economic, and cultural resources, are integral to enabling a person's resilience (Norris et al., 2008).

Moreover, individuals have the ability to navigate crises and shocks by creatively resorting to the resources at their disposal. In this regard, resilience is a phenomenon that involves "persistence, adaptability and transformability" (Davoudi et al., 2012, p. 304), stressing the capacity of actors of 'bouncing forward', by adapting and reinventing themselves in the face of challenges (Shaw, 2012). A key focus of resilience is thus the agency of individuals, which Sewell (1992) conceptualizes as the capacity "of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree" (p. 20). This conceptualization of agency considers the action of individuals to be in a constant and mutually transforming interaction with the existing social structures, which in turn delimits the possibility of individual agency.

Furthermore, social resilience is observable when there are crises in life, namely events that disrupt the everyday life of subjects, in the form of "micro-disruptions" or "slow burn struggles" (Fahlberg et al., 2020; Pendall et al., 2010), which require a constant and continual adaptation by individuals. For instance, a 'crisis' could be constituted by a routinary police check, the departure of a relative, or a sudden change in the official law.

Additionally, we look at resilience in a context that is located at the margins of society, namely the everyday life of Uzbek migrants in Moscow, Russia. Marginality can be conceptualized as a situation of structural inequality that impacts individuals' agency (Varghese & Kumar, 2022). This situation is the result of political decisions that create "injustices-in-waiting" (Caniglia et al., 2017), namely, structural inequalities that puts individuals in a disadvantaged position to respond to crises.

Finally, we build on Qamar's (2023) work on social resilience in the context of migration. Qamar argues that migrants' social resilience is influenced by four aspects, namely status (e.g., documented/undocumented, employed/unemployed, etc.), access to resources (family, school, community), support

(network provision and protection), and visibility (being recognized as agentic). These four factors shape migrants' social resilience by influencing how they withstand changes and challenges that occur in the political, economic, cultural, and social environment.

To build our heuristic device, we borrow from Qamar these four factors of a migrant's social resilience, slightly adjusting them to our analytical angle. In particular, we conceive of:

1) *Status* as a migrant's official legal condition.
2) *Access to resources* as a migrant's availability of financial resources.
3) *Network* as a migrant's social support.
4) *Agency* as a migrant's capacity to *creatively* make do with the resources at their disposal. We prefer to speak of *agency* rather than visibility (as Qamar [2023] does), as we focus in our work on migrants' perspective, rather than whether they are seen by others as agentic or not.

Moreover, we conceive of a 'crisis' as any event in the life of a migrant that affects the availability of one of these four elements.

In the next two sections, we will use the five elements of our heuristic device to engage with the life stories of Baha and Zaur and show how the boundaries between legality and illegality are drawn in key passages of their migratory experience.

### Baha: Learning How to Perform 'Legality'

Baha (29, male) is a migrant worker who arrived in Moscow in June 2013, where he reunited with his father, who was working at a construction company. Two months before his arrival, he had sent a copy of his passport to his dad, who had arranged Baha's application to work at the same construction company. Due to his network ensuring him a legal status, Baha's migrant life in Moscow started smoothly. Baha's monthly salary was 22000 roubles (US$700, 2013 exchange rate). As Baha was formally employed, he worked five days a week and stayed in the free accommodation provided by the company.

However, in May 2014, Baha's first crisis started with his father having to return to Uzbekistan, an abrupt change in Baha's network support. Furthermore, tensions between Uzbek and Tajiks migrants arose at the construction site where Baha was working, and after several physical altercations, Baha was compelled to quit his job, thus severing his source of economic stability. Both these crises completely changed Baha's migrant life. Additionally, Baha's work permit was going to expire within a month, resulting in two construction companies refusing to offer him a job, thus affecting his

status. Therefore, Baha understood that he had to renew his legal status to obtain a new work permit and continue to work legally.

In order to prolong their working period in Russia, migrants are required to leave and re-enter the territory of Russia once a year. Russian authorities keep immigration flows under control by legally requiring migrants to renew their migration card and exit-entry stamp at various border points (Schenk, 2018, 2021), where the Federal Security Service (FSB) perform law enforcement functions.

The closest border point to Moscow is in Pogar, in the Bryansk province, at the Russia-Ukraine border, where thousands of migrant workers travel to by shared taxi to receive a new exit-entry stamp on their passport and so renew their status.

When migrants arrive in Pogar, they have two options. They can reach the passport control point on foot, exit Russia, and upon re-entering, pay a 500 roubles (US$8) bribe to the border control official who puts an entry stamp in the passport. This is a well-established norm; all migrants know about it and so they insert 500 roubles into their passport when handing it over to the border official. While cheaper, this first option is quite lengthy (at least 8 hours) as compared to the second option, where migrants do the crossing via a bus. For a fee of 1500 roubles (US$25), migrants remain on a bus for the entire process, which is managed by the bus driver, who collects all passports and gets stamps for everyone. This process takes approximately 2-3 hours, and the profit is shared between the FSB officials and individuals who organize the bus service. The bus service is informally organized, which means that all transactions described above are illegal and a source of kormushka (unofficial income) for border officials.

In late May 2014, Baha, together with three migrants, travelled to Pogar by shared taxi. Each migrant paid 4500 roubles (US$70) for a return journey. The trip to the border took about 10 hours and they arrived at about 8 am. Baha decided to use the bus service and quickly exited the Russian territory. However, when attempting to re-enter Russia, Baha was asked to get off the bus and talk to a passport control official. After a quick conversation, Baha understood that he had an entry ban due to minor administrative offences. This change in his status impeded him to re-enter Russia. Simultaneously, Baha was not allowed to enter Ukraine given the tensions between Russia and Ukraine over Crimea. Being stuck in a dead-end situation, Baha started to navigate his options. He approached a Ukrainian border guard who, in exchange for 10000 roubles (US$160), offered to issue a document that stated that Baha was not allowed to enter Ukraine. This document would have forced the Russian officials to re-accept him into Russian territory.

Baha did not have enough economic resources to pursue this path. He thus resorted to his network and contacted his co-villager Misha in Moscow, asking him to come to Pogar and lend him the money. After eight hours, Misha arrived at the border point and asked the Russian border guards to pass the money to Baha. The border officials instructed him to give the money to some taxi drivers (who presumably worked for the Russian border officials), who would have then passed it to Baha. Misha quickly made a deal with the taxi drivers for 5000 (US$80) roubles, and gave them 10000 roubles to pass it to Baha. He also hid another 10000 roubles inside a piece of bread he had brought for Baha. This strategy worked out and Baha received 20000 roubles (US$325), as well as bread for his survival.

After receiving the money, Baha passed 10000 roubles to the Ukrainian border official, who in turn promised to have the document ready in one hour. Baha waited for more than two hours, but the official did not show up. Baha thus approached other Ukrainian border guards and asked them for the agreed certificate. The border guards told him that the official had already left and that he would come back in two days. Baha shouted at them, but the border guards threatened that they would shoot him if he did not stop immediately. Baha got scared and returned to the neutral zone.

Despite the critical situation, Baha started negotiating with Ukrainian border guards again. The guards told Baha that they could help him enter Russia through alternative, roundabout ways for 7000 roubles (US$110). Baha had these resources, thanks to Misha hiding additional money inside the bread. Luckily, the Ukrainian border guards kept their word and guided him to where he could enter Russia illegally. This strategy was very risky because, had Russian border guards noticed him, he could have been either shot or faced a prison sentence. Baha was lucky and crossed the border safely and returned to Moscow with Misha.

This crisis had a serious impact on Baha's status, as he had entered the Russian territory in a way that made him officially 'illegal'. Nonetheless, due (again) to his network, with the assistance of Misha, Baha managed to 'legalize' his status. He first purchased a fake entry stamp from a printing house at Kazanskiy station. Then, Baha obtained a fake residence registration and a fake work permit from the same printing house, which allowed him to pass as legal whenever stopped by the police. However, Baha still did not have an actually legal work permit, and so he worked informally for different middlemen in the construction sector between May 2014 and November 2015. His precarious status negatively impacted his access to resources, as he often had problems with delays or non-payment of his salary. He thus started exploring different possibilities to find a stable, well-paid job. Baha was fed up with con-artist migrant middlemen, and so tried to work directly under Russian people who,

in Baha's view, never cheated migrants. But, to find such work, one needed to have a Russian passport or at least a Kyrgyz passport. In fact, due to the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the Eurasian Economic Union, Kyrgyz nationals were allowed to work in Russia without a work permit, which made them more easily employable than Uzbek and Tajik migrants.

In October 2016, he bought a fake Kyrgyz passport from the underground printing house at Kazanskiy station. His change in status opened new, otherwise-impossible, opportunities for Baha. With the recommendation of an Uzbek friend in his network, who also had a Kyrgyz passport, Baha got a job as a loader at a warehouse in November 2016. The Kyrgyz passport led to the warehouse manager quickly employing Baha, granting him a more stable economic condition. He was, in fact, paid a salary of 35000 roubles (US$550), which allowed him to send money home as well as have some money for daily expenses in Moscow. The manager also allowed Baha to use one of the empty rooms of the warehouse as an accommodation.

These changes positively impacted Baha's life, allowing him to also learn how to avoid paying bribes to police officers. Baha knew that police usually stopped those migrants who were not well-dressed, and so he decided to invest part of his salary into decent clothes so that he would be stopped less. He often stated that it was better to invest in your clothes and appearance than paying bribes to police officers, creatively inventing various strategies to avoid potential crises associated with police stops.

When the second author lastly visited Moscow in August 2018, Baha was still working at the same warehouse and was engaged to a Russian woman, who he eventually married in March 2019. Due to the marriage, Baha eventually received Russian citizenship in November 2021.

### Zaur: Becoming "Russkiy" (Russian) Through Informal Practices

Zaur (35, male) is a migrant worker who arrived in Moscow in the autumn of 2003, when labor migration was still a new phenomenon in Russia. His classmate Mirzo, who was already working in Moscow, assisted him with finding a job at a furniture factory, where he worked until 2007, yet without any work permit and employment contract, thus remaining in the country without a legal status. Zaur's network still granted him access to economic resources: his salary was 21000 roubles (approximately US$700, according to 2003 exchange rates), and he was even able to pay off the debts he had previously accrued. Furthermore, he was able to buy a fancy car for his parents and renovate their house, which afforded Zaur and his family higher social status in their village.

However, Zaur lost his job in 2007, facing a crisis due to the tightening of immigration laws in Russia. This forced many employers to hire migrants with proper work permits and residence registration documents[4]. Due to his undocumented status, Zaur was forced to work in the construction sector for a year where he could be employed without documents. As construction work is considered "black work", that is, the lowest-paying job among migrants, Zaur strategized a way out of it. In December 2007, for a fee of 8000 roubles (a US$250, 2007 exchange rates), he bought a fake Russian passport at Kazansky station and became a 'Russian citizen' with a different name and place of birth. As his Russian passport was nicely designed and identical to a genuine passport, Zaur managed to convince his Russian boss at the furniture factory (where he was originally employed) that he had indeed received Russian citizenship through bribing a high-level official at the Federal Migration Service. Thanks to this 'legalized' status, he returned to his old job at the furniture factory but this time his economic resources increased. Hired as a Russian citizen, he was granted a 45000 roubles (US$1500, 2007 exchange rate) monthly salary, an income which is comparable to an average Muscovite salary and that granted him high visibility among his co-villagers in Moscow, who even gave him the nickname Russkiy (Russian).

Zaur's success did not last even a year, as a new crisis occurred. In August 2008, when heading to his workplace, he was stopped by a police officer. While Zaur confidently showed his Russian passport, the police officer decided to check its authenticity at the police department. Upon discovering the falsity of his passport, he informed Zaur that he had prepared an arrest report and transferred his case to a public prosecutor. It was highly likely that Zaur would have been charged with forgery of documents, a criminal act according to Article 327 of Russian Criminal Code. Not wanting to end up in prison, Zaur quickly found a Russian lawyer through his street network in Moscow. His defense lawyer was street smart and well versed in bribery. Rather than trying to defend him in court, he asked Zaur to give him 30000 roubles (US$1000), which were then passed to the public prosecutor who agreed to change Zaur's case from a criminal charge to an administrative offense, which involved a fine and deportation to Uzbekistan. After spending three months at a temporary

[4] Federal Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation, No. 115-ФЗ, adopted July 25, 2002, with amendments from 1 January 2014; The Code of Administrative Offenses (COA) of the Russian Federation as of December 30, 2001, with amendments to the CAO of 23 July 2013 (Federal Law No. 207); Russian Law on the Rules of Entry and Exit from the Territory of the Russian Federation, with amendments, Federal Law No. 224-ФЗ, 2013; Patent/work permit law (Federal Law No. 357 of 24 November 2014).

detention center in Dmitrievskoe Shosse in Moscow, Zaur was deported to Uzbekistan in November 2008, with an entry ban until 2013, thus with a new, limited legal status.

After returning to his village, Zaur got married in 2009 and started a new life. However, as Zaur worked in Moscow many years and used to receive a good salary, he could not re-adapt to the working conditions in rural Fergana. His salary was not enough to secure even his family's basic needs. In his words, he had already become 'Russified' (*o'rishlashib ketdim*) and longed for his migrant life in Moscow. Accordingly, he invented new strategies to move back to Russia. In March 2011, after long negotiations, a local police officer assisted Zaur in changing his name and obtaining a new passport for a gratitude payment of US$ 500. This effort ensured Zaur a clean status, which allowed him to return to Moscow in April 2011 as a migrant who had never been to Russia before.

This time, due to his prior bad experience with a forged passport, Zaur was determined to go 'legal' (*qonuniy bo'lib yurish*) and follow all laws in Russia. Thanks to his new name, Zaur knew that all offenses he had committed in the past did not exist in the Russian state database. However, things in the labor market had changed substantially since he had left, and Zaur had to work several jobs in the shadow economy, all based solely on handshake; between April 2011 and May 2014, he worked as an electrician, loader in the bazaar, dacha caretaker and construction worker, earning on average 18000-20000 roubles (approximately US$500-650, according to 2011-2014 exchange rates) per month. In order to maintain legal status, Zaur travelled by shared taxi to the Pogar border point every 90 days to get a new exit-entry stamp, which allowed him to legally stay another 90 days in Russia.

In May 2014, however, a new crisis occurred. The FMS, with the assistance of OMON (Russian paramilitary police), conducted a raid at the construction site in Moscow province, where many Uzbek undocumented migrants worked, including Zaur. Their case was thus transferred to court for trial and possible deportation. Before the court proceedings, Zaur and all other migrants were brought to a police department where they were kept in a cell prior to trial. Confidently relying on his understanding that all Russian police officers take bribes, Zaur offered 15000 roubles (US$450) to one police officer, who however refused the bribe, saying that FMS was involved in the case and he was not in a safe position to take bribes.

The next day Zaur was fined 10000 roubles (US$300) and received an expulsion order with a 5-year entry ban, and thereafter was transferred to a temporary detention center in Moscow, where he was kept 18 days until his deportation to Uzbekistan. These 18 days, however, turned out to be useful for him. Zaur met one migrant from Kyrgyzstan who knew how to navigate around Russian laws; he told Zaur that he could have returned to Russia immediately

if he managed to renew his passport within a month after his arrival in Uzbekistan. He explained that each Russian state institution (FMS, police, border control) has a separate database, which are synchronized once a month. This means that migrants could enter Russia if they manage to replace their old passport (with the deportation stamp) to the new one within a month. Not many migrants knew about this practice. Even within the crisis that brought him to a deportation center, Zaur managed to learn creative ways to surpass the Russian official legal regime on migration.

After being deported and arriving in rural Fergana in early June 2014, Zaur moved quickly and secured a new passport in 12 days due to his network connections at the district passport department. Immediately after receiving the new passport, Zaur decided to travel to Russia by shared taxi, assuming that it would have been safer to enter Russia through the Russia-Kazakhstan border where, he believed, there was less control and more disorder. His strategy proved successful, and he managed to get an entry stamp at the border which allowed him to continue his trip to Moscow.

Learning from his past mistakes, Zaur completely changed his strategy this time. He was aware that his status was already 'illegal' in the FMS database, which meant that obtaining a real work permit and residence registration was impossible. This time too, his network proved essential to move forward. When Zaur worked in a wholesale bazar, he was able to build a friendly relationship with Mukhtar, an Azerbaijani immigrant in Moscow with Russian citizenship. Coincidentally, Zaur's and Mukhtar's facial appearance were identical, to the point where it would be hard to distinguish between them. Zaur and Mukhtar came up with an agreement. Mukhtar lent his Russian passport to Zaur, who would use it to get a job as a clerk at the supermarket and to open a bank account. Moreover, he also gave Zaur two additional documents that would keep him out of trouble when stopped by law enforcement authorities: (1) a notarized copy of Mukhtar's passport, and (2) the original of his "*voenniy bilet*", an identifying document testifying that Mukhtar completed military service at the Russian army. In return, Zaur offered Mukhtar 5000 roubles per month (US$155, 2014 exchange rate) and, considering that Mukhtar was not accumulating any points for his pension as he was working informally at the bazaar, Zaur argued that due to his job Mukhtar would be registered formally in the state records, thus receiving social security and pension contributions.

Zaur hence approached the manager of the supermarket with Mukhtar's passport. After an interview, Zaur's job application was accepted and, thus, he was employed as a Russian citizen with 45000 roubles salary (US$1200, 2014 exchange rate) and two days off every week. He also managed to open a bank account at Sberbank and received a debit card. Zaur was known as a Russian citizen in his workplace and received his salary in a bank account, a thing which

is rare among many migrants in Russia. Zaur also started enjoying free mobility in the city, as police checks were no longer a problem for him, thanks to the additional documents given to him by Mukhtar. In August 2018, the last time the second author met Zaur in Moscow, he was still working at the same supermarket in Moscow.

## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Baha's and Zaur's stories are striking examples of the contingent, unpredictable, and unstable life-courses of Central Asian migrants in Russia. In a space characterized by a harsh and punitive official immigration legal regime, they are pushed to a status of marginality that makes their life extremely precarious. Yet, far from being passive actors of the official legal system, both Baha and Zaur devise creative strategies that allow them to remain in the Russian territory, to the point that they both manage to, at least ostensibly, 'legalize' their stay. Employing a social resilience framework allowed for an analysis of Baha's and Zaur's lived experiences and an understanding of how they managed their way out of critical situations where little room for action existed. This methodological choice enabled a focus on their emergent agency, underscoring their capacity to navigate crises. In this final section, we discuss the empirical and theoretical connections between law and social resilience in the case of migration.

First, our case study shows that, in a hybrid political regime, the relationship between law and social resilience is one of mutual constitution. While official law matters in shaping migrants' resilience, it does not on its own explain the whole of migrants' ability to withstand crises and shocks. Official law decides migrants' official status, and it creates, on paper, very little space for migrants to maintain an existence within the boundaries of official legality. Nonetheless, migrants make do with the resources available, which are predominantly financial (money allows them to buy fake IDs or bribe officials) and social (their network of friends and family). These resources permit migrants to navigate an informal substratum characterized by illegal or quasi-legal practices, which either are tolerated by the official regime (e.g., public advertising of printing houses) or are a function of how the official regime is implemented (e.g., bribing public officials). The crises in their lives frequently revolved around their legal status, which they lost due to various reasons (job loss, expiration of their legal stay, sudden change in the official law). While officially holding an illegal status, Baha and Zaur manage to regularize their stay in Russia by creatively taking advantage of the vagueness and inconsistent implementation of the official legal system.

The second contribution of our work is methodological, namely, the usefulness of a social resilience framework to study the empirical side of

migration laws in a hybrid political regime. By following Baha's and Zaur's life trajectories, we were able to show that any daily situation might hide a potential challenge, from a routine police check to the departure of a relative. The methodological approach was useful in depicting how changes in official law affected migrants' lives and how in turn, migrants find and exploit their resources to navigate these crises. If one analyzes the sociolegal situation of migrant workers in Russia from the perspective of a framework that centers the official legal regime and the adaptation to it by migrants, millions of migrants would simply be 'officially illegal'. Conversely, if one investigates Central Asian migrants' lives in Russia ethnographically, one finds their adaptive capacities *within* a system that officially pushes them to a marginal status. By highlighting migrants' agency within structural constraints, social resilience is a useful conceptual framework that, combined with an ethnographic approach, allows a migrants' "continuity and shifts" (Qamar 2023, p. 3) in their life course to emerge. Migrants' ability to cope with each crisis is, in fact, only understandable if one considers their accumulated knowledge and resources. A life-course angle allows us to show how the ups and downs in a migrant's life actually constitute a dynamic process that leads to the accumulation of important knowledge and resources. In the event of a crisis, knowledge and resources turn out to be key factors shaping migrants' ability to navigate the challenges they face.

Third and finally, our case study shows that the political and cultural context matters when discussing migrants social resilience. In particular, our study shows that a country like Russia, with a low rule of law-culture and high levels of corruption (Gel'man, 2004; Guillory, 2013; Ledeneva, 2013), creates a pressure for migrants' adaptive strategies to develop if they are to survive. In fact, in a hybrid political regime, there is a high probability for a crisis to occur (e.g., because laws are implemented arbitrarily), as well as space for creative agency to flourish (e.g., due to the unpredictability of laws' implementation). Any discussion of law and social resilience in the context of migration must therefore consider carefully the political and cultural context where the empirical material is collected. Our study suggests that, for a migrant in a hybrid political regime, the road to legality is full of illegal or quasi-legal arrangements. Social resilience, i.e., migrants' ability to creatively navigate crises in their lives and adjust to them, represents a useful vantage point to empirically investigate and more properly understand the boundaries between legality and illegality in hybrid political regimes like Russia.

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Chapter 4

# The Church's Café Serving Migrants in Sweden: Creating a Support Network for Social Resilience

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**Abstract**

This chapter is a case study exploring the role of the Church's Café in Sweden as a faith-based initiative fostering migrants' social resilience. Drawing on preliminary fieldwork, including interviews with the priest, deacon, and migrant participants, the study spotlights the church's café as an inclusive social space and a supportive social actor. The café provides migrants with opportunities to socialize, access useful information, and get practical support for everyday needs. It also facilitates the connections with Swedish social services, and provides help in language practice and cultural orientation. The findings reveal the potential of faith-based grassroot initiatives in shaping migrants' social resilience by bridging social networks, collaborating with civil society, and promoting inclusion beyond religious membership. While the café cannot resolve complex bureaucratic challenges, its empathetic understanding and guidance strengthen migrants' coping strategies and sense of belonging. The chapter argues that such grassroot initiatives demonstrate the strength and effectiveness of local social actors (such as religious organizations) who can act as social bridges, enhancing migrants' lived experiences and contributing to broader and ground-up understandings of social resilience and social integration.

**Keywords**: Social resilience, Migration, Faith-based organizations, Church café, Support networking, Social integration.

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International migration (especially forced migration) can be a traumatic event that includes the loss of one's home, loved ones, and status. Migrants in host

countries face change and challenges as they begin a new life. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, rising violent conflicts have increased international migration, mainly from war-torn countries (for example, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Yemen) to Europe. To help migrants meet their basic needs, humanitarian aid is provided by civil society, and religious and non-religious groups (Lyck-Bowen & Owen, 2019). Religious humanitarian traditions based on sympathy and charity are as old as religion itself. However, faith-based contribution to humanitarian aid is worth recognizing when they cooperate and collaborate with other agencies of all or no faith (Stoddard, 2003). The role of the church in the migrant support network has been established in studies as a religious contribution to humanitarian assistance. The church, in collaboration with other humanitarian aid organizations, has evolved into a professional volunteer organization, serving as a substantial source of migrants' access to social capital (Bassi, 2014; Canizales, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2017).

As a host country for many migrants, modern Sweden is a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. The Svenska Kyrkan (the Church of Sweden, henceforth "the Church") is a prominent supporter of fostering a multi-religious and multi-cultural Swedish society (Liljestrand, 2015). In the 21st century, the Church is seen as an emerging social agent contributing to social welfare in Sweden (Edgardh & Pettersson, 2010). Since the 2015 refugee crisis (with the majority of Muslim migrants migrating from the Middle East to Europe), the Church has shared the responsibility of supporting refugees (together with civil society and local communes). It has played a role in shaping migrants' resilience by providing support for living in Sweden. In addition to the language café (*Språkcafé*), to support migrants to be integrated into Swedish society, the support network was extended through a folk high school (*Helsjöns folk-högskola*), a second-hand shop (*Erikshjälpen Secondhand I Kortedala*) and other parishes of the Church (Linde et al., 2020). However, radical nationalists criticized these support activities.

Radical nationalism is politically aligned with the historical connections between Swedish(ness) and Christianity. The Church has been criticized by radical nationalist parties who want to see the role of the church in distinguishing 'Swedish Christians' from external (migrants) and internal (liberals) rivals. Despite political pressure and anti-Muslim campaigns portraying Muslims as a threat to ''Swedish(ness)'', the Church has progressively emerged as a defender of the welfare state and a civil society activist (Ideström & Linde, 2019; Nilsson, 2020). Gradually, the Church has illuminated its role in political activism through social commitments and its presence in civil society (Linde & Scaramuzzino, 2018). In addition to engaging and assisting local parishes, the Church attempts to mold public opinion in

favour of welcoming migrants to a rich welfare nation. Language cafés are one of the Church's attempts to create an inclusive social space for migrants where they can interact with Swedes and learn the language and culture (Helgesson, 2016).

One's social support network has a significant impact on resilience (Juliano & Yunes, 2014; Maclean et al., 2014; Linde et al., 2020; Southwick et al., 2016). On the one hand, social support provides psychological strength and works as a vital component of the coping process (Coyne & Downey, 1991; Thoits, 1986). On the social level, the support system strengthens the process to foster inclusive networking and form social capital that contributes to social resilience (Qamar, 2023a; Cinner & Barnes, 2019; Uphoff, 2000). There has been little research on the church as a supporting actor assisting the state and society in giving humanitarian aid on multi-religious and multi-cultural grounds. It is interesting to investigate the function of mainstream religious organizations in presenting themselves as a key component of a social support network that does not perceive religious membership as a mean of social visibility and access to social resources. Based on my field visit to a Church's Café, this article presents preliminary research related to the role of the church in fostering social resilience among migrants.

## Social Resilience and Migrants' Support Network

In the social sciences, social resilience is a relatively new term. It has frequently been used to describe coping mechanisms in crisis and disaster studies. Nevertheless, it has rarely been investigated as a phenomenon with a focus on migrants' support networks. The notion of resilience has been adapted from physical sciences to social sciences, and it has now become a multidisciplinary construct. In social sciences, the concept is associated with the human capacity to respond to and cope with adversity. The concept of social resilience has been in the spotlight in the twenty-first century, with a new emphasis on social dimensions of resilience (Cinner & Barnes, 2019). In this regard, Adger and colleague's definition of social resilience (2000, 2002) is one of the most widely used definitions. It defines social resilience as the ability to cope with external pressures while enhancing quality of life. Though the emphasis on social resilience as an ability to survive is consistent with definitions of resilience from other disciplines, the notion of 'ability' as a 'potential' is problematic, because it draws a line between so-called 'resilient' and 'non-resilient' responses. While experiencing a change, humans respond to it, and this eventually situates the social context of the response. Here, I realize that the predominant conceptualization of social resilience as an 'ability' or 'capacity' to respond and withstand crisis may be inadequate in understanding the experiences and resilience strategies that emerge from change, challenge, and continuity in the

host country. I argue that the variety of responses to adapt and grow stems from the multiplicity of environmental factors (and the complex interaction between these factors), the person-environment interaction, and social actors in the support network. These responses are process-oriented social constructs that contribute to migrants' social resilience.

The 'response' is a significant factor in determining the meaning of experiences in crisis. We cannot overlook the fact that 'response' connects perception (such as risk perception), experience (such as social experience), and context (such as migration). Perception, experience, and context are three dots that connect to form a sketch of lived experience in time and space. The interconnection of humans in the social world, the diversity of human experiences, and the intersectional influence of environmental factors shape the human reaction to adversity and contribute to the social phenomenon of resilience (Qamar, 2023b). Lived experiences and the embedded meaning-making processes result in a variety of capabilities, including endurance, adaptability, and creativity. However, these capabilities are co-constructed by the social actors who contribute to make sense of the lived experiences. In the context of migration, the understanding of social resilience should be based on the migrants' lived experiences and the role and contribution of the social actors in enhancing the social process of resilience.

In host countries, religious, non-religious, and civil society organizations (working for the migrants) possess a durable network and resources to support migrants. These organizations, as social actors, play a significant role in providing inclusive social spaces and supportive social networks to support migrants. Migrants go through the sufferings of human lives in their home countries and the complex asylum-seeking process in the host countries. They need support, guidance, and help to re-establish their lives. In the host country, they may face social and economic challenges. They may experience cultural and language barriers restricting the adaptive process. In this situation, the role of organizations becomes significant, and they must be sensitive in their design and implementation of support programs to address the integration, inclusion, and socio-economic needs of the migrants (Bucken-Knapp et al., 2019; Thommessen et al., 2015; Wallin & Ahlström, 2005). The active presence of these organizations helps in the creation of a gradually emerging social network for the migrants that becomes a source of practical information and support for housing, social services, education, work, and everyday needs. This social network ultimately contributes to migrants' adjustment, growth, and sustainability in the host country (Faist, 2000; Jennissen, 2004; Samers & Collyer, 2016). In this connection, the church as a supportive social actor can help to enhance the process of social resilience by interconnecting various sources (organizations, institutions) and forming a social bridge to connect

migrants with the resources provided by the sources. The church aims at helping migrants to be integrated into Swedish society. For this purpose, the church seeks collaboration with civil society and the public social service sector which is helpful to function as a support actor (Vikdahl et al., 2023).

## The Objectives of the Study

I have been working on social resilience and migrants' lived experiences in Sweden since April 2021. I started fieldwork to find potential participants after receiving ethical approval for my project from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (in September 2021). During early field visits to connect with migrants, I had a chance to visit the Church Café in a small town in Skåne County. This chapter is about my preliminary field visit to the Church Café. My findings are based on the interviews that I conducted with the administrative members and migrants in the café. I had two (whole day) visits to the café during which I paid attention to the physical site, the migrants who came to seek assistance, and the café's contribution to providing social support. I conducted individual and group interviews with the priest, deacon, and migrants.

The primary objective of this preliminary research was to understand the role of the Church's Café in helping migrants, assisting them in forming a support network, and contributing to their social resilience. The café provides economic and social assistance to enhance the social experience and shape social resilience among migrants. Overall, the chapter discusses the role of the Church café as a social work initiative presenting a philanthropic model of religious institutions in fostering migrants' social resilience, regardless of religious membership or status. I used this research excursion as a pilot study to further investigate how local social institutions (such as churches, mosques, and other similar institutes) can help to enhance social experiences, and how social experiences can shape social resilience among migrants.

## Method

As described earlier, the Church was purposively selected to gain an insight into the role of the Church café in providing an inclusive and supportive social space for the migrants. To ensure anonymity of the participants, I use fictitious names or the people's titles (such as the Priest). For this specific church, I use ‘the Church’, and I name the city as 'Svensk-Stad', which translates as ‘a Swedish city’. During my two visits, I interviewed a deacon, a priest, three migrant women (in a group interview), a man, and a young couple (Table 5.1). I interviewed all the participants in the English language, except for the group interviews with Arab women, who were interviewed with the help of an interpreter. All participant names used in this study are fictitious pseudonyms

to ensure anonymity. Quotations are reproduced with participants' informed consent, in accordance with ethical approval granted by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.

**Table 5.1 Participant Information**

| Participant/s | Description |
|---|---|
| The Priest | The project (the Church's Café) was headed by a priest who was in his sixties. He was the primary source of knowledge about the purpose and role of the Church's Café. |
| John | Deacon (fictitious name – John) was a young man in his thirties. He provided practical information about the café's support to migrants. |
| Arab women (Group interview) | The three Arab women (Naila, Hiba, Aqsa - fictitious names) in their forties were migrants and members of the café's women's wing. |
| Rajab, A man from Kuwait | Rajab (fictitious name) was a 48-year-old Kuwaiti man living in Sweden for eight years without a permanent residence permit. |
| The Afghan couple | The young Afghan couple (husband 'Inam' and wife 'Nabiha' - fictitious names) were in their twenties and had recently moved from Iran. |

### The Church Café

About ten years ago, the Priest and his colleagues proposed an idea to help and support migrants in the area. The idea eventually evolved into a sophisticated form of the Church's Café. This café is a meeting place where migrants share their concerns and issues and seek support. The priest and the deacons try to assist them in all possible ways.

The café was situated in a building with two halls (one small and one large). Both halls contain kitchenettes stocked with cooking utensils and appliances. The small hall was used as a common place for the employees who served the café, for occasional meetups, and for the youth who visited the café in the afternoon. The large hall was the café, where migrants met once a week. There were chairs and tables to sit, dine, and drink. The hall's seating capacity was approximately 100 individuals. A kitchen was located at the far end, and one of the organizers was responsible for arranging coffee, tea, juice, and sweets for the migrants. On one side of the hall, there was a 'children's corner, with a carpet and a cupboard full of toys and books. Unlike the Church's main building, the café hall does not have any symbolic representation of

Christianity in the form of pictures, paintings, or religious texts. As most of the migrants visiting the café were Muslims, it seemed intentional to maintain the physical environment as non-religious.

The deacons and women from the Church (who were Swedish) attended to and helped the migrants visiting the café. The support was provided in the form of information, contacting, and seeking help from social welfare services, and meeting basic needs (for example, food and clothes). The Church Café had a women's wing where the migrant women could help other migrant women. In Muslim cultures, women are expected to seek support from other women and avoid a direct approach to men (Stewart et al., 2008). In this sense, the women's wing was a sensible resource to connect and help women migrants that were mostly Muslims.

This chapter is based on a single case study, and the Church's Café in this study should not be seen as a representative of other church cafés in Sweden. However, the Church's Café in this study may be seen as an initiative by the Church to provide human right-based support and socially inclusive spaces for all migrants, respecting their religious diversities and sentiments.

## Results

Based on the qualitative analysis of the interviews, I present the findings in two thematic categories: 'The Church Café as Inclusive Social Space' and 'The Church Café as Supportive Social Actor'.

### The Church Café as an Inclusive Social Space

The motivation to take the initiative to establish the Church Café is primarily based on providing an inclusive social space to the newcomers (migrants). The idea is intricately connected to the social inclusion of marginalized communities and minorities. In this sense, the Church's Café is an example of laying the groundwork for interaction with migrants from multi-religious backgrounds. As the Church itself is a religious institution, to give people from diverse religious backgrounds a sense of inclusion becomes a sensitive and challenging task. I observed that almost all the migrants at the café were Muslims, and the Church's Café presented a religiously neutral social venue for the migrants. On the walls, there was no symbolic representation of Christianity. There were no Bibles on the desks or in the cabinets. The bags (for food and clothes) were not labelled or marked with any Christian symbols. During the conversation, the Priest said:

> I am not sure how it is done in other parishes in Sweden. However, as you can see, we are simply trying to help and support the migrants as human beings and on human grounds. We do not attempt to persuade

> people with our 'Christian persona' anyhow. The whole idea is about providing a social space for all where we can host them, listen to them, and support them in whatever ways we can (Priest, personal communication, April 18, 2022).

John (the deacon), talking about the number of migrants visiting the café, talked about how the majority of the Muslim migrants come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

> We don't have a lot of migrants coming to the café. But yes, they come from different social and cultural backgrounds, though almost all of them are Muslims. They are from Afghanistan, Syria, Kuwait, Iran, Somalia, etc. The café opens once a week, but that is a place for socialization and making connections. The migrants can reach us on other days by visiting us or contacting us through email (John, personal communication, April 18, 2022).

John talked about helping migrants with food and clothes in collaboration with a charity organization. "Sometimes people approach us if they need something and sometimes, we have stuff to give away. With the support of a charity organization, we try to provide them with food and other things. We do it quietly and the bags are not labelled or tagged. (John, personal communication, April 18, 2022)" The Church Café is the Church's initiative to provide an inclusive social space for migrants. This social space is used to provide an inclusive space where migrants can gather, talk to each other, and share their issues and experiences with the café management. Hence, the Church café serves to bring people together in one place where they can connect. At the same time, the priest and deacons reach out directly to the migrants to offer support.

**The Church Café as Supportive Social Actor**

Though the café is a meeting place to socialize and spend time together, the Church café is a multipurpose place. Besides providing a social space for migrants, it is a support hub to address migrants' needs on several levels. For example, to meet basic needs, the Church Café collaborates with a charity organization to support migrants with food and clothing. Migrants get information, advice, and guidance that is relevant to their everyday lives. To learn more about the Church Café's support for basic needs I had a group conversation with the migrant women who were the members of the women's wing of the Church's Café. To facilitate the conversations, the Priest introduced me to Laila, who is a social worker and who offered her voluntary services as an interpreter in the Church Café. She was fluent in Arabic and Swedish. Her role

was important in connecting newcomer migrants (who were mostly Arabic-speaking) with the café admin, who did not know the Arabic language. The migrant women (who volunteered to work in the women's wing) in the group told me about their role in helping other migrant women. Hiba: "*We come here once a week. We sit here and welcome the women who come to the café. We try to help them and educate them on how the café can support them. For example, they may need winter clothes or food. They may need advice or information at times, such as when seeking medical treatment. We listen to them and talk with the people at the café (deacons and the Priest), and they assist us* (Hiba, personal communication, May 23, 2022)." Naila: "*Occasionally, they talk about their children. For example, how to care for children in Sweden. We know and understand the difference in parenting in Arab and Swedish cultures. We discuss their issues with the café admin and then communicate with the migrants* (Naila, personal communication, May 23, 2022)."

Naila also mentioned that Swedish people did not have much social interaction with the migrants. The Church's Café is a place to connect with some Swedish people and learn from them. Though there are not many Swedish people who visit the café, the café admin including deacons and other people (serving in the café) are Swedish. In this way, the café is a social space to have a friendly interaction with Swedish people and to learn about social life in Sweden. There are several issues that newcomers may face, for example, access to education, medical help, libraries, and other social services (such as support for children). The people at the Church Café try to solve these issues by providing information and guidance. Sometimes the deacons connect to the service providers to help the migrants. The Afghan couple (Inam and Nabiha) who were new in the city, shared their experience and their immediate needs, on which they wanted the deacon's help. Their migration case was under process, and immigration officials sent them to Svensk-Stad. Some migrants told them about the café, and they started visiting it for socialization and support.

Inam: "*We do not pay for housing here. We get money every month, but it barely covers our basic needs, such as clothes and food. Now we have started school to learn the Swedish language. The school is free, but they do not speak English, and we are having difficulty understanding the language. Someone told us about the café here and we came here to seek help* (Inam, personal communication, May 23, 2022)." Inam and Nabiha wanted to have free internet, and they were looking for some support from the café. Inam: "*We must spend money to get internet access. We need free Wi-Fi access. We called the migration office for help. They asked me to bring a letter from the school with information to provide them with support in this regard. The school gave me a letter, but the immigration office refused to accept it. They are asking for a letter on 'special' paper* (Inam, personal communication, May 23, 2022)." The support they were receiving

from the municipality was for their basic needs, such as food and clothing. They did not have any support for other activities. They were learning Swedish, but it was challenging for them. The teachers were not using English (or their language) as an instructional language that could help them to start from the basics. They were not offered free internet which might be a good source of online resources to learn the language. They visited the café to seek help and to get free internet. The Priest asked Inam to provide more information and any correspondence he had with the school. It seemed an official protocol to provide them free access to the internet, and for that, the migration office required formal paperwork from the school. The Priest and John decided to contact the concerned authorities to find out a solution. The availability of free Internet might help Inam and Nabiha in learning the language, communicating with others, seeking employment, and discovering new places and opportunities.

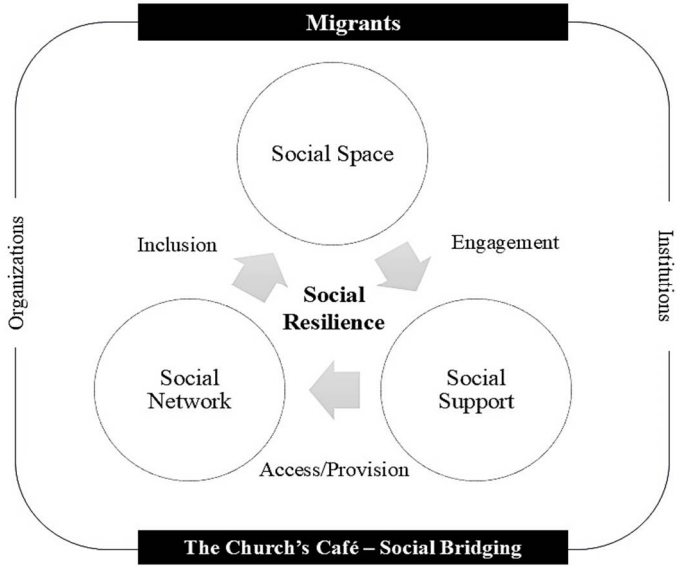
Besides providing basic support to meet every day needs, the café management was trying to help with everything that migrants shared with them by reaching out to other sources or institutions, who could do something to resolve the issues. For example, Rajab's story was interesting. He was living in Sweden for ten years and he was still worried about his legal status. When I met Rajab at the café, he was sitting with John with some papers in his hands. Later, during the conversation with him, he talked about his issues living without permanent residency. "*They (the immigration office in Sweden) say that Kuwait is a rich country with oil. Why should I stay here? Do they realize that children require milk rather than oil?* (Rajab, personal communication, April 18, 2022)."

According to Rajab, he was refused because the migration agency did not see his case as strong enough to assign permanent residence in Sweden. Rajab did not learn the Swedish language. He is at an age where learning a new language is not easy and he explained that the uncertainty about his stay in Sweden led to a lack of motivation to learn the language. Rajab used to visit the café to socialize and to get general support. The support he was seeking to find a way to get a residence permit was more challenging for the Church Café administration. They are not able to directly engage in legal matters. During the interview, I asked John about such cases, and he said: "*Generally, we can provide them with support regarding basic needs (such as clothes and food). We are in contact with a charity organization to provide support to the migrants. We provide information, assistance, advice, and counselling. We try to listen to them and give them the freedom to express themselves freely about their issues. This is a way to make them feel included with us. However, sometimes undocumented migrants approach us and ask for help. In this case, we are not an authority. We can only advise and guide them, and in some cases accompany them to the migration office.*" Researcher: "*What are the cases when you accompany them to the migration office?*" John: "*We agree that cases are sometimes unnecessarily*

*delayed and that they should be resolved based on human rights. We try to speak with the migration office about the case, the issues that the migrants face without legal status, and possible solutions to expedite the procedure.*" Researcher: "*Isn't it unpleasant for the migration office when you question or argue with them?*" John: "*Yes, it isn't always easy. They become annoyed at times, and they likely think we're interfering in their routine process. We understand they may be constrained by some sort of formal protocol. However, we maintain a respectful but consistent stance on migrants' human rights in this country. In short, we do our best to assist them* (John, personal communication, April 18, 2022)."

Theoretically, the Church Café is an initiative to provide a socialization and support platform for the migrants where they sit together, and besides being connected socially, they talk about their needs and issues. The café primarily serves as a socialization platform, supporting migrants economically, socially, and politically by fostering person–environment connections through information, guidance, and practical support. Though in some cases, where the bureaucratic processes are complex and lengthy, they have little to do, they listen with empathy and try to help migrants to some extent (wherever they can). The café (in this study) is trying to form a social bridge to engage social actors (religious/non-religious and civil society organizations, and institutions) in creating a social support network by interconnecting resources (Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1 The Church's Café: Social Bridging to Create a Support Network and Foster Social Resilience**



## Discussion

Faith-based organizations are affiliated with a religious body that has religious values and receives financial assistance from the religious body. On an administrative and support level, these organizations may be linked to an established religious body (such as the Church in this article) or other religiously oriented organizations (Ferris, 2005). The Church, Sweden's largest Christian communion, maintains and organizes the Church's Café. The sponsorship from the Church provides operational strength to the café to serve the migrants. Nonetheless, the Church café contacts non-religious independent organizations to seek their cooperation in assisting migrants (e.g., the Red Cross).

The Church café reflects the Priest's and his team's altruistic and empathetic role in listening, understanding, and supporting migrants. Their work represents the 'Diakonia,' which (in Christian traditions) means to care for one's neighbours by expressing compassion, listening, and supporting them. In this sense, faith-based support implies that humanitarian aid should always be unbiased, apolitical, and based on the principle of universal brotherhood. Since Christian and Muslim activists' humanitarian support is based on human rights, dignity, and equality (Christian Aid, 2021; Muslim Aid, 2008), there is no space for religious or politically driven charitable agendas. Serving others regardless of religious, political, cultural, or ethnic background is part of the code of conduct for impartial and altruistic humanitarian aid. Faith-based institutions coordinating humanitarian aid with a socially inclusive approach set up human rights-based initiatives to support migrants (Gardemann & Wilp, 2016). In the case of places like the Church's café, the primary objective is to create a social support network for the migrants that should ultimately support the process of social resilience. This is only possible if the place can provide a sense of belongingness and trust by creating an inclusive social space for migrants without the manifestation of religious symbols that can trigger a sense of insecurity and vulnerability among migrants from different religions.

In this study, the café's services and the environment do not represent Christian symbolism or promote humanitarian assistance in the name of Christianity. The name of the café (which cannot be disclosed here) represents a religious office or title that may be questioned if the intention is not to spotlight the Church's mission. There are examples in nearby cities where the civil society took the initiative to set up a café for migrants to provide them with support and social space. They used a name that makes more sense to me, for example, the café with the name '*Tillsammans,'* which means being together. Having said that, the Church's café is doing the job as it should. The Café's service to people in need may be seen as a central mission of the Church based on compassion and equality (Ferris, 2005; Vikdahl et al., 2023). Their work in

supporting Muslim migrants is significant, especially against the backdrop of progressively developing radical nationalism and anti-migrant politics (Finseraas, 2012; Nilsson, 2020). In addition to offering practical assistance (food and clothes), deacons assisted migrants in resolving settlement and legal status issues. Their ability to influence legal processes or decisions is limited; nonetheless, their supportive gestures and guidance helped resolve other issues (including access to medical and educational resources available in the city). Hence, the role of the Church's Café (as observed in this study) is central to enhancing the migrants' social experiences by backing them with information/advice, social networking, and empathetic support. Ultimately, the migrants use this unconditional support as a resource to cope with the challenges they face in their everyday lives.

## The Challenge of Bringing People Together

In 2011, a church (in Norway) invited me to attend a talk on forgiveness and reconciliation at the Saint Olav Festival. I was one of the speakers among three from Abrahamic religions (Jews, Christians, and Muslims) who talked about forgiveness and reconciliation from the scriptures of their respective religions. It was a remarkable project to promote multicultural relationships among different communities in Norway. However, I was surprised to hear that a few people were upset with the church for permitting a Muslim to recite the Quran in church. These intolerant voices may be few, but they considerably hinder the church's efforts to help and support migrants of other religions. Helgesson (2016) gave a similar example quoting a vicar, describing an incident in which a Swede misunderstood Christian migrants as Muslims and reacted aggressively: "*One man was shocked once, seeing a group of Eritreans lying down on the church floor. He was upset because he thought that the church had loaned its building to Muslims. After some heated conversations with him, he learned that this was a way for this group of Christians (migrants) to honor the church room as a holy room*" (Helgesson, 2016, p. 77). In this instance, the Church (which obviously cannot mute the intolerant voices) faces the challenge of giving a voice to migrants about their human rights (as a refugee) and visibility as members of society. The political presence of the Church becomes significant in shaping the opinion of the majority population to bring people together through their support network. Helping and supporting Muslim migrants may be a difficult and sensitive task for the Church, especially in the context of religious intolerance. The participants in this study did not report any religious intolerance, and the Church café (in this study) is seen as an initiative to bring migrants from diverse backgrounds together in an inclusive social space. I did not see local Swedes attending these gatherings, except the volunteers (usually old people) who help the café administration. The café administration was not

successful to attract or engage locals to join the gatherings. Yet, it demonstrates its reflective capacity to include people regardless of religious differences and other explicitly diverse social and cultural characteristics that may be used to exclude minorities in the dominant social set-up (Ghorashi & Ponzoni, 2014; Rast & Ghorashi, 2018).

Religious affiliation may be a way of gaining access to social and religious capital. A multireligious organizational approach to integration is overlooked (Lyck-Bowen & Owen, 2019). In the context of migration from the Middle East to Europe, the role of the church as a leader in bringing people together is challenging. The Church's café is one example where the Priest and his team are serving the migrants by providing support, information, and a place for socialization. This support may be further developed and extended through a multireligious collaboration involving other religious actors, particularly the Mosque and Islamic cultural centres in the region (for example, cooperation among a church, a mosque, and Islamic Relief to build bridges for multireligious integration, see Lyck-Bowen, 2020). Nevertheless, it is a challenging and demanding task to bring the Church and the Mosque to collaborate and form a working relationship for a common cause in a society where political and media actors may practice their influence otherwise.

According to Helgesson (2016), one of the functions of the church's café is to offer a place where "*participants can meet Swedes, learn Swedish, and learn about Swedish society and culture*" (p. 84). During my ongoing research on young adult migrants' social experiences in Sweden, I had a chance to visit some social cafés organized by the church, civil society, and local organizations. However, I did not find local Swedes joining these gatherings, except those who were already part of the initiative, volunteers wanting to help the cause or elderly individuals who enjoyed interacting with the people at the café. The people working in these social cafés believed that the presence of Swedish families and children might make an enormous difference. The 'café' has found its place among migrants who visit it to make connections, learn the language, get information, and find support. However, it is still struggling to decrease the social distance between migrants and local Swedes. To serve as a bridge between migrants and Swedes, the café should be a place where both can learn about one another's culture and language. Learning the Swedish language and culture is increasingly essential for migrants who want to live and work in Sweden; however, it is equally important for Swedes to learn about the migrants' social and cultural life to understand them and count them as 'us' in the Swedish multicultural democratic society. This mutual understanding can help to enhance social experiences, foster social resilience, and transform a multicultural and multireligious society.

## Conclusion

In the context of migration and drawing on the social constructionist approach, I see 'status, network, support, and visibility' as four dimensions of social resilience that are institutionally embedded and connected by environmental factors and social experiences. Social resilience, as a social phenomenon, is characterized by the social experiences of the migrants embodied in the hosting country's social, political, economic, and cultural (SPEC) environments (Qamar, 2023b). The Church's café is one of the supportive actors for migrants on political, economic, and social levels. Though the level of support may vary according to the issue and the extent of intervention that the Café admin can practice, the support contributes to migrants' social resilience in the host country. As this study was conducted as a pilot study, there is a need for further empirical investigation to examine the working of other church cafés, their role and challenges, the connection gaps (such as collaboration with other religious and non-religious organizations), the workable solutions, and their contribution to foster social resilience.

The several (sociocultural, economic, and political) challenges that migrants face are interrelated. Addressing the challenges requires a 'migrant-centred' understanding of support and assistance. An inter-sectoral collaboration is essential to address the relevance of support needs with migrants' perceptions and requirements (Stewart et al., 2008). In this study, the Church and one non-religious organization (Red Cross) worked together to develop a support network for migrants. However, the role of the non-religious organization (in this case) seemed to be solely that of providing support for basic needs (food and clothing). On the other hand, the café admin tried to provide support on various levels to help migrants for their social visibility. Here, (religious and non-religious) welfare organizations, local communes, migration offices, social service centres, and other individual social actors (such as lawyers and politicians) should collaborate to secure the political and socioeconomic rights of the migrants. Meanwhile, the Swedish community can team up with (religious and non-religious) welfare organizations and local communes to provide sociocultural support to migrants and help them to gain membership visibility in society.

The role of the Church's Café in giving psychosocial support to migrants is both valuable and challenging. Going beyond religious barriers (which divide humans) requires a will to work freely without external or internal restraints. However, it is the responsibility of all individuals who are regarded as members of the host society (including locals, officials, professionals, and religious people) to adhere to the moral principles of universal brotherhood. The Church's Café might serve as a platform for mobilizing the support of other individuals and organizations for this mission. Language cafés and church

cafés in Sweden can play a key role in supporting migrants through education (including parenting and living in Sweden), counselling, and social support. There is a need to integrate religious and non-religious organizations to work toward a common goal of creating a multicultural, peaceful world.

Considering the limitations that the café admin has in resolving issues that involve bureaucratic processes, I cannot say that the Church café is a place to resolve migrants' issues that are related to their rights as documented residents. However, the café can be seen as a step forward in setting up inclusive social spaces for the migrants where they are visible in society. Several other services could be incorporated into this initiative; for example, formalizing a plan for parenting education and guidance for the migrants, and extending collaboration to other stakeholders in the area (for example, Muslim cultural centres or mosques). The 'café' could be used as an effective and collaborative social platform to engage civil society and religious/non-religious organizations to broaden the social base for the migrants and to help them understand change, face challenges, and enhance their adaptive and transformative experiences.

This case study of the Church's Café in Sweden shows social resilience as a relational process built through inclusive social spaces and supportive networks. The chapter fills a gap in migration studies that often overlooks grassroot initiatives such as mainstream religious actors, civil society, and other social actors. Future research should compare similar initiatives across contexts to deepen understanding of how local institutions shape migrants' trajectories of integration and resilience.

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Chapter 5

# Cultivating in the Margins: Collaborative Ethnographic Reflections on Social Resilience among Immigrants of Color in the Day-to-Day

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**Abstract**

This chapter examines migrants' social resilience through an auto-ethnographic lens, drawing on the lived experiences of two immigrant authors navigating everyday life in the United States. Situated within a combined framework of social resilience and a desire-based approach, the chapter moves beyond deficit-oriented narratives of migration to foreground migrants' agency, relational strengths, and adaptive capacities. Through personal narratives of cultural brokering, mental health help-seeking, and identity negotiation, the authors illustrate how resilience is enacted in mundane yet meaningful interactions shaped by cultural norms, institutional structures, and power relations. The analysis highlights how pre-migration cultural contexts intersect with post-migration experiences, shaping how immigrants navigate unfamiliar social systems while cultivating belonging and well-being. Methodologically, the chapter contributes to migration studies by demonstrating the value of auto-ethnography as a form of intellectual activism that centers migrant voices and lived expertise. Conceptually, it advances understandings of social resilience as a dynamic, relational process rooted not only in survival but also in desire, dignity, and the pursuit of possibility. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the implications of culturally responsive practices for research, policy, and professional fields such as mental health counseling.

**Keywords**: Social resilience, migration, auto-ethnography, desire-based framework, immigrant agency, cultural identity, mental health, cultural brokering, intellectual activism, everyday resilience.

* * *

Immigrants and their children are severely minoritized in the United States and other immigrant-receiving nations. Particularly, immigrants of Color are often excluded from decision-making bodies and processes, which shape their lives and discriminated against in everyday interactions (Binggeli et al., 2015; Dixon et al., 2018; Martin & Blinder, 2020). Their immigrant status and related experiences are often politicized and lead to barriers to accessing physical and mental health resources and care (many of which are culturally inappropriate or linguistically inaccessible) (Thomson et al., 2015). Often, accessing and legally performing everyday processes such as obtaining legal identification, registering children for public school, navigating issues with discriminatory landlord practices, and discarding trash without facing fees or legal issues, are significant impediments to a dignified life in the U.S. and yet another insidious way in which hegemonic inequities are reinforced (e.g., Shi et al., 2023). These daily experiences accumulate and are understood to cause significant stress and detriment to immigrants' whole selves (Patel et al., 2017; Sangalang et al., 2019; Li et al., 2016; Byrow et al., 2022). Nevertheless, despite, and sometimes in response to, everyday oppression and barriers to accessing culturally appropriate mental health care, immigrants of Color continue to cultivate vibrant and resilient lives full of wisdom and desires. And while ideally these nuanced experiences and realities would lead to a vibrant, multi-dimensional immigrant-led literature and praxis, in the U.S., psychological research relating to immigrants, their experiences, and their mental health continue to be dominated by White, non-immigrant voices and centered on White praxis.

As we, two authors with different yet distinctly immigrant experiences, navigate fields of psychology steeped in White, non-immigrant voices, we hope to, in this chapter, give pause and reflection to this hegemonic, colonial legacy by sharing insights in the form of collaborative auto-ethnographic reflections about personal experiences of social resilience which center our immigrant experiences. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to reflect and analyze, as an immigrant author (Mrudula) and second-generation immigrant author (Yani), moments of social resilience in our lives through a social constructionist approach to social resilience and a desire-based framework. In doing this, we aim to reflexively engage with the ongoing process of decolonizing our areas of psychological work and praxis with our whole selves, as scholar-activists have called for and modeled (Langhout, 2015).

First, we will briefly introduce meaningful contexts and frameworks related to immigrant social resilience to situate this chapter. Next, before sharing our reflexive stories and the insights we have gleaned from them, we will provide relevant context and positionality statements to ground our narratives. Then, we will share two reflexive pieces that provide insight into how our post-migration conditions have shaped our social resilience experiences. We hope these reflexive stories contribute critically to the ongoing work to center and celebrate everyday immigrant stories in psychology.

## Immigrants in the West

"Immigrant" describes those who migrate and relocate semi-permanently or permanently to improve their lives. The term captures a unique and life-changing identity and condition yet cannot capture, in a word, the richness, and diversity of the global immigrant community. In the West, immigrants generally emigrate from countries in the Global South, which refers to the areas of our world which are politically and economically disadvantaged due to contemporary global capitalism (Mahler, 2017) and now neoliberalism (Boden, 2011). The Global South is also sometimes defined as formally and currently colonialized areas (Grovogui, 2011) and broadly includes the majority of the global population, including those in Central, South, and East Asia, Central and South America, the Middle East, Southeastern Europe, and Africa. When in their post-migration contexts, immigrants from the Global South are generally socioeconomically and politically marginalized, disadvantaged, and subject to anti-immigrant attitudes, discrimination, and prejudice (Hynie, 1996). Broadly, in their Western post-migration contexts, immigrants commonly face barriers to socioeconomic mobility, power, resources, and representation through discriminatory factors in areas such as employment, health care, and politics (Bogic et al., 2012; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Bloemraad, 2013; Dixon et al., 2018; Dancygier et al., 2015; Martin & Blinder, 2020). Studies have demonstrated how members of groups with less access to sociopolitical power and economic resources are at higher risk for developing mental disorders and have poorer mental health (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008; World Health Organization and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2014).

Within the mental health counseling profession, work with immigrants and their children must prioritize cultural sensitivity and self-awareness, two essential aspects of providing effective support to individuals with intersectional cultural identities. Recognizing personal values and biases shaped by one's cultural background is vital to ensure culturally responsive counseling practices. Cultural sensitivity involves understanding and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds, which in turn enhances the therapeutic relationship and promotes positive mental health outcomes (Sue

& Sue, 2016). By acknowledging personal values and biases, mental health professionals can create a safe and inclusive space that fosters clients' resilience and well-being. Bhugra (2004) emphasizes the importance of cultural competence in counseling, which involves understanding and respecting diverse cultural values, norms, and beliefs. Developing cultural competence allows mental health professionals to effectively navigate cultural differences and promote positive mental health outcomes and must be prioritized.

### A Social Constructionist Approach to Social Resilience

Resilience is most commonly conceptualized as an ability to absorb external stress and change while sustaining and maintaining livelihood (Adger et al., 2002), yet some scholars (see Estêvão et al., 2017; Ungar, 2011; 2013; Qamar, 2023) have argued that this definition, when ecologically situated, depoliticizes and ignores social contexts, post-migration conditions (e.g., available resources, cultural attitudes, and adversity, creating enduring and surviving experiences; Qamar, 2023) and mechanisms of control and power. It also individualizes personal resources and capacity as traits one must access and grow to adapt to their context. This definition of resilience, the ability to absorb external stress and to change, takes the spotlight off structural or institutional injustices shaping post-migration conditions by eroding immigrants' dignity while extolling the virtue of "resilience" in the individual. This neoliberal notion of individual resilience fails to acknowledge the critical role of social institutions and context which shape immigrants' lives and dignity. A social constructionist approach, however, emphasizes the transformative capacities of individuals, communities, and social institutions to adapt to challenges while also recognizing how power dynamics and systems shape our capacities (Qamar, 2023; Betteridge & Webber, 2019; Harris et al., 2018). Through a social constructionist approach, social resilience is conceptualized as the experience, rather than ability, of communities to take in external stresses and changes while sustaining themselves (Qamar, 2023). This conceptualization emphasizes immigrants' lived experiences and brings in context and nuance of immigrants' post-migration conditions. A social constructionist approach to social resilience, therefore, works to de-individualize the notion of resilience to center the collective forces and power that shape experiences of resilience (DeVerteuil, 2017).

### A Desire-Based Framework

While writing on social resilience among immigrants, it's important to acknowledge the historical and current over-emphasis on immigrants' "damage" or their helplessness and hopelessness. This overemphasis has been denounced by activists and scholars who have called for more desire-based

frameworks, which "suspend damage" (but not *ignore* damage) and center the rich desires, complexities, humanity, and wholeness of communities (Tuck, 2009). Rather than frame entire communities and minoritized populations as one-dimensional sufferers without agency who only exist to receive harm from their oppressors, Eve Tuck (2009) has called for a desire-based framework that centers on the complex wholeness of immigrants and their communities. The scant nature of immigrant-centered and reflexively processed literature calls for increased research which aims to understand the complicated, intersectional nuances of immigrants and their experiences of resilience.

This chapter will combine the social constructionist approach to social resilience with a desire-based framework through which Eve Tuck (2009) has called scholars of marginalized communities to center the desires, wisdom, and rich experiences that are often forgotten in research with those who are marginalized. Taken altogether, this chapter conceptualizes immigrant social resilience as a contextualized social phenomenon characterized by immigrants' lived experiences of challenges related to their post-migration context (Qamar, 2023; Ungar, 2013) which is held alongside the rich wisdom and desires that shape their experiences of resilience (Tuck, 2009).

## Positionality

Communicating positionality is a reflexive practice in which researchers describe where they stand in relation to their research subjects. Critical, sensitive, and reflexive approaches to research emphasize the importance of identifying areas of tension and our assumptions, expectations, and background, which shape our research (Sarason, 2004; Arcidiacono, 2017). Due to the autoethnographic nature of this chapter, positionality is especially important to provide context for our reflections.

### Mrudula

My deep connection to Indian culture as an immigrant has shaped my understanding of cultural identity. Growing up in a joint family and experiencing the influence of the caste system have added complexities to my life, including expectations based on gender and social status, such as what I "could" wear or how I "had" to behave. As an individual belonging to the Brahmin caste in India, my cultural identity carried with it certain expectations and responsibilities. Specifically, as a "Brahmin girl," I was subject to various rules and regulations that were not imposed on my male counterparts. One such example was the requirement to be home before 6 pm, while my brothers did not have the same obligation. As a Brahmin, I belonged to the top caste, which brought both privileges and expectations. The rules and regulations

associated with being a Brahmin were imposed on me, and even today, the pressure to conform to these customs and marry within my caste persists.

Similarly, religion, particularly Hinduism, played a significant role in shaping my upbringing. While I did not have a choice in following these beliefs, they became ingrained in my daily life. Relocating from India to the U.S. brought significant changes to my understanding of cultural identity. The shift from a collective lifestyle to an individualistic society challenged my beliefs and values. While it provided me with the opportunity to explore my own choices and freedom, it also created a conflict between collective and individualistic values, impacting my ability to counsel clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Importantly, my experiences highlight the impact of cultural values on mental health. Personally, experiencing depression and witnessing the associated stigma within Indian culture has emphasized the need for greater awareness and acceptance of mental health issues within our communities.

**Yani**

I am a U.S.-born child of Chinese immigrants whose grandfather fought against the communist control of mainland China, resulting in the limiting of their educational, labor, and financial opportunities. My parents immigrated to the U.S., where, shortly after, my siblings and I were born. My family and I have experienced many normative realities of immigrants in the West. We faced normative immigrant family stressors (e.g., discrimination, intergenerational cultural dissonance (ICD), acculturation gaps, language barriers, and transnational biological family). As kids, we navigated U.S. and Chinese cultures through our bilingualism and acted as cultural brokers for our parents. For most of our lives, our nuclear family was our only biological family in the U.S. However, we were surrounded by a large East Asian Immigrant community of mainly Chinese and Taiwanese aunties and uncles who acted as a family (i.e., fictive kin). As of about a decade ago and currently, my family has become more financially stable, and our access to healthcare, higher education, and employment (and subsequently, our socioeconomic status) has increased. As a Ph.D. graduate, I am one of about 28% of Ph.D. students in the U.S. who are immigrants or children of immigrants (Batalova & Feldblum, 2020). These identities and experiences reflect many of the normative experiences of children of immigrants in the West. My lived experiences and published literature inform my analysis and research. However, my singular lived experiences and insights will always limit my understanding of others, and my biases as a *child* of immigrants may lead me to overlook certain immigrants' experiences. Due to this, I work to apply reflexive practices (e.g., positionality statements) and methodological approaches (e.g., semi-structured, qualitative

methods, community-based participatory action research (CBPR)), which center participants' lived experiences and voices.

## Our Stories of Social Resilience

### Mrudula

Upon my arrival in the United States in 2011, I was immediately greeted with the promise of abundant educational opportunities. My enthusiasm and eagerness to learn were palpable, but my journey as an immigrant bore unique challenges. These challenges, deeply rooted in my Indian heritage, formed the crucible of my personal and academic development.

The transitional phase from India to the United States was marked by a profound alteration in my understanding of cultural identity. I encountered a shift from a collective, familial lifestyle to a more individualistic society, which stirred a whirlwind of emotions and personal growth. This transition compelled me to question my values, beliefs, and personal aspirations in the face of newfound freedom. It provided me with the opportunity to explore and make choices independently, a privilege I had not known before. Nevertheless, this newfound autonomy also introduced a poignant inner conflict, with my personal values colliding with those of the individualistic society in which I now resided. Navigating this dichotomy has not been without its challenges.

My narrative underscores the significant impact of cultural values and societal norms on one's mental health and overall well-being. I confronted personal experiences with depression, only to be met with the stigma that often shadows the topic within Indian culture. Depression, in the context of my upbringing, was not regarded as a genuine issue but rather dismissed as mere "drama." This revelation was met with considerable internal conflict, as I grappled with societal expectations, familial obligations, and personal health.

Overcoming the stifling fear of non-acceptance, due to my depression, by society, family, and my cultural heritage was a formidable hurdle. It necessitated an extended period of introspection and required immense courage to accept that my prevailing lifestyle was detrimental to my mental health. Despite numerous heartfelt conversations with my parents, their inability to grasp the depth of my struggle reinforced a profound sense of isolation. The dearth of familial support compounded my emotional turmoil, pushing me perilously close to emotional rock bottom. In search of solace, I quietly embarked on a path to counseling, attending sessions that marked a turning point in my life. This transformative experience ignited a fervent desire to advocate for those who grapple with similar challenges, driving me toward a career as a mental health counselor. My aspiration is to be an agent of positive change and to pave the way for a brighter tomorrow.

This chapter of my life illuminates the reality that cultural identity casts a profound influence on individuals and their mental health. As I work towards a career in mental health counseling, I am fervently dedicated to cultivating cultural sensitivity and competence, particularly when interacting with diverse populations. The critical importance of recognizing personal values and biases is etched into my approach, ensuring that I create a therapeutic space where clients can freely explore their cultural identities and address their mental health concerns.

The immigrant community, often faced with unfamiliar social structures and norms, often exemplifies remarkable experiences of social resilience. In a new land, immigrants build networks, find support in each other, and create a sense of belonging, even amidst challenges. This collective resilience forms a cornerstone of immigrant communities, providing the essential support system needed to navigate the complexities of cultural assimilation.

In light of my personal journey and the broader context of social resilience among immigrants, I am committed to raising awareness of mental health issues within cultural communities and fostering an inclusive environment that champions the mental health of individuals seeking help. It is my fervent hope that I can empower others to take charge of their lives, just as I have learned to navigate this complex and transformative path. Through cultural understanding, personal resilience, and collective social support, immigrants can not only survive but thrive, embracing their unique identities while contributing meaningfully to their adopted society.

***Key Takeaways***

Cultural identity is closely linked to mental health and well-being, as individuals' cultural backgrounds and beliefs provide them with a sense of meaning, belonging, and support (Berry et al., 2006; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Cultural factors like the caste system and religious beliefs can impact an individual's sense of identity and well-being. The caste system, for example, can lead to social stratification and discrimination, which can negatively affect mental health outcomes (Kumar & Kumar, 2012; Varnik, 2016). Similarly, religious beliefs and practices can influence individuals' coping mechanisms and mental health (Koenig, 2012).

Immigrants often face challenges when reconciling their cultural heritage with the values and expectations of the new culture to which they are exposed. Acculturation stress, identity conflicts, and discrimination can have significant impacts on the mental health of immigrants (Schwartz et al., 2010; Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Understanding and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of individuals is crucial for mental health professionals to provide effective support. Mental health professionals need to be aware of their own cultural

biases and engage in ongoing self-reflection to ensure unbiased and culturally sensitive care (Sue & Sue, 2016; Constantine et al., 2008). Culturally informed research helps identify the unique mental health needs and strengths of diverse populations, leading to more effective interventions (Griner & Smith, 2006).

The journey of self-discovery and resilience as an immigrant enhances understanding of the complexities of cultural identity and the significance of embracing cultural differences. Personal experiences as an immigrant can foster empathy, cultural humility, and a deeper understanding of the diverse factors that shape mental health and well-being (Kirmayer et al., 2014). These takeaways underscore the importance of social resilience, cultural understanding, and self-reflection in promoting mental well-being and providing effective support to individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds, as supported by the referenced studies.

**Yani**

First, I'd like to share a bit of background on "cultural brokering." Because youth and children of immigrant families often adapt faster to their post-migration context (Bauer, 2016; Shen et al., 2017), they often help their parents and other older family members to navigate mainstream Western cultures and processes through "cultural brokering" or "language brokering" (see Trickett & Jones, 2007). Cultural or linguistic brokering is the mediating of interactions between older family members and people from the mainstream culture by younger members (e.g., preadolescents, adolescents, and young adults; Kam & Lazarevic, 2014). This normative, or standard, experience among immigrant families requires brokers to quickly understand, interpret, interact, and decide on adult matters, which often have large impacts on the family (Love & Buriel, 2007). Cultural and language brokers may assume some authority in communicating on behalf of their parents, relatives, or family (Kam, 2011).

Like nearly all children of immigrant parents, as an adolescent and teenager, cultural and language brokering was a part of my everyday life (Morales & Hanson, 2005; Kam & Lazarevic, 2014). Brokering was a regular part of my identity and obligation as a child of immigrants. It was something I did both willingly and unwillingly, without a second thought. Once I graduated from high school and moved out of my parent's house, my role as a broker drastically decreased. I engaged with my parents in minor ways as a broker, but for many years, I did not have to broker with the intensity that I did as an adolescent and teenager.

About six years after I graduated from high school, I learned, for the first time, about the term "cultural brokering" and finally became conscious of this role I had been playing my whole life. Today, I've chosen to share a story of a recent cultural brokering moment in which I brokered as someone who was aware of

the phenomenon and the privilege, access, and dignity I had to share with my mother as we navigated an interaction at a fabric and craft supply store.

My mother and I decided to browse a nearby fabric and craft supplies store. Inside, we split up, each exploring different sections of the store. After making our selections, we headed to the check-out lane. I was slightly ahead of my mother, so I checked out first, and she was right behind me with her item, a bundle of blank canvases. After I checked out, a "50% off of one item" coupon came attached to the bottom of my receipt. Seeing this, I offered, in Chinese, the coupon to my mother for her use and handed the receipt to the cashier, saying, in English, that we wanted to use the coupon. While I could have simply handed the coupon over and stepped back, I made the *choice* to broker the interaction. The cashier tried the coupon, but after it did not work, they showed us that it wasn't eligible for use until the upcoming Saturday. In Chinese, I shared this with my mother, and she mentioned that now, she was not sure if the canvases she was buying were a good deal after all. Despite the looks of others, we continued to discuss the situation in Chinese. We talked about whether she should even buy the set of canvas she had picked out. After some discussion, the cashier offered another discount: a 40% off discount if my mother made a donation to their charitable partner. After more discussion and translation into Chinese, my mother agreed to donate, and I translated this back to the cashier. Again, however, this discount didn't work as the item my mother chose was already on sale; thus, no additional discounts could be added to her purchase. I translated this into Chinese, and after more discussion about the utility of the set of canvases, we completed our interaction.

I cannot remember whether she purchased the set of canvases or not. However, I can remember the dual anxiety and pride I felt for two reasons: I brokered this interaction with a newfound pride and patience centered on my mother and our dignity. Despite being surrounded by social cues which told me that we were an annoyance, my mother and I took up as much space and time in that store as we wanted. That day, our interaction could have been perceived as an embarrassingly long inconvenience, but instead, it was empowering and dignified.

***Key Takeaways***

Current literature about cultural and language brokering supports mixed findings on the effects of cultural brokering on the young people who do it (Hua & Costigan, 2012). While some studies indicate positive experiences (e.g., positive self-esteem and efficacy), others have also indicated negative experiences (e.g., feeling stressed, embarrassed, or guilty, having lower self-efficacy; Weisskirch, 2007; Wu & Kim, 2009; Jones & Trickett, 2005; Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009). Some studies of immigrant and refugee families found that

brokering led to trust and cooperation within families (Puig, 2002; Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009), while others have found that the impact on familial dynamics was highly dependent on the context and activities of the brokering (Roche et al., 2015; Kam & Lazarevic, 2014).

Clearly, the experience of cultural brokering may be disempowering, empowering, or both. In my story, it was up to my mother and me to be patient with ourselves and our language accessibility needs. It was also up to the cashier and other employees of the store to provide the space and time and be accommodating. Without one of these factors, our interaction could have quickly become disempowering or even hostile, an experience with which many immigrants are all too familiar. In my story, social resilience means celebrating and remembering the moments in which we, as children of immigrants, choose patience and center our and our family's time, space and dignity.

For cultural brokering to be an empowering experience, individuals must have the capacity, understanding, and free choice to be a cultural or linguistic broker, and systems in which we broker must be just and accommodating. This dialectical understanding of cultural and language brokering must be further explored to progress the development of culturally responsive treatment and care for children of immigrants experiencing the role of brokering (American Psychological Association, 2017; Kohn-Wood & Hooper, 2014).

## Discussion

With this chapter, we aim to celebrate the individual and communal ways that immigrants of Color and their families cultivate resilient practices in their day-to-day lives. Identifying specific stories of social resilience in everyday contexts is key to centering and celebrating post-migration narratives and transforming their contexts (Betteridge & Webber, 2019; DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016; Ungar, 2012). Our conceptualization and narratives of social resilience emphasize our capacities, actions, and nuanced decision-making processes, as well as the contextual conditions that shape our lived experiences.

In Mrudula's story, she emphasized the crucial role of social resilience in navigating cultural identity and mental health care. Mental health professionals' ability to provide culturally sensitive care involves understanding and respecting diverse cultural values, norms, and beliefs, as well as practicing reflexive self-awareness (Sue & Sue, 2016). Developing cultural competence is essential to navigating cultural differences and promoting positive mental health outcomes, particularly in multicultural contexts. By recognizing the influence of cultural identities and embracing cultural differences, mental health professionals can build upon social

resilience practices and contribute to a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to mental health support for immigrants.

In Yani's story, she emphasized the potential of brokered interactions to be empowering when all factors—the broker, the recipients, and the context—work together to welcome the interaction with patience and dignity for all. While research on the effects of cultural and language brokering on young brokers has been mixed, cultural brokering has the potential to be empowering and to build on social resilience practices if the broker has the capacity, resources, and choice to engage in such roles (see Puig, 2002; Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009). Scholars should continue to challenge the notion that cultural brokering is a wholly negative, damage-centered experience and instead recognize it as a complex phenomenon related to social resilience.

Rooted in interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, autoethnography offers a powerful and reflexive methodological approach that connects the personal to the political, the individual to the collective. Rather than positioning the researcher as a distant observer, autoethnography situates the self as both subject and site of inquiry, enabling deep engagement with questions of identity, power, and meaning-making (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008). In the context of immigrant justice, this approach is particularly significant because it captures the emotional, embodied, and affective dimensions of resilience that are often overlooked in traditional empirical research (Holman Jones, 2016). By weaving personal narratives into the structural realities of migration policy, systemic discrimination, and community activism, autoethnography reveals how resilience is not merely an internal capacity but a socially and politically negotiated process.

When combined with a social constructivist lens, autoethnography becomes especially suitable for examining social resilience among immigrant communities. Social constructivism posits that meaning and knowledge emerge through social interaction and shared cultural understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, resilience is understood not as innate endurance but as a socially mediated process shaped by relationships, networks, and collective practices of care and resistance. Through reflexive narrative and critical self-inquiry, autoethnography illuminates how immigrant individuals and communities construct, perform, and sustain resilience amid structural inequities. This makes it an inherently ethical and politically engaged methodology—one that both critiques dominant, individualistic notions of resilience and amplifies the voices of those navigating the complexities of immigrant life (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015).

Through this chapter, Mrudula and Yani highlight two phenomena that illustrate how immigrant social resilience is embedded in everyday interactions, decisions, and contexts. Mrudula emphasizes the salient role of

cultural identity and the importance of culturally responsive, self-aware counseling practices, while Yani underscores the dignity-centered effort required from all parties during culturally brokered exchanges. Taken together, these narratives exemplify how autoethnography, as both method and praxis, can surface the nuanced and relational ways immigrants enact resilience in daily life. This reflexive exercise foregrounds a desire-based framework and a social resilience approach that de-individualize resilience, center collective forces and interdependence, and celebrate the everyday acts of resistance and care that sustain immigrant communities.

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Chapter 6

# Active Measures for LGBTQ Inclusion in Sweden: Progress or Persistent Ignorance?

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**Abstract**

Sweden is often regarded as one of the most progressive countries in terms of legislation and policies protecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) people. Such measures aim to promote wellbeing among LGBTQ individuals, who generally report more negative experiences compared to heterosexual cisgender people. Swedish legislation requires employers to take active measures to prevent discrimination, which can be understood as an attempt to strengthen social resilience. However, little is known about how these measures function in practice. This chapter presents findings from a mixed-methods study examining workplace experiences of LGBTQ employees and managers' perspectives on implementing active measures. Quantitative analyses show no significant differences between LGBTQ and cisgender participants regarding explicit discrimination, harassment, or abuse at work, an encouraging result that underscores the importance of the Discrimination Act. However, LGBTQ participants reported higher exposure to more elusive risks and barriers, including incivility, hetero- and cisnormative interactions, and microaggressions such as hearing negative jokes about LGBTQ people.

Qualitative analyses reveal that while many managers report having policies, training, and routines in place, uncertainty about how to translate legislation into practice persists. This ambiguity fosters different interpretative

repertoires: an "individualistic" approach that risks placing responsibility on individuals versus a "systemic" approach emphasizing shared responsibility—more aligned with the Act's intent. The chapter concludes that enabling social resilience requires moving beyond formal compliance toward everyday practices that challenge normative structures and foster genuine inclusion.

**Keywords**: LGBTQ, minority stress, microaggressions, workplace, active measures, Sweden, resilience.

* * *

As psychologists, we are troubled by the empirical fact that Swedish lesbian, gay, bi+, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) people, report more mental health problems than heterosexual cis people (e.g. Bränström et al., 2023). A major ambition of our research is to understand how such disparities can be addressed and counteracted, making psychological resilience important. Since 2017, we have used the minority stress model (Meyer, 2015) to better understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ people in Sweden. The model suggests that distal societal factors, such as access to health care, discrimination, or exposure to violence, as well as more proximal factors, such as internalized negative societal attitudes and concealment of identity, give rise to stress that explains health disparities between LGBTQ and heterosexual cis people. In addition, we use microaggression theory to highlight social interactions between people where "subtle forms of discrimination, often unconscious or unintentional, that communicate hostile or derogatory messages, particularly to and about members of historically marginalized social groups" are enacted (Nadal et al., 2016, p. 488).

In the minority stress model, coping is included as a potential buffer to the negative consequences of stress (Meyer, 2015). In psychology, much research has traditionally focused on individual resilience. However, Meyer (2015) argues that such a focus risks perpetuating the problems that need to be addressed:

> Minority stress aims to draw our attention to social events and conditions related to stigma and prejudice that harm population health, for example, causing health disparities. As we begin to focus on individual responses and resilience, we risk a shift from interventions that attempt to correct the pathogenic social environment to interventions that focus on individuals so that they can become resilient in coping with the environment. (p. 51).

As such, he suggests that psychologists shift focus from individuals to the social context, which places resilience in an ecological milieu.

This stance, of moving from the individual to addressing the social context, fits well with the ambitions of social resilience research (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). However, we have not found many texts that explicitly address the connections between LGBTQ psychology and scholarship on social resilience. Drawing on insights from our current research project "Minority stress at work: Workplaces as enablers of or obstacles to LGBTQ people's mental health and wellbeing" (funded by AFA Insurance, no. 200313), we use the opportunity provided by writing this chapter to explore how research on LGBTQ and social resilience might be combined.

## Previous Research on LGBTQ and Work

The need to move from individual to social resilience in psychological research is particularly important in understanding the work conditions of LGBTQ people in Sweden. A recent review of international research done by the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise (2022), highlighted that many gay and lesbian people experience a good and accepting, or at least neutral, working environment. However, despite Sweden being considered one of the top countries in the world when it comes to LGBTQ rights (ILGA-Europe, 2022), including legal protection against discrimination at work, Swedish reports show that LGBTQ people still experience more negative exposure than heterosexual cis people at work (Björk & Wahlström, 2018).

Theories on minority stress and microaggressions have been used in international research to understand negative workplace experiences among LGBTQ people. In a seminal paper, Velez and colleagues (2013) showed that minority stressors at the workplace, such as heterosexist discrimination, led to lower job satisfaction and greater distress. Their study also highlighted that the link between distal and proximal stressors and distress was mediated by participants' management of their identities with strategies of concealment. In addition, those who had low levels of internalized heterosexism and who disclosed their identity reported higher job satisfaction. In other words, individual coping and resilience seem to matter. However, this buffering effect disappeared when the work environments had higher levels of discrimination. This means that individual resilience can only buffer negative exposure to a certain extent. In addition, to prevent discrimination and negative exposure, the responsibility to build resilience seems to be better placed on the organizational level than on the individual. Research on microaggressions at work also supports these ideas. Galupo and Resnick (2016) conclude that microaggressions contribute to a workplace atmosphere that is heterosexist and even hostile. While their participants reported several individual coping

strategies to deal with this atmosphere, the authors state that what needs to happen is not to rely on individuals to build resilience, but rather that measures are taken to address the workplace atmosphere, as well as organizational factors.

### Developing our Understanding of Social Resilience in the Workplace

Developing workplaces that enable, instead of obstructing, LGBTQ people's mental health and wellbeing requires us to expand our understanding of how work contexts can become more resilient. In this chapter, we draw on social resilience research that understands the construct, not only as a process of adapting to challenges or crises but also as potentially transformative, addressing how societies or social groups can evolve and grow (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). While we are well aware of critical discussions on the validity, suitability, or even usefulness of the construct of social resilience itself (see the multiple critical discussions in this volume's chapters), we use it pragmatically to be able to analyze empirical material where such resilience is thought (or expected) to happen.

Inspired by the growing body of literature analyzing how resilience can (or cannot) be enabled via governance and legislation (see e.g. Humby, 2014) to provide societal good, we have looked to Swedish legislation that is supposed to protect LGBTQ people at work. We suggest that the Swedish Discrimination Act ([Diskrimineringslag] 2008:567) can be understood as a societal measure requiring social resilience to happen in the workplace. To prevent discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities for all, the Act outlines a responsibility for employers to work with "*active measures*" to prevent discrimination, reprisals, or any other barriers for individual employees. As such, the Act can be understood as removing the sole responsibility to cope with societal challenges from minority individuals themselves (individually or as a group), to building social resilience in the work context instead.

This has led us to the urgent question: with reports showing that Swedish LGBTQ have negative experiences in work contexts, that simultaneously are governed by the Discrimination Act, does the intention of the Act "trickle" down to the people it is supposed to protect? By empirically exploring what risks and barriers Swedish LGBTQ people experience in the workplace as well as how managers talk about how they put legislation into practice, we analyze whether, and how, social resilience is enabled by legally mandated active measures in Swedish workplaces to prevent LGBTQ workers from being exposed to minority stress and microaggressions.

Below, we present the Swedish Discrimination Act and the active measures that workplaces must implement in practice, and critically discuss the possibilities and pitfalls of the Act. After this, we present empirical material that shows that while active measures to enhance social resilience in workplaces are honorable in theory, making a difference in practice for the people it is meant to protect is a very ambivalent, complex, and at times, counter-productive project.

## The Possible Potentials and Pitfalls of Active Measures

The Swedish Discrimination Act aims to prevent discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities for all. Discrimination is defined as unfavorable treatment due to any of seven defined grounds, of which three (sex, transgender identity or expression, and sexual orientation) have direct relevance for LGBTQ. The Act is divided into several chapters, with one defining discrimination and another prohibiting discrimination and what to do if it happens. The third chapter requires employers to work with *active measures* to prevent discrimination from happening, as well as promoting equal rights and opportunities for all. Active measures are described as investigating whether there are *risks* for discrimination or reprisals or any other *barriers* to the individual employee's equal rights or opportunities in the workplace. Such risks could include, for example, experiences of work incivility (see e.g. Schad et al., 2014) or microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2016). It is explicitly stated that employers need to have guidelines and routines to stop harassment, sexual harassment, and reprisals. Active measures also involve *analyzing the causes of identified risks and barriers*, taking *reasonable active measures* to prevent risks and barriers and to promote rights and opportunities, and continuously evaluating the work.

The Discrimination Act can be understood as removing the sole responsibility to cope with the societally caused challenges from the minority individual. Importantly, responsibility is not only shifted to minority groups (see Meyer, 2015) but to everyone, where workplaces irrespective of identities represented there, have a role in addressing these challenges. Thus, the Act can be interpreted as a societal means to enable social resilience to prevent minority stress and microaggressions, including discrimination and harassment.

While the intention of the Act is good, several challenges have been discussed in relation to this law. First, not all employers know about the obligation to work with active measures (the Swedish Equality Ombudsman, 2018). Second, an Act addressing all kinds of workplaces and working conditions needs to be written in general terms and cannot give much practical guidance on how it should be implemented in practice. This leaves the interpretation and implementation to the employers themselves. Lehto and Lindholm (2014) critically discuss that

the vagueness of the Act compromises the ability to make a real difference in practice as the implementation risks becoming symbolic and ineffective. In addition, differences in how risks and barriers, as well as causes, are analyzed can result in very different ideas of what measures are to be taken, and consequently, if social resilience is enabled or not. Studying how the Act is considered in practice is therefore important, as it is here the practical outcomes of the legislation can be found.

## Exploring Active Measures at the Intersection of Law and Everyday Work Life

Two bodies of empirical data are used in this chapter. Using a pilot study quantitatively exploring minority stress at work, we first outline *the risks and barriers* that LGBTQ participants report to have experienced in Swedish workplaces. Based on these results, we then draw on analysis from a qualitative study of managers' experiences of working with active measures to critically discuss some *analyses of causes* for the identified risks and barriers as well as what *reasonable measures* are (il)logical depending on such analyses.

### Risks and barriers experienced by LGBTQ people

To explore potential risks and barriers experienced in the workplace by LGBTQ people in Sweden, we draw on results from a questionnaire study (see Fredriksson & Heinerud, 2023) where we developed items addressing job satisfaction, experiences of microaggressions and situations involving minority stress. All items measured experiences in the last six months and were answerable on a six-point scale (from "I have never experienced it" to "I experience this every day"). We also used the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS), addressing experiences of incivility in the last six months on a five-point scale (Schad et al., 2014).

In early 2023, 509 people (with 312 people identifying as women, 113 as men, 72 as nonbinary, and 12 as other) responded to the survey posted on social media platforms. Of the participants, 187 people identified as gay/lesbian, 146 as bisexual/pansexual, 123 as heterosexual, 9 as asexual, and 44 as other. A total of 152 participants reported having trans experience. Most participants (n=345) lived in a large city, with a minority living in a small city (n=92) or a rural area (n=61). Most participants had an undergraduate degree (n=329), upper secondary school degree (n=101), or graduate degree (n=39) with a minority having an elementary degree (n=16) or other degree (n=19). The vast majority were currently working full-time (n=285) or part-time (n=62) while several studied (n=40), studied and worked (n=63), were unemployed (n=13), on sick leave (n=20), on parental leave (n=9) or received disability benefits (n=5).

Two analyses were done. First, the ratings of heterosexual participants (shortened 'het' in the descriptive statistics) were compared to ratings of participants identifying as lesbian/gay, bi-/pansexual, asexual, and other (LGBA+) with non-parametric t-tests (Mann-Whitney *U*). Second, we explored differences between participants with and without trans experiences with non-parametric t-tests (Mann-Whitney *U*). Below we especially highlight the significant results from these analyses.

Regarding LGBA+ people, they experienced several aspects of job satisfaction as significantly poorer than heterosexual participants. This included less satisfaction with opportunities for promotion ($M_{(het)} = 3.16$, $SD = 1.19$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 2.86$, $SD = 1.09$; $U = 16{,}685$, $p = .012$), a poorer relationship with the manager ($M_{(het)} = 3.88$, $SD = 1.13$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 3.61$, $SD = 1.26$; $U = 17{,}380$, $p = .048$), higher levels of stress at work ($M_{(het)} = 3.69$, $SD = 0.94$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 3.91$, $SD = 0.94$; $U = 17{,}243$, $p = .018$), lower experiences of inclusion ($M_{(het)} = 4.05$, $SD = 1.13$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 3.80$, $SD = 1.13$; $U = 16{,}760$, $p = .011$), and experiences of a less open work atmosphere ($M_{(het)} = 3.79$, $SD = 1.07$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 3.56$, $SD = 1.07$; $U = 16{,}863$, $p = .028$). In addition, significantly more LGBA+ people were formally responsible for working with diversity/equality issues at work ($M_{(het)} = 1.98$, $SD = 1.43$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 2.60$, $SD = 1.66$; $U = 13{,}843$, $p < .001$).

The total score of the WIS did not differ between heterosexuals and LGBA+ participants. However, LGBA+ people were significantly more often put in situations where others tried to engage them in unwanted discussions on personal matters ($M_{(het)} = 1.53$, $SD = 0.87$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 1.80$, $SD = 1.06$; $U = 13{,}847$, $p = .023$).

On items measuring experiences of microaggressions or situations giving rise to minority stress, there were no significant differences between heterosexuals and LGBA+ participants on questions addressing explicit discrimination, physical or sexual abuse, or harassment at work. However, heteronormative situations (e.g., others referring incorrectly to one's partner; $M_{(het)} = 1.00$, $SD = 0.00$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 1.73$, $SD = 1.12$; $U = 5{,}439$, $p < .001$) were common among LGBA+ participants. In addition, more LGBA+ people than heterosexual participants reported having heard others say negative things or make insensitive jokes about people with their sexual identity ($M_{(het)} = 1.08$, $SD = 0.28$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 1.65$, $SD = 1.03$; $U = 6{,}154$, $p < .001$). LGBA+ participants also reported significantly more experiences of exotification ($M_{(het)} = 1.03$, $SD = 0.16$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 1.21$, $SD = 0.54$; $U = 7{,}904$, $p = .003$) and experiences of overly tolerating comments ($M_{(het)} = 1.05$, $SD = 0.47$; $M_{(LGBA+)} = 1.57$, $SD = 0.91$; $U = 5{,}863$, $p < .001$). In addition, more LGBA+ participants than heterosexual participants had experienced comments that they complained too much about discrimination against people with their sexual identity ($M_{(het)} = 1.04$, $SD = 0.35$;

$M_{(LGBA+)}$ = 1.21, $SD$ = 0.66; $U$ = 8,165, $p$ = .009) and knew about other people with the same sexual identity having been victimized because of their identity ($M_{(het)}$ = 1.07, $SD$ = 0.39; $M_{(LGBA+)}$ = 1.34, $SD$ = 0.78; $U$ = 7,530, $p$ < .001).

Regarding people with trans experiences, they reported less job satisfaction than cis people on several items. This included less satisfaction with work in general ($M_{(cis)}$ = 3.99, $SD$ = 1.00; $M_{(trans)}$ = 3.74, $SD$ = 1.05; $U$ = 19,419, $p$ = .006), opportunities for promotion at work ($M_{(cis)}$ = 3.03, $SD$ = 1.16; $M_{(trans)}$ = 2.73, $SD$ = 1.02; $U$ = 19,646, $p$ = .015), a poorer relationship with close colleagues ($M_{(cis)}$ = 4.26, $SD$ = 0.84; $M_{(trans)}$ = 3.74, $SD$ = 1.16; $U$ = 17,174, $p$ < .001), less support to do their job ($M_{(cis)}$ = 3.50, $SD$ = 1.17; $M_{(trans)}$ = 3.15, $SD$ = 1.19; $U$ = 18,976, $p$ = .003), lower experiences of inclusion ($M_{(cis)}$ = 3.97, $SD$ = 1.09; $M_{(trans)}$ = 3.62, $SD$ = 1.21; $U$ = 19,089, $p$ = .003), and a less open work atmosphere ($M_{(cis)}$ = 3.76, $SD$ = 1.04; $M_{(trans)}$ = 3.29, $SD$ = 1.09; $U$ = 16,854, $p$ < .001).

The differences in experiences of work incivility between trans and cis participants were even more pronounced than for heterosexual and LGBA+ participants, as results on the whole scale were significantly different ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.65, $SD$ = 0.68; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.93, $SD$ = 0.85; $U$ = 14,759, $p$ = .001). Trans people thus reported more experiences of others being humiliating, condescending, and unprofessional in interactions with them, as well as experiences of not being listened to and ignored or ostracized in the workplace.

On items measuring experiences of microaggressions or situations giving rise to minority stress, there were no significant differences between trans and cis participants on questions addressing explicit discrimination, physical or sexual abuse, or harassment at work. However, cisnormative situations (e.g., others assuming one to have another gender identity; $M_{(cis)}$ = 1.22, $SD$ = 0.84; $M_{(trans)}$ = 3.29, $SD$ = 1.97; $U$ = 4,140, $p$ < .001, being referred to with incorrect pronoun; $M_{(cis)}$ = 1.05, $SD$ = 0.34; $M_{(trans)}$ = 2.95, $SD$ = 2.02; $U$ = 4,864, $p$ < .001) were common among trans participants. In addition, more trans than cis participants reported having heard others say negative things or make insensitive jokes about people with their gender identity ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.30, $SD$ = 0.76; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.98, $SD$ = 1.31; $U$ = 7,611, $p$ < .001), having experiences of being stared at ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.26, $SD$ = 0.66; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.75, $SD$ = 1.16; $U$ = 8,229, $p$ < .001), or being told that their gender identity makes other people uncomfortable ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.02, $SD$ = 0.13; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.16, $SD$ = 0.59; $U$ = 9,832, $p$ < .001). More trans than cis people had also been told their gender identity was just a phase ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.00, $SD$ = 0.07; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.06, $SD$ = 0.32; $U$ = 10,375, $p$ = .013) and experienced that other people had stopped talking to them after finding out about their gender identity ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.01, $SD$ = 0.09; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.16, $SD$ = 0.53; $U$ = 9,851, $p$ < .001).

Trans participants also reported significantly more experiences of exotification ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.02, $SD$ = 0.13; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.19, $SD$ = 0.59; $U$ = 9,493, $p$ < .001) and tolerant comments ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.08, $SD$ = 0.33; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.46, $SD$ = 0.93; $U$ = 8,566, $p$ < .001). In addition, more trans than cis people had heard that they complain too much about discrimination against people with their gender identity ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.12, $SD$ = 0.50; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.38, $SD$ = 0.89; $U$ = 9,368, $p$ < .001) and had been questioned or told they were hypersensitive when they have pointed out that others have acted wrongly towards them ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.38, $SD$ = 0.80; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.66, $SD$ = 1.00; $U$ = 8,981, $p$ = .003). Many trans participants also knew about other trans people having been victimized because of their identity ($M_{(cis)}$ = 1.26, $SD$ = 0.78; $M_{(trans)}$ = 1.36, $SD$ = 1.36; $U$ = 9,776, $p$ = .039).

To conclude, it is positive that there were no significant differences between LGBTQ and heterosexual cis participants on questions addressing explicit discrimination, physical or sexual abuse, or harassment at work. In a support document to employers working with active measures, the Equality Ombudsman (2023, p. 4) highlights, however, that risks and barriers might be physical or explicit, but can also be more elusive, such as attitudes, norms, and structures. Our data supports that several elusive risks and barriers seem to be evident for LGBTQ participants, including being exposed to incivility, experiences of hetero- and cisnormative interactions with others, and experiences of microaggressions (e.g. hearing negative jokes about LGBTQ people), that need to be addressed with active measures. This requires careful analysis and planning of reasonable active measures according to the Discrimination Act, which is most often the responsibility of the manager.

**Analysis of Causes and Reasonable Measures**

The other source of data that we draw on is semi-structured interviews that were done with eight managers (who had held managerial positions for 5-12 years, mean = 7.9). These participants were 35-60 years old (mean = 49.4). Most had experiences as managers within municipalities, the rest within non-governmental organizations. The managers were invited to openly talk about their thoughts on what active measures mean to them and what experiences they have from working to prevent discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities, with a specific emphasis on LGBTQ.

The analysis was done in two steps. First, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) clustered themes based on the content of the interviews (see Gustavsson & Hjörneby, 2023). Second, we used a discursive approach focusing on interpretative repertoires (inspired by Wetherell & Potter, 1988), which is presented here. Building on the discursive understanding that language is the vehicle through which reality and action are enabled, this analytic strategy helped us pay attention to the different ways that managers reasoned about

measures and causes, and thus, the action orientation and epistemological understandings in their talk.

One of the first questions that participants were asked to talk about was what active measures to prevent discrimination meant in their work. One participant said that when they first saw the invitation to the study, they thought "active measures, have I taken any? Am I supposed to?" as a spontaneous response to the term. Many did not have much support in how to implement work with active measures; they had to find ways of working with this on their own without external follow-up. One manager said: "I'm not a hundred percent sure if that is exactly what is written in the law regarding prevention (…) no one follows it up. This person further explained how they had been informed about LGBTQ people's situation: "they feel worse, that they have things that they feel are worse in the workplace. And then I asked, 'okay, can you explore this further then?' How do we take measures? What's the point of just getting that result?' But I haven't received any feedback on that." While some participants experienced enough support, several said that they would like more time to reflect on and work with these issues.

In the discursive analysis, two very different interpretative repertoires in making sense of causes, and thus reasonable measures, became evident. These different discursive understandings were used by the same participants simultaneously.

In one repertoire, the causes of risks and barriers seemed to be understood as individual mistakes, biases, and problematic attitudes: "It could be that someone expresses themselves in a clumsy way without being aware of doing so. Because we all are also very different. Some are more, have harsher jargon" or "we shouldn't turn a blind eye to the fact that there are employees who may not behave in a decent way. Who may not follow routines and rules". Drawing on this "individualistic" repertoire, reasonable measures included minimizing mistakes and changing attitudes by concrete measures related to routines for recruitment, discussing diversity/equality issues at workplace meetings, and having an LGBTQ or diversity officer at the workplace. Many talked about routines for when to talk to staff about these things during the year and that they were given specific exercises by human resources (HR). Several talked about the importance of inculcating workplace values such as having an "open and respectful workplace that tolerates most things".

Having routines and policies in place was thus understood to limit mistakes, biases, and problematic attitudes in the workplace. Participants also said that because such measures are part of the workplace routine, they did not work with active measures all the time: "because you say active measures, it sounds like something you work within the day-to-day work, all the time, and I can't say that we do that". With policies and routines in place, some participants also

concluded that: "I don't experience that it is something we need to address and actively work with, I do not have any information that someone feels singled out in a negative way". In other words, unless someone indicates that there is a problem, one can assume that there is no problem and that the work environment is characterized by an open atmosphere.

Some also said that not being LGBTQ as a manager might make it hard to "take the fight". Having a person who is interested and engaged in diversity issues at the workplace was thus considered a strength, as they could help to highlight what was needed: "(that person) was very good at speaking up when someone said things that did not include everyone and what effects it could have. (…) That opened my eyes to what minority stress means to some in a workgroup". Also in this example, active measures are delegated to a specific individual.

In the second interpretative repertoire, the causes of risks and barriers were placed on a systemic level: "There is also the outside world, you have to remember that, it is not just the workplace that is... There is an outside world as well. Which affects our employees, affects us, affects the clients we meet." While some mentioned the importance of addressing norms and utilizing norm-critical approaches, very few talked explicitly about systemic hetero- and cisnormativity. However, drawing on a more "systemic" repertoire seemed to make other kinds of measures reasonable, e.g. a more processual understanding of interventions: "You can't just write your values on paper, you have to live them. If we say that all people have equal rights, we have to show it too. That's what I think, I think we do, but you can always get better at it." It is thus not only about having policies and practices outlining what to do but also about trying to live it: "*I also think that preventively, it needs to permeate everything. Permeate how we write, how we talk, (…) what we focus on, in conversations and in dialogue. And also, how do you joke? So jokes can become quite a dangerous thing, 'I'm just kidding' (…) Yes but… at whose expense? (…) I have no problem with being called politically correct or anything like that. I don't care at all. It's how we talk about people, it reflects something.*" This kind of "keeping these issues alive" at the workplace, as other participants talked about it, also signaled a move beyond openness, respect, and tolerance to focus on values such as "caring for each other", making everyone "feel safe" and how people talk about each other, as evident in the quote above. Some participants pointed out that this work cannot be a specific person's responsibility only (e.g. a diversity officer). One participant also said that they had to be aware of and intervene in problematic situations themselves to be a role model of how to keep learning and caring about each other and have sincere interactions with all coworkers.

In this repertoire, further training, exercises, discussions, and policies were considered important "as a first step" that can help people make "shifts in perspective (…) if you haven't thought along those lines before", but education will not work "all the way". In addition, there is probably not an endpoint to these processes. You need to continue "learning" and if you do not want to do that, then "you need to quit", as one participant stated.

To conclude, many managers talk about how they have policies, training, exercises, and discussions at work meetings addressing active measures and that there are routines for recruitment and making sure these issues are discussed regularly. While some managers talked about having enough support to work with these questions, others felt insecure about how they put legislation into practice and asked for more time to reflect on these issues at work. The latter is in line with the critique raised by several commentators (see e.g. Lehto & Lindholm, 2014). Such unclarity also seems to give rise to different interpretative repertoires of analyzing causes of risks and barriers, and, consequently, what measures are reasonable. Using a more "individualistic" interpretative repertoire in working with active measures risks individualizing risks and barriers, as well as measures, in a way that might be at odds with the intention of the Discrimination Act. As such, the "systemic" repertoire placed a lot more responsibility on the manager and the group working together as a whole in ways that seem to be more in line with the idea of social resilience.

## Does the Act Enable Social Resilience in Workplaces? A Critical Discussion

By using social resilience pragmatically, we aimed to explore if the intentions in the Discrimination Act "trickle" down to the people it is supposed to protect. Based on an understanding of the Act as mandating social resilience to happen in workplaces, we analyzed whether, and how, it is enabled by work with active measures.

While this study does not enable us to speculate about the causes of our findings, we were glad to see that there were no significant differences between LGBTQ and heterosexual cis participants in reported experiences of discrimination, physical or sexual abuse, or harassment at work. The importance of the Discrimination Act should not be underestimated here. Similarly, most managers talked about policies and training, which are important basic aspects that need to be in place to make workplaces supportive of LGBTQ people (the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2022). However, data from LGBTQ people and managers alike also highlight the need to continue to address how the Act can be put into practice to create social resilience in the workplace in a way that shifts the responsibility of dealing with structural challenges from individuals to the social context.

It is illuminating to review how managers talk about active measures in relation to the experiences that LGBTQ people report. Several managers talked about creating workplaces that are tolerant to an open work atmosphere. However, both LGBA+ and trans participants rated inclusion and open atmosphere lower compared to heterosexual cis participants. In other words, the environment that participating managers want to create does not seem to be evident in all workplaces. Discussing what constitutes an open atmosphere is important to be able to achieve this state. Drawing on the data presented in this chapter, an open atmosphere does not equal interactions with colleagues where LGBTQ people are tolerated or exotified. Similarly, an open work atmosphere cannot include being able to say heteronormative and cisnormative things, draw people into unwanted conversations about personal topics or have opinions about other people's gender identity. Rather, the data presented in this chapter suggests that inclusion should be more about caring about each other and building trust, as some managers mentioned. However, questions remain about how care should be shown in work groups, and how trust can be built.

In the analysis of managers' talk, different interpretative repertoires on causes for risks and barriers made different measures reasonable. For example, an individualistic repertoire of causes as a matter of individuals' inappropriate jargon, attitudes, or bias call for individually focused interventions, such as minimizing the risk of people saying inappropriate things or expressing negative attitudes. In this case, building resilience can be understood as making policies to stop some "bad" individuals from making certain events happen. However, this kind of resilience still focuses on individuals, instead of shifting to the social context. Similarly, many managers said that they expected employees to come to them if they felt singled out, placing the responsibility on an individual level. In other words, LGBTQ individuals are, again, responsible for dealing with their exposure, which is precisely the situation that the Discrimination Act aims to avoid. Our data also showed that LGBA+ participants reported worse relationships with their managers than heterosexual participants. Many LGBTQ participants also stated that they have been told at the workplace that they complain too much about discrimination or were questioned for pointing out when people treat them wrongly. Therefore, telling the manager about exposure at work is a complicated or taxing request. This is why anonymous surveys can be so important (the Equality Ombudsman, 2023). In line with research on developing our understanding of social resilience, this task should not be left to individuals themselves.

Managers also said they appreciated having others, e.g. diversity officers at the workplace that could help detect what measures needed to be taken. It is

interesting that LGBA+ participants to a significantly greater extent than heterosexual participants reported being formally responsible for diversity/equality issues at work. In other words, LGBA+ participants take a larger role in making the workplace better for LGBTQ employees. While they might have lived experiences that make them excellent at the job, the responsibility for building resilience remains on the minority itself. Again, this can be interpreted as in opposition to the intentions of the Discrimination Act.

Within the interpretative repertoire of individualizing the causes of risks and barriers, building resilience via active measures also risks becoming merely a task for managers to make sure that policies, practices, and opportunities for dialogue were in place if something happened. This kind of understanding can be interpreted as a static role for the manager regarding active measures, somewhat removed from the day-to-day work (cf. Haavik's, 2020, discussion on sharp/blunt end versus network metaphors for conceptualizing societal risks and safety). It can also be interpreted as understanding the workplace as neutral or socially just *as default*. In other words, resilience can be understood as needed only when this neutrality is disturbed (which seems to be the case for some, but not all, LGBTQ people according to research; the Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2022). Consequently, the structurally unjust living conditions permeating society as well as workplaces, that give rise to microaggressions and minority stress in the first place, might become invisible or overlooked in practice when measures only focus on events, rather than the conditions giving rise to normative power structures that make sexual and gendered othering possible in the first place. This, in turn, risks a situation where organizations have good policies and routines that are not practiced in day-to-day work (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). This also risks putting organizations in a situation where they think they do everything according to the legislation although they only address issues superficially or even reify injustices and perpetuate nescience. In other words, in these instances, we do not see that social resilience is enabled.

What is the alternative? In the other, more systemic interpretative repertoire evident in the managers' interviews, the cause of risks and barriers were placed on a structural level. In this understanding, the workplace is unjust because society is, and social resilience, is thus already necessitated in current work practices. However, drawing on this repertoire also revealed a sense of not having a specific goal or endpoint of this endeavor. In other words, knowing exactly what social resilience meant in practice was not easy to articulate. Again, this resembles an understanding of social resilience as transformative (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013) to a potential state that we still do not know. Working with such open processes often includes "uncertainty, unpredictability and surprise" (Magis, 2010, s. 401), which probably requires something

completely different from workplaces than (only) making policies and hiring diversity officers. We suggest that more research should be done on such processes, both to better understand how to improve working conditions for LGBTQ people and to better understand what social resilience in the workplace can mean.

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Chapter 7

# Pathways to Resilience: Small-scale Mountain Farmers Articulate Their Ideas for the Future of Agriculture in the Italian Alps

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**Abstract**

Small-scale mountain farmers in Italy face interconnected challenges stemming from climate, ecosystem, and social changes of recent decades. The abandonment of agriculture combined with rural depopulation have fundamentally altered the landscapes and ecosystems on which farmers depend, as well as the social context of agriculture. Despite these challenges, there are new, long-term, and returning farmers who continue to pursue agricultural activities in the Italian Alps. They articulate and enact a vision for the future of mountain farming that is a response to the current social and ecological context and their perception of what the future will bring. Through sixty-seven interviews and participant observation with farmers and beekeepers in the Lombardy region Alps of northern Italy, this paper identifies four pathways to social resilience rooted in farmer ideas for the future of agriculture in the mountains. The paper outlines the primary concerns and priorities of farmers in their own voices. It describes their desired outcomes and the ways they envision achieving these outcomes. In so doing, the paper contributes to the discussion on social resilience the voice of a population currently being affected by and having to adapt to simultaneous and interconnected social and ecological changes.

**Keywords**: agriculture, climate change, environmental change, future, small-scale farming

* * *

Over the course of the last several decades, agriculture has been widely abandoned across the Italian Alps as people left the mountains for work in the lowland industrial areas and economic activity shifted towards industry and then tourism. These changes have fundamentally altered the landscapes and ecosystems on which Alpine farmers depend, as well as the social context of agriculture (Dax et al., 2021; MacDonald et al., 2000; Plieninger et al., 2016). At the same time, climate change is shifting weather patterns and affecting the reliability of traditional farming methods (EEA, 2016; Gobiet et al., 2014). European Union and national policies and programs aimed at developing mountain areas and supporting agriculture often fail to deliver needed support (Bournaris and Manos, 2012; Verwoerd, 2019) and may actively hinder progress and innovation. For many smallholder farmers in the Alps, economic survival is uncertain (Dax et al., 2021; Flury et al., 2012; Merlo, 2002). And all this in areas that have historically occupied a marginal space in society due to their relative isolation and the harsh mountain climate and terrain. As a result of these changes, Alpine farmers and beekeepers still active today face a social and ecological context that presents unique challenges for agriculture, and one that continues to change and will continue to change in the future.

The current study focuses on those smallholder farmers and beekeepers still active in the Val Camonica and the Valtellina of the Lombardy region of the central Italian Alps. In the face of the abovementioned changes and challenges, smallholder farmers and beekeepers in these two valleys are finding solutions to current social and ecological challenges while also planning and preparing for the future. They are part of a community undergoing change, living through change, handling the changes but also seeking to transform to ensure the social, ecological, economic, and individual sustainability of farming in the Alps. And they have ideas about what this transformation should entail. In the words of a livestock farmer: "We need a new vision of development, one harmonized with the environment where people can make a living off the land with dignity" (42, man).

The current article outlines four pathways to social resilience in the Alps grounded in farmer ideas for the future of agriculture in their mountain valleys. In so doing, it seeks to contribute to understandings of social resilience from the ground-up, that is from the perspective of people whose everyday lives are being affected by change and who are having to adapt in the present and prepare for the future. The chapter asks: What are farmer ideas for the future of

agriculture? How do their ideas map onto existing definitions of social resilience?

## Social Resilience: The Capacity to Transform in the Face of Change

Social resilience includes both the robustness and resistance of a social system to change as well as the ability of the system to adapt, learn, re-organize and self-organize in the face of change (Adger, 2000; Bollig, 2014; Carpenter, 2001; Folke, 2006; Lorenz, 2013). Here, we will focus on the ability of a system to re-organize. A resilient system is a process, constantly evolving and emerging, adapting and transforming (Bollig, 2014; Leslie & McCabe, 2013; Obrist et al., 2010; Parsons et al., 2016). In resilient systems, social actors have the capacity "to craft sets of institutions that foster individual welfare and sustainable societal robustness towards future crises" (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013:5). The ability of a social system to transform depends on the system being able to recognize that the current state is no longer working given the challenges being faced and to imagine new structures (Lorenz, 2013; Folke, 2006). Because social systems have an important "symbolic dimension of meaning", they are cognizant of their history and able to look towards and plan for the future (Lorenz, 2013; Westley et al., 2002). This renders them able to reorganize in response to disaster by reframing their relationship and developing novel solutions tied to the past (Lorenz, 2013; Gunderson, 2003). Importantly, social and ecological systems are linked (Nelson, Adger, & Brown, 2007; Adger, 2000). The capacity of a system to learn, adapt, and transform will vary in different locations at different times based on the specific social and ecological characteristics of that system (Van Kessel et al., 2015). A socio-ecological system is resilient if it is able to continue to provide ecosystem services even as it faces pressures from social and environmental changes (Adger et al., 2005; Folke et al., 2002).

## What Factors Make a System Resilient?

There remains conceptual ambiguity about how to define and measure resilience (Saja et al., 2019; Serfilippi & Ramnath, 2018). Here, we focus on how social resilience has been operationalized in relation to social, economic and political, environmental, and individual dimensions as these are the four pathways to resilience that emerged in the current study. Social capital and trust in institutions are key to resilience (Lin, 2001; Norris et al., 2008). Social capital involves trust, community engagement, and social connections all of which may be affected by change (Putnam, 1995; Lin, 2001). It facilitates access to resources including material resources and knowledge (Duarte Alonso & Bressan, 2015). As such, loss of trust, including in institutions, can undermine social capital and resilience (Duarte Alonso & Bressan, 2015; Putnam, 1995).

Social capital, and thus resilience, is enhanced by effective institutions and governance structures and a sense of collective responsibility for their functioning (Bollig, 2014; Lorenz, 2013; Nelson et al., 2007; Quinlan et al., 2016).

Community participation, including the degree of participation and the integration of local knowledge; the capacity for self-organization and learning; a willingness to change; as well as a community's sense of place, altruism, and cooperation, have been linked to greater resilience (Bollig, 2014; Shahpari Sani, 2022; Nelson et al., 2007; Quinlan et al., 2016). Communities and individuals who have high levels of knowledge, awareness, and education, as well as human capital or assets, and the ability to increase them, have higher levels of resilience (Nelson et al., 2007; Shahpari Sani et al., 2022; Quinlan et al., 2016). Values, beliefs, and the meaning assigned by society both to social structures and to challenges and changes faced by the community, affect resilience and the form it takes (Lorenz, 2013; Shahpari Sani et al., 2022). Other factors that contribute to resilience are environmental sustainability and knowledge of the complexity of socio-ecological systems (Bollig, 2014; Lorenz, 2013; Quinlan et al., 2016).

Resilience can also involve individual-level elements such as quality of life and well-being (Duarte Alonso & Bressan, 2015; Norris et al., 2008) as well as hardiness. Hardiness includes the belief that life experiences can lead to growth and having as a priority finding meaning and purpose in life (Bonnano 2004:25 in Bollig, 2014). It includes self-efficacy and agency, at the individual and collective levels (Nelson et al., 2007), which can "lead to collective action" (Bollig, 2014, p. 275).

In the face of social and ecological changes and challenges such as those facing Alpine agricultural systems today, transformation of the social-ecological system to increase social resilience may be necessary. Actors in that social system will need to draw on existing elements of the system that contribute to resilience, determine which elements must be transformed to increase resilience, and imagine new pathways to resilience. The pathways to resilience that emerged in this study reflect a recognition among farmers that the socio-ecological system on which they depend has fundamentally changed in recent decades and currently faces social, ecological, and climate challenges that require transformation to ensure the persistence of mountain agriculture, society, and environments into the future.

## Method

This chapter is based on ethnographic research conducted over fifteen months of fieldwork in the Lombardy region of the Italian Alps. The Lombardy Alps consist of mountains reaching over 3000 meters in elevation; long, narrow

valleys; rocky mountain peaks and high-elevation pastures; and rivers. The valley bottoms contain cities and towns as well as warehouses, factories, and the largest roads. Some towns can be found scattered at higher elevations. The landscape bears evidence of a long agricultural history and continues to have a traditional Alpine appearance with pastures, fields, and grazing livestock.

Research involved 67 semi-structured interviews and participant observation with mountain farmers and beekeepers. The farmers and beekeepers (hereafter referred to as farmers) interviewed were primarily small-scale farmers who raise animals and/or grow crops with the goal of making a living (Holloway, 2002). All farmers were multifunctional and combined traditional and modern agricultural methods. Many supplemented their income through other economic activities such as working in local government or as a chef, mechanic, or teacher. Twenty-six (38.8%) were women and 41 (61.2%) were men (age range 27 to 82; median age: 45; average age: 47).

Interviews were wide-ranging and involved discussion of the history of the farm and farmer; the nature and practice of farm activities; the impact of changes to ecosystems, landscapes, and climate on agricultural activities as well as farmer adaptations to these changes; and the role of government and bureaucracy in agriculture. Participant observation (Bernard, 2013) involved working on farms and with beekeepers, visiting local associations, and attending local agriculture events. Study participants were found through snow-ball sampling, a local beekeepers association, and local agricultural websites. Field notes were taken during and immediately following interviews and participant observation (Spradley, 2016).

Interview data was analyzed through thematic analysis and inductive and deductive coding of individual interviews (Bernard et al., 2016). Analysis occurred in the textual analysis software MAXQDA. The themes that emerged from the textual analysis form the core of the current paper. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. All participants have been given pseudonyms. Farmer age and gender are included in parentheses after quotes (e.g. "30, woman").

## Results

### An Outline of Farmer Ideas for the Future of Agriculture in Mountain Areas

> Certainly, we must not think of returning to the past when people lived off a small vegetable garden … Obviously we don't want that, but the fact of remaining connected to the territory – that we think it has a unique value and that we want to valorize that which the territory can give us …

We have strong ties to the areas we are from … If we abandon everything, the forest will advance, and in a bit, there won't be anything left (early 30s, man).

**Table 7.1 Elements of the four pathways to social resilience**

| Ecological | Social | Political and Economic | Individual |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Use agriculture as a tool of land management<br>• Practice environmentally sustainable agriculture (i.e. preserve the soil, protect biodiversity)<br>• Restore the landscape to an agricultural landscape by maintaining and recovering pastures, fields, terraces<br>• Increase recognition of the ecosystem services provided by agriculture | • Protect the Alpine landscape, agricultural traditions, and identity as tied to agriculture<br>• Increase recognition of the ecosystem services provided by agriculture<br>• Increase social capital and cohesion<br>• Foster collaboration<br>• Raise awareness among consumers of the value of consuming products that are produced locally with respect for the environment and for Alpine history and culture<br>• Restore dignity to the farming profession | • Increase the economic viability of agriculture<br>• Increase government subsidies and support for agriculture<br>• Push for agricultural policies, programs, rules, and regulations designed for mountain areas<br>• Push for economic development rooted in agriculture and the services it provides | • Pursue work that gives one's life meaning<br>• Pursue work that connects one to place<br>• Well-being |

| **Points of Overlap** | |
|---|---|
| **1)** | Social capital and cohesion contribute to well-being |
| **2)** | Maintaining agricultural landscapes means maintaining landscapes productive for agriculture |
| **3)** | Environmentally sustainable agriculture creates environments that are good for human health |
| **4)** | Identity and values are tied to an agricultural landscape and agricultural practices |

Farmers' ideas for the future of agriculture in mountain areas can be divided into four pathways to resilience: ecological, social, economic and political, and individual (see Table 7.1). The ecological dimension includes restoring the landscape to an agricultural landscape and practicing environmentally sustainable agriculture. The social dimension includes fostering agricultural values, creating a shared identity, and restoring dignity to the farming profession. It also includes increasing social capital and cohesion. The economic and political dimension includes ensuring the economic viability of agriculture and increasing government subsidies and support for mountain areas. For some farmers, this economic support is essential for farm survival. The individual dimension consists of individual well-being which involves the opportunity to pursue work one finds meaningful and to live in a place to which one feels connected. As we will see below, each of these pathways is interconnected with the others.

## Resilience to What?

Defining resilience of what and to what is a first step in any analysis of resilience (Carpenter, 2001). The four pathways to resilience that emerged in the current study stem from a specific socio-ecological context and a combination of on-going social and ecological shocks to Alpine agriculture. Up through the 1960s, agriculture was a dominant economic activity in the Alps. Social and ecological systems were, and remain for those practicing agriculture, tightly linked. Animals are moved to high-elevation pastures during the summer months so that hay can be made in the low-elevation pastures. Over time, there has been selection for animal breeds and crop species that survive well in cold environments. The steep terrain, limited opportunities for mechanization, short productive season, and harsh climate exerted and continue to exert pressure on the type of agricultural activities practiced (Dax et al., 2021; Flury et al., 2012; Klein et al., 2019). As a result of this long history of agriculture in the valleys, Alpine identity today remains linked to this agricultural past.

A livestock farmer describes the area's history:

> Up until the 50s, the land was heavily exploited, and people helped each other out when needed… But then in the 60s and 70s, more job opportunities became available in the lowlands, for example building the metro in Milan… The result was a dramatic decline in farming and maintaining the traditional landscape through traditional activities. Also starting in the 70s, young people and outside forces came in with new technologies, mechanization, and pesticides, which the older people could not adapt to and which in the end did not make sense for the Alps. This accelerated the decline in farming. Starting in this period, a lot of people also transitioned to industrial agricultural practices. Land became valuable for building houses rather than for agriculture… The valley bottom filled with warehouses and industry… Today, lots of activity is in the tertiary sector, but what is really being produced?

As the farmer explains, the shift in economic activity towards industry and tourism accelerated in the post-World War II era (Dax et al., 2021; MacDonald et al., 2000; Plieninger et al., 2016). Agriculture was widely abandoned, and rural areas depopulated as people moved to the lowlands in pursuit of work. Traditional forms of Alpine agriculture tightly tied to the unique Alpine environment, minimally mechanized, and small-scale have been largely abandoned. Farmers today face intense pressure to mechanize and industrialize in order to compete with industrial agricultural activities in lowland areas (Dax et al., 2021; Flury et al., 2012; MacDonald et al., 2000). European Union Common Agricultural Policy subsidies tend to favor larger scales of production (Bournaris & Manos, 2012; European Commission, DG AGRI, 2018; Papadopoulos, 2015). Farmers in the Alps also remain marginalized because of their distance from markets and limited access to contiguous, large, and accessible plots of land (Dax et al., 2021; Flury et al., 2012; MacDonald et al., 2000).

The decline in agriculture resulted in profound changes to landscapes and ecosystems (Höchtl et al., 2005; Lasanta et al., 2017; MacDonald et al., 2000). As a young farmer explains, "That which has changed the most is the landscape, not because of climate change, but because of the simple abandonment of the mountains by its residents" (31, woman). Abandoned agricultural land has reforested, the tree line has risen, and the fertility of unused meadows and fields has declined (Gehrig-Fasel et al., 2007; Mietkiewicz et al., 2017; Wieser et al., 2019). At the same time, climate changes have also altered landscapes, ecosystems, and weather patterns (EEA, 2016; Gobiet et al., 2014). Higher average temperatures have permitted trees and pests to colonize higher elevations (Leonelli et al., 2011; Turbelin & Catford, 2021). Farmers report that

the frequency and intensity of precipitation events, summer and winter temperatures, and the timing of the seasons and blooms have changed (Whitaker, 2023), "I have noticed strong climate changes. When I was little in the winter it was much colder … We see ever more frequent 'violent' natural events such as strong thunderstorms, hailstorms, and strong winds that until a few years ago seldom occurred" (36, woman).

As a result of the above social and climate changes, those Alpine farmers still active today face a social and ecological context that presents unique challenges for agriculture, and one that continues to change and will continue to change in the future. The pathways presented below are a response to how social and ecological changes of recent decades have failed to maintain a social-ecological system that supports mountain agriculture. While farmer ideas for the future reflect a wish to return things to the way they were in the past, farmers do not want a full return to a past, but rather to combine those elements of the past that contributed to resilience with opportunities for resilience afforded by the present.

## Elements of Social Resilience Identified by Farmers: The Pathways to Social Resilience

### Ecological Transformation: a Certain Type of Agriculture

Farmers proposed a form of agriculture that is rooted in traditional methods and products and prioritizes the preservation and protection of Alpine natural and cultural heritage. This form of agriculture involves the preservation of traditional methods such as transhumance, and traditional products such as rye, barley, cheese, honey, and potatoes should be preserved. It also provides room for the production of new products, though, such as grapes and olives. The modern and the traditional should be mixed but respect for the mountains, its rhythms, and the history of agriculture must be a priority, "products must express the flavors of the territory" (50, man, grape producer).

Many of the farmers are concerned about how social and ecological systems are interlinked and how agriculture can contribute to the restoration of the Alpine landscape to that of a productive agricultural landscape. They argued that agriculture should be a tool of land management. People in the environment are key to the protection of the environment. There should be a "management of the Alps that includes both people and nature … nature without people is nothing" (early 40s, man). This farmer, and others, argue that people have always lived and worked in the Alps, taking advantage of all its ecosystems and landscapes have to offer. Agricultural practices have long shaped the Alpine ecosystem and landscape (Höchtl et al., 2005; Niedrist et al., 2009; Plieninger et al., 2016; Schirpke et al., 2021). Therefore, farmers today

should actively seek to maintain remaining fields, pastures, and terraces and to restore ones that have been abandoned.

Agriculture can also protect biodiversity, contribute to the fertility of the soil, keep fields and pastures from being overrun by trees, and help maintain the agricultural appearance of the Alpine landscape. Tommi, a crop farmer in his early 40s explains, "Agriculture is one way to take care of the environment. Humans have been using and modifying the environment through agriculture for a long time. We can continue to do so in a way that is sustainable and regenerative." Stefano and Carlo are two vegetable farmers in their late 20s with a similar vision to that of Tommi's. While they clear former agricultural fields of trees to grow their crops, to protect biodiversity, instead of pulling up all the brambles and trees on their land, they leave some of the forest to preserve a small habitat for a unique bird species, "We are going to plant some trees along the edge of our plot that will hopefully help our other plants grow and provide habitats for animals." Today, the mountains can and need to be managed again through agriculture.

### Social Transformations Identified by Farmers

#### *Increasing collaboration*

Collaboration is an important indicator of social capital and cohesion, and thus resilience, but farmer statements about collaboration reveal how complex it is to initiate. They spoke of challenges of trust and achieving shared objectives: "I must be sure of the person. Once I am sure of the person, how they farm, and the respect they have for the soil and the environment, then I'll collaborate. With people I do not know, I don't trust them … seeing as it is my reputation at stake, because my clients know me, they know how we work, I do not want to make a mess" (late 30s, woman). Another crop farmer in his early 30s acknowledges that, "Here in the valley it has been really hard to initiate successful collaborations. The mentality is that rather than work together, here we instead fight one with the other." This may be because, "people here are sometimes closed. They do not want to share. They prefer to keep to themselves." Nearly every person I spoke to mentioned this about themselves and their fellow mountain residents: "We are closed" or "they are closed," to each other and to outsiders, even to new ideas, some added.

At the same time, farmers spoke of people with whom they collaborated and the value of this collaboration for their agricultural activities and well-being. They learn from each other and share knowledge and information. Agricultural associations serve as meeting points for members and places to exchange experiences. A young crop farmer explains how sometimes he is out in the field, and he has been working for three hours on a tiny plot of land and he asks

himself, "Why the heck am I doing this? But the fact that you know that there are other people out there who think like you do, who are working towards similar goals, helps you continue, it is motivation."

There are also examples of successful collaboration. The Paesaggi Resilienti (Resilient Landscapes) project, a project that began in 2018 with the goal to "counteract the advancement of the forest and the abandonment of terraced agricultural land … by catalyzing skills and resources around a network of farms, local authorities and institutions (schools and museums) capable not only of reversing these phenomena but also of using agriculture for development, social cohesion, and participation as well as a tool for improving well-being, collaboration between public and private sector, and the protection and maintenance of the landscape" (Bio-Distretto Valle Camonica, 2024). The project links ecological and social transformation, viewing one as a path to the other.

Thirteen farms are involved in the project, with more farms hoping to join. The project brings farmers with a similar vision for the mountain territory and mountain agriculture together, providing them with important social support, the opportunity to collaborate, and resources they would not be able to afford on their own. A young farmer in his early 30s said, "Often we talk to each other, compare what we are each doing, send each other photos… knowing that there are other people who think as we do, who are going ahead with their projects, for us, that is fundamental. I think together we have the opportunity to do truly important things." The project is an example of successful community organization around shared goals and in response to shared perceived challenges.

### *Increasing community support*

Social transformation also includes increasing community support for agriculture which, for now, is mixed. Some mountain residents are enthusiastic about farming and the fact that young people wish to revitalize agriculture and the mountain territory. They will support younger farmers by willingly offering new farmers land to work. Sometimes just finding one person who will give you a plot to work is enough, "starting with her, spreading the word, people came to know about what we were trying to do and would say, 'Look, I have a plot of land,' and so, slowly but surely we pieced together some land" (early 30s, man, crop farmer). Others willingly offer new farmers land; glad it is being taken care of and the trees are being kept at bay. These people may have an agricultural mentality and do not want the land abandoned. Farmers will sometimes give the landowners food products in exchange for the land. A young farmer said that this sort of exchange can make both landowner and farmer alike feel good.

Community support is not always forthcoming, though. Some mountain residents complain to farmers about the smell of animal dung from nearby stalls or pasturing animals. One farmer said, "The people around here are very anti-animal, anti-farming … We do not feel supported in the community in general, but we continue our work" (late 20s, woman). Community support can be especially complicated for people who are not from the valley. Six different farmers who moved to the mountains from far away described how difficult it was to obtain community support. Over time, they all managed to gain some support in the community, but it was not easy.

### Educating consumers on the social and ecological value of mountain agriculture

Community support also involves educating consumers about the value of products produced in the mountains with respect for the environment, society, and agricultural traditions. Consumers must be convinced that it is worth it to spend more on the product. Lucia, a livestock farmer in her early 30s, speaks about her farm and its work on Facebook, TV programs, and in local newspapers. She invites people up to her high-elevation summer farm where she makes cheese using traditional methods. They can learn about the production process and see the animals at pasture. Once a consumer tastes the product and understands how it is made, it can, as Rita, a crop farmer in her early 30s, explains, become an addiction: "Once you start, you won't be able to stop … the other day an older woman arrived who said, [Rita] I had to wait 67 years - because I'm 67 years old - to eat greens this good."

Farmers also wish the social and ecological services they provide would be better recognized. As one farmer explains: "Our work is socially useful, but it is not treated as such. More dignity needs to be given by society to farming…The law and politics also need to give the work more dignity. It needs to be seen as work that contributes to society" (early 40s, man). An organic farmer in his early 60s agrees, "farming has to be part of the social fabric…it needs to be supported [by mountain residents and the government]."

## Economic Viability

Economic viability looms large in farmers' minds. It is challenging to stay afloat economically in a marginal agricultural environment such as that of the Alps (Dax et al., 2021; Flury et al., 2012; Merlo, 2002). Farmers find themselves in competition with large-scale industrial operations, yet, as we saw above, face much higher costs of production in the mountains. The low prices offered by the national and international agriculture system are insufficient. At the same time, there are benefits from being integrated into an agricultural system supported by subsidies from the European Union. This is particularly true for

livestock farmers, but crop farmers and beekeepers also speak of the subsidies they have received, "I have to say, they [the economic support] do help." And, as another livestock farmer says, "Once the subsidies are finished, so is mountain agriculture."

Changing the political and bureaucratic system to favor farmers would be one step towards increasing the long-term economic viability of small-scale farms. Many farmers identified dealing with the endless bureaucracy and paperwork and with complex rules that are difficult to follow as a major challenge. Many also perceive that the rules and regulations designed by policy makers appear to be designed with intensive agricultural operations in lowland areas in mind, "They take the rules made for the big farms and they pass them on to the small farms and so the small farms have disappeared" (late 50s, man). Although the rules and regulations may make sense in theory and may be backed up by scientific research, farmers say there is a disconnect between what the rules are intended to do and the practical realities of farming in the mountains, "The rules do not make sense for the realities of small mountain farming." Subsidies, too, tend to favor industrial farming. These issues could be resolved by designing regulations and subsidies specifically for mountain areas (with farmer feedback), by reducing bureaucratic requirements, and by greater clarity regarding how to implement government rules and regulations at the farm level.

### *Individual Well-being*

Individual well-being is a key element of resilience (Duarte Alonso & Bressan, 2015; Norris et al., 2008). Social and psychological resilience contribute one to the other (Bollig, 2014). Therefore, promoting individual well-being is important for increasing social resilience. At the individual level, farmers identified ways in which the practice of farming can contribute to well-being by giving their lives meaning. These include collaboration and community support, the feeling that one's work is contributing to the preservation Alpine natural and cultural heritage, the satisfaction of overcoming challenges, the benefits of a connection to place, and passion for their work. One farmer said: "This is well-being: having land, being outside, farming, being able to take your animals to the high mountain pastures."

Many farmers report feeling connected to the mountains. This connection is cultivated through active engagement with Alpine ecosystems and landscapes through agriculture. It can also come from a family history on the land, or a choice made to pursue a different kind of life in the mountains: "The opportunity to valorize that which belongs to my family is interesting." Others point out the importance of a community to their sense of well-being, "I want to have a place I am from … here, people know us. I am from here" (late 20s,

woman). Therefore, to promote well-being, and increase social resilience, it will be important to ensure that farmers can continue to farm, and beekeepers can continue to raise bees. Because, as this livestock farmer points out, "Science, technology, and fertilizer do not make food from the land, people do. And if you cannot keep people on the land, especially in the Alps where you need a lot of labor to produce food, then you will not have food."

## Discussion and Conclusion

The above sections have outlined four pathways to social resilience rooted in farmer ideas for the future of agriculture in the mountain valleys in which they live and work. The goal is to transform the existing socio-ecological system from within, building on elements of the past that they see as successful, but transforming those that are no longer supporting agriculture (Lorenz, 2013; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Their ideas for the future of agriculture are a response to social and ecological changes that have, over the course of the last several decades, disrupted the socio-ecological system on which farmers depend for their livelihoods and their sense of well-being. These changes include the abandonment of agriculture, rural depopulation, shifts in economic activity towards industry and tourism, and changes to the climate and ecosystems.

The components of the four interconnected pathways – ecological, social, economic and political, and individual – identified by farmers map onto factors known to contribute to resilience. At the core of the social pathway is increasing social capital and cohesion (Lin, 2001; Norris et al., 2008; Duarte Alonso & Bressan, 2015) and increasing a sense of collective responsibility (Nelson et al., 2007; Bollig, 2014; Lorenz, 2013). For the farmers, social transformation involves increasing collaboration, community support, and recognition of the ecosystem services provided by agriculture. Smallholder farms provide important ecosystem services for both the highlands and the lowlands, for example tourism, the protection of cultural and natural heritage, and support of local economies (Egarter Vigl et al., 2017; Grêt-Regamey et al., 2012; Klein et al., 2019). They contribute to rural vitality and the functionality and resilience of mountain ecosystems (Marino et al., 2022; Rivera et al., 2020). Greater recognition, and greater social and political support, need to be given to the services farms provide.

As social resilience and ecological resilience are linked (Nelson et al., 2007; Folke, 2006; Folke et al., 2002), it is not surprising that the social and ecological pathways to resilience identified here are also linked. The linked social and ecological transformation sought by farmers involves restoring agricultural landscapes and engaging in agriculture that protects and preserves the mountain environment. In doing so, farmers will both create environments

that are productive for agriculture while also contributing to environmental sustainability so that agriculture will be able to be practiced into the future. Landscapes are repositories of social identity and history (Schama, 1995). For farmers, restoring and protecting agricultural landscapes will also contribute to restoring a sense of agricultural identity.

Social resilience has an important institutional/governmental component (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Lorenz, 2013; Shapari Sani, 2022). The economic and political pathways to social resilience include transforming agriculture so that it is economically sustainable. This requires profound changes to the political system so that it is more attentive to and supportive of the mountain agricultural context. EU agricultural policies and programs as well as rules and regulations should be tailored to the needs and dimension of mountain agriculture. Farmers must also take responsibility for communicating the value of their products to consumers, and, again, there needs to be greater social and economic recognition of the services, ecological and social, provided by mountain farmers.

The final pathway regards individual well-being. Individual resilience involves allowing farmers to pursue activities that give their lives meaning and fostering a social context that supports agriculture. Individual well-being will be difficult to achieve if agriculture does not permit a farmer to stay afloat economically and if social support for agriculture does not increase. The steps farmers are already taking to promote the social resilience of agriculture suggests they possess a sense of agency and self-efficacy known both to be important for well-being (Nelson et al., 2007) and important for collective action (Bollig, 2014).

The overlap between the farmer's model of resilience and how resilience has been operationalized and theorized by other scholars provides support for the idea that there are common elements of resilience shared across communities and social systems, including those in marginal areas. At the same time, the Alpine socio-ecological context presents unique challenges for farmers that require more local responses. The range of opportunities for the development of agriculture in the mountains is constrained by the steep terrain, mountain climate, and distance from markets. Farmers and beekeepers in the Alps are working on the geographic margins, in a marginal agricultural environment, and on the margins of an industrial agricultural system. But this is not stopping them. They recognize that they will have to take action on their own to handle the social and ecological challenges they face, and their actions reveal that they already are.

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Chapter 8

# "You Must Beat the Inflation and Save in Dollars!": Social Resilience in the Context of an Economic Crisis in Argentina

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**Abstract**

Argentina is notorious for its recurring economic crises that have periodically plagued its socioeconomic landscape for almost a century now. Only within the last 40 years, the country has gone through four severe macroeconomic crises characterised by volatility of the national currency, extremely steep inflation, and a rapid rise of poverty. The most recent one continues today. The cyclicity of these crises has led Argentines to consider themselves a particularly resilient people with an outstanding capacity to weather economic hardship. But how does this so-called Argentine resilience unfold in practice; what does it mean in people's quotidian lives? This chapter examines, first, how social imaginaries of (Argentine) resilience come about and how they reflect in people's everyday behaviors and practices. Second, drawing from ethnographic data collected in northern Argentina between 2021 and 2023, the chapter explores middle-class Argentine's strategies to navigate and their 'resilience tactics' in the face of periodic economic crises –both while undergoing a crisis and while anticipating the next one.

**Keywords**: Resilience, economic crisis, Argentina, social imaginaries.

* * *

"To be honest, we're fed up with this country", Noelia[1] says and looks at me directly in the eye while her husband, Fernando, nods approvingly. Noelia is an entrepreneur who used to have a football field renting

[1] All interlocutors are anonymised and have chosen their own pseudonyms.

> business and now performs as a singer and gives singing classes. Fernando is an electrical engineer. We are talking about the current economic crisis in Argentina and how she, Fernando, and their one-year-old son are coping amid the prevailing economic constraints. She continues to say how impossible it is to save money and to progress, how the politicians are nothing but a horde of delinquents, and how difficult it is to make ends meet amid the constantly worsening inflation. Our conversation then shifts to the topic of emigration, a topic that most Argentines are likely to have something to say about. Noelia and Fernando know a couple of people who have left and some others, who are thinking about leaving the country, mainly for Spain or Italy. For Noelia and Fernando, leaving is just a distant dream rather than a plan to concretize. But it is a dream, nonetheless.
>
> A couple of days later, Noelia, her sister-in-law, and I are sitting and chatting in Noelia's small kitchen. We are looking at social media sites on our phones and laughing at different memes concerning *Argentineness* that people are circulating to 'honour' the day of the Argentine Flag (*el Día de la Bandera*). One such meme depicts a man wearing the Argentine national football team's shirt, preparing steaks on a grill. In the background there are flames. The text in the meme says: "What does an Argentine do when he is sent to hell? He starts a barbeque."

What kinds of ideas of social resilience does this ethnographic account summon? Is resilience about facing the hardship and making the most out of it, such as 'when in hell, start a barbeque'? Is it about mustering the mental and material resources to go to the other side of the world in search of a better livelihood? Or still, is it about turning the dire circumstances into memes of parody and jokes about one's own and others' socioeconomic plight?

Through discussing microentrepreneur women's lives in Santiago del Estero, North-western Argentina, this chapter explores how social resilience emerges in different behaviours, strategies, and narratives in the context of Argentina's current economic crisis (2017–present). Engulfed in a severe recession marked by rampant inflation and growing poverty, Argentina's present socioeconomic landscape affords a relevant, albeit poignant backdrop for analysing social resilience and its meanings. This implies inquiring into the everyday forms of resilience; the small yet significant strategies put into practice that not only enable people to navigate the crisis, but also allow them to build future aspirations.

This chapter approaches social resilience as a constantly unfolding, dynamic process rooted in *doing*. It moves beyond the more common ways of

conceptualizing social resilience as an adaptive capacity of sorts by suggesting that resilience is not necessarily something that people *have* or can *build*/*accrue*. Instead, it emerges in human activities and habits that relate to common ideas of how to deal with changing, often adverse life circumstances. This does not mean I intend to redefine the concept –there are enough definitions out there already. It means focusing on how behaviours, collectively understood behavioural models, and widely shared social imaginaries (of resilience) constantly inform and fuel each other, translating into particular ways of doing things. This interpretative framework also stays attuned to the transformative potential of everyday practices and how they help people make sense of the crisis they are living with (cf. Anderson, 2015).

The discussed data was collected between 2021 and 2023. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted 30 semi-structured online interviews that were recorded. In 2022 and 2023, I spent three months in the field meeting my interlocutors in person and doing supplementary interviews. Some of my collaborators, I had first learned to know online; others, I have known since 2014, when I first set out to do doctoral fieldwork in Santiago. Still some, such as Dora, whose story is featured in this chapter, I have known for over 20 years, much prior to my academic endeavours in Argentina. It is important to mention, that all my interlocutors consider themselves middle-class. Though the term is highly complex, it is a common socioeconomic self-identification in the country (Adamovsky, 2009). In the case of my interlocutors, most own a house and a car. Some have been able to travel abroad or spend vacations in a domestic destination at some point in time. The question of class is an integral part in research on social resilience. Yet in this chapter, due to its limited scope, I focus instead on different ways of acting that speak of resilience, recognising that it is my interlocutors' class position that makes those actions possible to begin with. It therefore suffices to note that the social imaginaries of (Argentine) resilience this chapter refers to, and how they concretize in practice, are, to a large extent, anchored in ideas and understandings of Argentine middle-classness.

The following pages are structured around three main sections. The first part offers a brief overview of the prevalent conceptualizations of social resilience and then, how it has been studied in relation to economic crises and in the Latin American context. The second part expounds on the current economic situation in Argentina and the relevance and timeliness of social resilience research there. In the final part, I explore the relationship between social imaginaries of (Argentine) resilience and how my interlocutors (have) cope(d) with the economic crisis in their day-to-day. I do so by first telling the story of Dora, a 68-year-old bakery owner, whose life story encapsulates the ebbs and flows of the national economic history. I then discuss how Noelia, a 36-year-old

former owner of a football field renting business, envisions her and her family's future. Dora's and Noelia's stories reveal three survival tactics that help weather crises: 1) Beat the inflation by consuming, 2) buy dollars and keep them safe (in cash), 3) prepare to leave the country (just in case).

## Definitions and Approaches Conceptualizing Resilience

Since its beginnings in the early 2000's, the field of social resilience research has been strongly linked to socioecological systems and subsequently, social systems and institutions. A vast body of literature within the field focuses especially on social and socioecological relations in terms of risk-assessment, vulnerability, and adaptation. Often this research happens in the context of ecological crises, natural disasters, and climate change (McGreavy, 2016). The continuously evolving work has birthed countless definitions that aim to capture the essence of social/community resilience. A cornerstone in the field was established by Neil Adger in 2000, with his now classic definition that "social resilience [is] the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change" (2000, p. 47). Building on that, Norris et. al. deem it "a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation after a disturbance" (Norris et al., 2008, p. 130). For Berkes and Ross, "community resilience can be understood as the capacity of its social system to come together to work toward a communal objective" (2013, p. 7). Kwok et al., in turn, posit that "social resilience can be conceptualized as a process of capacity building (e.g., disaster planning), as a post-disaster outcome (e.g., rate of population retention after an earthquake), or as both a process and an outcome" (2016, p.198). Further, some scholars argue that an integral part of social resilience is resistance (Chica et al., 2014). Others, in turn, draw a stark line between resistance and resilience, emphasizing instead transformation, learning, and self-organization (of a social system) as the latter's core components (Brenson-Lazan, 2003 in Carrasco, 2012; Folke et al., 2010; Vila Freyer et al., 2016).

Despite the nuanced differences among these definitions, they are generally predicated on the capacity-oriented approach. Though varied in terms of theoretical and topical approaches, investigations into social resilience often focus on the kinds of resources –e.g., social, cultural, material, and physical capital– that communities can accrue and draw from in their efforts to build resilience in the face of crisis (Barrios, 2014; Cirer-Costa, 2020; Obrist et al., 2010; Sherrieb et al., 2010). Social resilience, it follows, has become widely understood as a capacity that can be collectively shaped and built; not simply a static trait that a community either possesses or not. It implies the ability to cope with hardship in a flexible manner that leads to successful adaptation.

But there are problems to conceptualizing social resilience in such terms. For instance, focusing on what makes one social group more resilient than another, leads to the trap of atemporality, overlooking how time and context continuously inform and shape our (collective) ways of acting in diverse conditions. Second, inquiring into the different resources that serve as building blocks for collective resilience does not necessarily tell us about how people interact with and apply those resources. Third, discussing social resilience in terms of adaptation often emphasizes causality, predicating that resilience leads to adaptation. This approach, however, ignores the realms of action and discursive spaces where the two emerge. In that sense, thinking about resilience in terms of constantly evolving adaptive responses that take their cue from cultural models and public discourses may allow us to better understand how social resilience-as-action unfolds in practice. For that, more empirical and ethnographic research is necessary.

Over the past decade, social resilience studies in the context of economic crises have started to increase (Walker & Cooper, 2011). The global financial crisis in 2008 triggered a surge of literature on how different populations – especially in Europe– dealt with the crisis and its socioeconomic repercussions. That research explores, for instance, the differential impact the crisis has had on different demographic groups, and gendered forms of resilience (Papageorgiou & Petousi, 2018); the relationship between social resilience and entrepreneurial activity (Huggins & Thompson 2015); the role of the civil society and civil resistance in collective coping strategies (Chica et al., 2014), and how intergenerational dynamics affect the ways in which families confront and built resilience to the crisis (Gray & Dagg, 2019).

Research on social resilience and economic crises is, of course, not limited to Europe. Especially relevant for this chapter, the topic is gaining interest also in the Latin American context[2] (Ayuso, 2020). With enormous wealth inequalities and well-recorded (and continuing) consequences of the 1980-90s' neoliberal financial policies, a state of privation is for many a naturalized condition. Within this setting, especially anthropologists tend to inquire into the *experiential* dimension of a crisis as it touches people's everyday lives. For economists, political scientists, and economic sociologists in turn, the relationship between citizens and institutions (and institutional crisis writ large) is often of greater interest (Gonzales Andrade and Ayala, 2017). Perhaps because of this, in Latin America, there is a strong tendency to connect social resilience with economic resilience and emphasize particularly the latter. It

[2] In the literature in Latin America, scholars tend to use the term *resiliencia comunitaria* –community resilience–more than *resiliencia social*. In terms of their meaning, they are virtually synonymous.

follows, that rather than focusing on how social groups navigate a crisis to ensure their sociocultural wellbeing, the investigations concern how collectively 'produced' resilience helps local economies to recover from that crisis (Sandoval et al., 2023).

## Argentina's Recurring Crises

Since 2017, Argentina has been engulfed in one its worst-ever economic crises. A rapidly devaluing national currency, increasing poverty (around 40% in June 2023; INDEC, 2023), and inflation that in 2024 stood at 220% (World Bank, 2024), serve as dramatic markers of an ailing economy. For many, the most punishing dimension of this crisis is the intractable inflation. Salaries, whether in the private or public sector, simply cannot keep up with the soaring prices. Consequentially, people's budgets are constantly shrinking, leading many to face inevitable downward mobility, if not outright poverty.

Although the crisis has reached a historical scale, as such, the situation for most Argentines is hardly new. Despite boasting Latin America's third-largest economy, Argentina is notorious for its financial volatility and recurring macroeconomic crises. One of my interlocutors, Julia, a 39-year-old handicraft entrepreneur, gives succinct account of this recurrence as we discuss her experiences of past downturns: "It's not that this crisis is really so different from any of the others", she says.

> I mean, they're all the same because they always affect us in bad ways. They're just sometimes different in form. Sometimes it's about recession and then it's about hyperinflation, and then it's the IMF trying to force us to pay our debt and then we default…but it never really changes, you know, I don't think Argentina ever changes. So, what do you do? *Seguís remando* [you continue to row on] and make a plan for tomorrow and then two or three contingency plans because you never know; here, you really never know!

Despite not yet being in her forties, Julia gives the impression of being a withered veteran of many economic battles. Without going further than 40 years back in time, historical data backs her account. As Daniel Ozarow writes, since the 1980s until the early 2000s, there have been three major waves of economic crises leading to sky-high inflation and rapidly increasing poverty. In his words:

> In the 1980s the military junta's public-sector wage freeze caused salaries to plummet by 40 percent, sparking the first wave. Then, during the 1990s, President Carlos Menem's structural adjustment policies

> fragmented the middle class (Kessler 2003) and provoked an incremental rise in (unemployment-induced) poverty. …Argentina's third and most tumultuous episode of new poverty was spawned by the economic crisis of 2001-2002. A sequence of events including the government defaulting on most of its US$132 billion debt…aggravated official unemployment, which soared to 22 percent by October 2002. Meanwhile, 54 percent of citizens found themselves below the poverty line (2014, p.181).

The fourth –the current– wave started in 2017, was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and is showing no sign of recovery.

The economic and institutional causes and consequences of these crises are well-documented. Much has also been written about how ordinary citizens have coped, with the 2001-2002 disaster arguably being the most thoroughly studied. In 1991, at the onset of the new era of neoliberal economic policies, the value of the Argentine peso was fixed to the US dollar in a one-to-one convertibility plan. The move managed to curb the hyperinflation, which had reached the average annual rate of 2600% in 1989-1990 (Pou, 2000). But by the second half of the 1990s, it was clear the economy was starting to sink –again. By 2001, the country was effectively in bankruptcy, incapable of paying its foreign debt, and with all but depleted federal cash reserves. In January 2002, the government decided to abandon the one-to-one parity agreement. By then, the value of the national currency had already plummeted, leading countless people, especially those of the middle classes, to lose their savings from one day to another. Among the most unpopular emergency measures, the government established a strict cash withdrawal limit of max. 250 USD per week, colloquially known as *el corralito*[3]. So, amid this socioeconomic and political chaos, what did people do and how did they get by?

The people took to the streets. Citizens of various socioeconomic backgrounds joined the *piqueteros* (people in the pickets) (Rey, 2011); across the country, grocery stores, shops, and even banks were ransacked, and protests –often violently quelled– demanding political change became a daily sight in various cities. But as the first shockwave causing immediate fury started to abate, more concerted popular coping efforts began to emerge. Perhaps most notably, the initially chaotic scene opened up for efficiently organized bartering clubs located as much in marginalized as in exclusive neighbourhoods, especially in Buenos Aires. This sudden –though not new– phenomenon of cashless economy offered an immediate relief in circumstances where frozen bank deposits made available cash extremely

[3] Corralito is the diminutive form of the word corral, which means an animal enclosure.

scarce (Pearson, 2003). Also featured in diverse global news media, e.g., the New York Times, BBC, and CNN, the bartering clubs brought to the fore the savviness, organizational abilities, and solidarity among Argentines. The academic commentary and news pieces written at the time barely mention the concept of resilience, as it was not yet in vogue at the time. In hindsight, the circumstances offered an extraordinary glimpse into what we now call social resilience and how it surfaced in people's daily (re)actions.

A historical feature of the Argentine economic life is that the cyclical crises are followed by periods of robust economic growth (Rapoport and Brenta, 2021). Thus, it is important to note that Argentina is not a country with decades of an ongoing crisis, such as those afflicted by years of armed conflicts or endemic poverty (cf. Vigh, 2008). It is a country with decades of recurring crises. In that sense, in Argentina, a state of crisis is not a normalized condition. What is normalized is the anticipation of a new crisis (Visacovsky, 2010).

## Shared Understandings of Argentine Resilience

Let us return to the image of the Argentine doing a barbeque in hell. A similar message of perseverance inhabits popular sayings, such as "for Argentines, crisis is a lifestyle", or "if you're born an Argentine, you're born resilient". These undoubtedly allude to the nation's uncanny ability to survive one crisis after another. But I argue the idea of *Argentine* resilience also has historical moorings linked to the period of the Great Migration (1880-1930), when millions of people, especially from southern Europe[4], arrived in the country. In historical fiction, popular culture, and even diverse public and political discourse, the first generations of 'new' Argentines are often portrayed as the builders of modern Argentina –an idea that can at best be described as a myth[5]. They are considered as hardy, resilient people who came with nothing yet were able to sow fortunes for the subsequent generations to reap. Though not central to this chapter, I suggest there is a link between these historical portrayals and the current social imaginaries of Argentine resilience.

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[4] Notable immigrant populations also came from e.g., the Middle East, Russia, and from other countries in Latin America.

[5] This is something akin to a national myth, debunked by a vast body of historical, sociological, and anthropological literature. Not only scholars but also experts on folklore are increasingly invested in telling the 'factual narrative', that is, that Argentina, by the time immigrants from outside Argentina began to arrive, had various indigenous peoples living across the territory. Moreover, processes of mestizaje since the colonization in the 16th century had already laid a foundation for a racially diverse population which had an enormous influence in Argentina's folklore, politics, socioeconomic stratification, etc. See e.g., Adamovsky (2018); Grosso (2008).

According to Dilip Gaonkar, social imaginaries are cemented on shared understandings of the self and collective identities. They "underlie and make possible common practices" and are "embedded in the habitus of a population or are carried in modes of address, stories, symbols, and the like" (2002, p. 4). In that sense, they are related to what Lamont, Welburn and Fleming (2016) call cultural repertoires –that is, "social scripts, myths, and cultural structures [whose] content…varies to some extent across national contexts" (Lamont et al., 2016, p. 144). Cultural repertoires are co-constituted by national ideologies and institutional forces, and people's everyday realities and experiences. Importantly, the authors also argue that: "Certain repertoires can foster resilience by feeding the capacity of individuals to maintain positive self-concepts; dignity; and a sense of inclusion, belonging, and recognition" (ibid.).

The following ethnographic accounts offer a glimpse to such repertoires of "belonging and recognition". They reveal three strategies that are tightly cemented in (mostly middle-class) social imaginaries of Argentine resilience. In a caricaturesque way, they read almost like a practical manual for crisis management in Argentina. In a more anthropological sense, they speak of practices, informed by accumulating experience, that unveil processes of resilient behaviour. They constitute the core of collectively decodable scripts of action that turn into stories people can share –even if their socioeconomic standing prevents them from putting those scripts of action into practice.

**Lesson 1: Beat the Inflation**

> The inflation first hits basic goods like flour, sugar, yerba[6], and oil. So, when I see that the prices start growing, I buy in bulk, litres and litres of oil, flour, sugar, butter… all the basic things we need in the bakery, I always keep extra stock. Then I obviously raise the price of the bread according to the inflation, but I've already won a bit by buying in bulk at a fixed price before it would go up again. And then you have to consider this: If the inflation gets completely out of hand, providers maybe take their goods off the market, maybe just for a day, because they want to wait for the prices to fix, to get a better deal. And if that happens, where do I get merchandise? (Dora, 68).

Dora owns a small bakery in the centre of Santiago del Estero. She has run it since 1993 and has no intention to leave it anytime soon. Before starting her own business, Dora worked with her now ex-husband in a humble

[6] Yerba is used to make mate, an herbal infusion that is highly common across the country.

neighbourhood bakery they owned together with Dora's brother-in-law. They started in the late 1970s, during a time when the country was ruled by a military dictatorship (1976-1983). Though not a fan of the military, she admits that the time was good for their business[7]. It allowed them to purchase property in the neighbourhood they lived at the time. By the beginning of the 1980s, they were able to buy out Dora's brother-in-law, invest in better equipment, and rent a larger locale next to the old one. She says that it was the beginning of her life as an entrepreneur.

"These economic crises, they don't scare me anymore, I've seen so many of them and look, we (the family) have survived, we're doing well", she tells me in a long, recorded conversation. Only twice has an economic crisis hit them truly hard. The first time was in 1990 during a period of hyperinflation that reached an all-time high at over 20,000% in March 1990. For months, they sold bread for less than it cost to buy flour. During those months, they used most of their savings just to buy ingredients to keep the bakery running.

> It was horrible, because every morning, we'd have to put out new prices. For instance, to give you an idea, if a kilogram of bread cost yesterday, for the sake of the example, ten pesos, today it could cost 12, and tomorrow maybe 12,50; we had to check the [flour, oil] stock prices with the central distributor every morning and maybe change the prices again in the afternoon. It was horrible, it was horrible.

Their bakery survived and kept afloat for another few years ("The good thing", she tells me, "Is that people always buy bread!"). Then, however, it emerged that Dora's husband had made a series of bad investments and consequentially, owed a vast quantity of money to people with little means to pay it back. According to Dora, it was a watershed moment in their family life and the second time they nearly faced bankruptcy. She tells me that one evening, she sat her husband down and told him he would no longer run the family economy. Dora took the reins and negotiated with the debt collectors a sound payment plan. She convinced her husband they ought to move to another neighbourhood and start a new bakery there, in a more convenient location. This was the first half of the 1990s, the apex of free market policies in Argentina, and private credit and bank loans were easily available. Dora made use of that. When the new bakery had started to function –her eldest son now in charge of the administration and her husband responsible for the daily operations–, she

[7] The military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983 left disastrous economic consequences. The poverty rate went from 5% to 22%, the external debt grew by 364%, and the average inflation rate of those years hovered around 200% (Rapoport, 2014, 2021)

decided she would establish her own bakery in the centre of the city. The move paid off. Although in the second half of the 1990s the national economy was again languishing and a new crisis was imminent, Dora and her husband were doing well enough to travel abroad, to Brazil, for the first time. According to her, her entrepreneurial talent saved them.

In Argentina, the way to 'beat the inflation' implies consumption. Dora's recounting is telling of what one does in the commercial sector, especially in the sector that fabricates goods. But the same principle applies to private citizens. Whether to acquire necessary commodities (e.g., household items) or to spend in entertainment (e.g., to eat out), the key is to use money before it loses more value. In terms of resilience, coping by consuming is an ongoing process that mirrors the shape of the crisis. This economic management strategy stands in stark contrast to the widely shared ideas of frugality, even austerity, as ways to survive recession. The expression *quemar la plata* –to burn money–, concretizes in urban landscapes where cafés and restaurants are buzzling as if there were no crisis in sight. Dora offers a clear summary of this behaviour as she says: "You have to be smart with how you spend your money when the inflation gets ugly (*cuando la inflación se pone fea*), you always have to think about the future. But you also have to enjoy life…you do that in the present."

**Lesson 2: Buy Dollars, Keep Them 'Under the Mattress'**

When the cash crisis began in November 2001, for Dora, its most "inconvenient" aspect was the *corralito*. Unlike countless others, Dora did not lose her savings for she did not have them in pesos, nor did she keep them in a bank. As soon as the convertibility plan had come into effect in 1991, she had started to exchange pesos to dollars whenever possible. "We kept [the dollars in cash] in a *chanchito* (a piggy bank), for years we never opened it." Moreover, given her experience with the hyperinflation in 1989-90, she had learned to always keep extra stock of flour, butter, oil, etc. in her bakery. Normally, this would have been a precautionary measure to stay ahead of the inflation. But in the last weeks of 2001 and early 2002, that stock enabled her to keep her bakery open. For during several days, it was virtually impossible to buy basic ingredients. Although she had to dramatically reduce the array of products (the same in her husband's bakery), she did not close the business for one day.

By 2003, the Argentine economy was starting to recover and about to enter a period of growth. Dora and her family's financial situation improved, too. In 2004, she and her husband were able travel to Europe for the first time. For the next 15 years, with some ups and downs, Dora's bakery kept its course. It did not make her rich. But it did provide her enough so that she could renovate her house as soon as she separated from her husband in 2014 and start travelling

abroad once every couple of years. When the current downturn began to be felt in 2018, Dora did not make much of it.

> At first, it didn't really affect me… We could see the inflation was going up, but I guess it was normal… The real problem was the dollar, it was hard to exchange dollars with the *cepo*[8], all the time you needed more and more pesos to buy dollars in the black market, and not to even talk about how it is today! I've obviously had my contacts [from whom I buy dollars], you know, in the family we have our trusted contacts. But it was difficult, and today… *mamita*, it's worse!

In the early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic started. March 20th marked the beginning of a national lockdown that would become one of the longest in the world. Most business life came to a halt. But not the food sector. Grocery stores, kiosks, vegetable stores, butcheries and, indeed, bakeries, could stay open with limited hours. Staying open did not, however, mean it generated profit. On the contrary, the money that came in was not sufficient to pay the rent, the expenses, and the workers' salaries. Dora used her savings to keep the business going. But she was fortunate to have dollars whose value had continued to increase, and to convert them into pesos in the black market was easy. Since in Santiago, many business transactions still happen in cash, she could 'liquify' pesos as necessary. With a hint of irony in her laughter, she exclaims that "*el billete verde* (the "green [dollar] bill") saved me again!"

It is estimated that there are over 250 billion USD in Argentina kept outside the finance system (Zalazar, 2023). While some of this is tied to bonds and properties, much of is kept 'under the mattress' (*bajo el colchón*) by private citizens. This adroit way to maintain financial flexibility is a resilient measure *par excellence*; a strategy that serves as an insurance against devaluation while also offering immediate relief when a necessity hits –such as in the case of Dora. It speaks of the lack of confidence that countless Argentines have in their banking system and national currency. In that sense, while the crisis that fuels the purchasing of dollars is primarily economic, below the surface, there is a more profound crisis of a societal distrust of the financial system writ large.

[8] Restrictions to currency exchange, in Argentina known as el cepo, were establish in mid-2019. It meant that private citizens could not exchange more than 200 dollars per month. Subsequently, the measure has been changed in various ways, yet as of 2023, various currency restrictions continue in place.

**Lesson 3: Prepare to Leave**

For Noelia and her family, the current economic situation is difficult. Until 2022, she had run a small business that rented out three football fields for local clubs and private groups. When I first interviewed her in 2021, her business had been closed for nearly a year because of the pandemic. Though she subsequently opened it, keeping it running rapidly became too costly. Eventually Noelia decided to close it down for good. She has been a performing singer since her early 20s. Making use of her talent and experience, today she gives private singing classes and performs in different kinds of events. What she and her husband earn together allows them to get by. Nevertheless, money is a constant issue of concern and saving any of their earnings is simply not possible.

The topic of emigration has often surfaced in our conversations. In one of our first (online) interviews, she tells me that she is in the process of applying for an Italian citizenship. This is not uncommon in Argentina, where a large part of the population has Italian and/or Spanish ancestry. Given the naturalization laws in both countries, Argentines who are able to prove they are of direct Spanish/Italian descendance, are eligible for applying for the citizenship. For Noelia, her Italian roots are important. She takes pride in her surname, Martinelli, and often jokingly calls herself *tana*, an Argentine colloquialism for Italian.

At times, Noelia's narrative evokes imagery of resilience associated with Argentina's history of immigration. There is a saying in Argentina, that the Argentines come from the ships (*Los argentinos descienden de los barcos*). The saying alludes to the Great Migration and the millions of immigrants who arrived in the country during that period. The popular narrative of Argentines being children of European immigrants, fuels imaginaries of *the resilient Argentine nation*; a nation, whose forefathers and -mothers arrived with nothing, yet by withstanding hardship and through hard work, they could save, study, and become *respectable*, *civilized*, and productive citizens (Garguin, 2007; Guano, 2004). Classic understandings of resilience are written into this narrative that speaks of collective strength, daringness, and the capacity to triumph and evolve while traversing difficulties. As Noelia talks about her citizenship application and her identity as an "Argentine of Sicilian blood", she constantly mobilizes those understandings, reaffirming the cultural myth of the resilient immigrants who 'built modern Argentina'.

At one point in the interview, I ask what she thinks *others* do in the current circumstances, how they manage with the inflation, etc. Wittily she first says that her neighbour just bought a new washing machine, that's how *others* cope. After talking about consumption and inflation, she says that she also thinks many people consider the option to leave, that at least in her social circles it is

an occasional topic of conversation. But analysing it further, she connects the possibility to leave with a certain kind of socioeconomic position that for most Argentines is unattainable. She says:

> I don't think so many people *actually* leave, but I know a lot of people who are doing the paperwork for obtaining the citizenship (*tramitando la ciudadanía*). For me, I mean, it may take another year or two, they say it takes up to three years because the [Italian] consulate is completely blocked, they say there are tens of thousands of citizenship applications there…[but] I'm not in a hurry. It's not like we need it now, it would be more like an insurance, or maybe like an emergency exit, you know, if we ever have the money to buy the plane tickets [laughs]…We sometimes talk about living in Spain, it would be easier with the language…maybe I could get a job in a radio or give singing classes; I mean, we could work in anything.

Some months later, in a conversation in her home, Noelia says that she knows they won't leave Argentina, not in any foreseeable future. First of all, it takes capital to leave, and currently they do not have that. Second, it would be hard to be away from their loved ones. And third, in contrast to having earlier said she and Fernando could work in anything, she now rhetorically asks "what could we do, how would we live?".

The way Noelia discusses the possibility to emigrate reveals how two different conceptions of social resilience collide, and then overlap. The cultural script about barbequing while in hell meets another popular narrative about emigration and immigration with culturally shared historical roots. Both can be interpreted through the lens of resilience. The former concerns Argentines' ability to confront and survive tough times with aplomb. The latter implies the hard decision to leave, the subsequent reconfiguration of affective relations, and being prepared to face difficulties elsewhere, just like the immigrants arriving in Argentina a century ago did. But Noelia's narratives also reveal another, latent dimension of resilience pertinent to Argentina's current context. I suggest that here, social resilience emerges in a discursive oscillation between dreams about leaving and the lived reality of staying. In this oscillation, staying in Argentina becomes more significant as the everyday realities are coupled with envisioning oneself elsewhere in the future. In other words, conversing about emigrating turns into an ongoing practice of resilience in and of itself. It becomes a way to render the present meaningful and the imperative to cope with the societal situation a little easier. "An emergency exit", even if imagined, provides hope.

## Concluding Remarks

I have heard people call the peak of the social and economic chaos in late 2001 and early 2002 "*un terremoto*" – an earthquake. Though the debacle had been in the making since the late 1990s, the dramatic events unfolded quickly, in a matter of days, and caused devastation of multiple scales. The aftermath revealed a trail of deprivation. But it also opened the scene for strategies and practices of survival that were implemented with extraordinary efficiency. Were the bartering clubs and the *ad hoc* cooperatives acts of resilience? And if they were, how would that form of social resilience differ from the longer processes by which social imaginaries of Argentine resilience are made and shaped? How would it differ from the processes that unfold in the context of a prolonged crisis such as the current one, and that constantly rebirth collectively shared scripts of resilient behaviour (e.g., buy dollars, keep them at home)?

While many of the widely shared understandings of social resilience in Argentina arguably have been fuelled by the crisis of 2001, they also draw from longer empirical knowledge of crisis management. Collective (and generational) experiences of recurring past adversity frame Argentines' ways of tackling the current economic hardship. These ways are relative to one's socioeconomic position and the available means one has –as of 2023, bartering clubs are becoming common again whereas for those considering themselves middle-class, it is paramount to spend money, *now.* The ethnographic accounts in this chapter refer primarily to the so-called middle-class survival strategies and the social imaginaries that frame them. A fascinating line of future research would be: what kinds of imaginaries –cultural repertoires– of social resilience are produced and consumed by other socioeconomic groups, e.g., the elites or those who subsist below the poverty line?

Through Dora's and Noelia's stories, this chapter has aimed to demonstrate how social –*Argentine*– resilience emerges in social imaginaries and quotidian practices, and in the process by which the two mutually shape each other. For example, buying dollars and keeping cash at home is a long-term 'game plan' and an insurance, or a saving grace when all else fails. At the same time, it serves as a constant reaffirmation of one's own and one's family's (and a good portion of the society's) savviness, not to mention class position in circumstances where that position is under threat. Further, it is the concretizing of what Lamont et al. (2016) called a cultural repertoire that "foster[s] resilience by feeding the capacity of individuals to maintain positive self-concepts… and a sense of inclusion [and] belonging". The practice of dreaming and articulating aspirations that stand in stark contrast to one's daily reality can also be seen as a process of social resilience. The narratives as such, e.g., those concerning a move abroad, are tightly linked to popular, cultural scripts that Argentines are familiar with. Yet I suggest that the question of social resilience is less tied to

those imaginaries than to the act of travelling between future visions and the present experience. If resilience partly equates *coping*, then the discursive space suspended between the reality and the aspiration serves as its incubator.

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# Epilogue

This volume stands as an endeavour to bring together voices from various disciplines to showcase the power of (social) resilience as a topic of critical inquiry. The empirical perspectives and methodological approaches the authors embrace as they grapple with the concept reflect its complexity and problematics, but also its flexibility, diversity of theoretical and practical implications, and analytical potential. We question the neoliberal undertones of resilience as a political construct while interrogating the prevalent understandings of it as a normative concept; as a mere capacity to either 'bounce back' or 'bounce forward'. But it is only fair that in these final reflections we also turn our gaze towards the life that the idea of resilience leads outside academia. For that life is thriving and should lead scholars to not look down on, let alone deny, the meanings of resilience and social resilience outside academia.

Over the past decade, the public and political mobilization of resilience has become one of the central drivers of change to myriad institutional agendas, from the third sector to micro and macro politics. That it features in various United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals is a living example of this. While it is important for scholars to approach resilience or any other normative concept from a critical perspective, we should not undermine the public power of the idea and even *ideal* of resilience. Its attractiveness as a way of behaving and being in a world, which from multiple angles seems increasingly preoccupying, must be taken into account as we consider the concept's relevance as an object of study. Thus, while the current proliferation of the term 'resilience' must raise critical questions about its meaning and implications in practice, its presence, validity, and public and popular significance must be recognized and acknowledged.

The popular power of resilience as a meaningful idea reflects also in how it has seeped into everyday vocabularies in different geographical and cultural contexts. In its everyday uses, it becomes imbued with understandings of strength, hardiness, creativity, flexibility, and toughness of spirit. As a concrete example of this, when asked about the meaning of resilience, one of the interlocutors from Kauko's chapter says: "Resilience means the capacity to innovate and find ways forward when life seems impossible". When politicians, the media, and various other industries tell us that we are living in times of crisis, the idea of resilience as a capacity and a way of being becomes an attractive, even logical way for an individual to project towards and safeguard their understandings of the future. Simply put, diverse social imaginaries of

resilience that institutional forces cultivate in tandem with pointing to the multiple crises the world seems to be engulfed in, provide solace.

The critical, scholarly ways of operationalizing resilience in general and social resilience in particular is a necessary parallel process to its everyday uses. For despite the proliferation of these concepts across especially social sciences, they can hardly help us solve the hardships that humanity is facing –even when in popular understandings they serve as aspirational sources of solace. Sure, to cast light on how humans can continue in the face of hardship and on their capacity to navigate and cope with outstanding difficulties is as necessary as it is timely. But this approach, which is grounded on the socioecological model, is not sufficient for us to obtain a holistic understanding of social resilience and its manifestations on various scales. A broader research path and more empirical investigations are needed on what social resilience means in practice and how it unfolds in socio-institutional interactions across a period of time. To embrace a relational and practice-oriented perspective rescues the concept from the confines of atemporality. Further, it helps attenuate the risk of resilience becoming harnessed by mainly neoliberal political forces as a panacea of sorts against vulnerability, precarity, and fear. It forcefully opens avenues to explore how structural changes, varying contexts, and above all, the passage of time shape human responses to adversity; how actions considered resilient today may not seem or be experienced as such tomorrow. Consequentially, the peril of a hierarchical organization of people and collectivities on the basis of their *capacity to be* resilient loses its power.

Put together, the chapters in this volume demonstrate how social resilience can be operationalized within multiple disciplinary arenas. While most of the chapters discuss social resilience and its manifestation in practice from an empirical perspective, the first two examine its meaning through a more theoretical lens. The volume thus connects research foci that range from (social) resilience in relation to dynamic systems and institutional macro forces to its significance in people's social networks and interactions on a microscopic scale. What the combination of these angles offers, then, is a comprehensive whole as an example of a multidisciplinary framework fostering a wide gamut of research possibilities. To secure and strengthen the analytical potential of a buzzword concept such as resilience, more critical and multisided research is in order. The array of studies that make up the contents of this volume is a step towards exploring and expanding that research territory.

# Contributors

**Sara Kauko** is a senior lecturer in the Division of Social Anthropology, Department of Sociology in Lund University, Sweden. Her research concerns socioeconomic mobility, processes of social resilience and cultures of neoliberalism in the context of recurring economic crises in Argentina. She has investigated how micro-entrepreneur women navigate their everyday lives in a conservative sociocultural context as autonomous entrepreneurs. Her research also concerns upper middle-classes and elites, and how people representing the upper echelons of the society manage, and even benefit from economic downturns. Dr. Kauko received her Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from Emory University, U.S., and her MA from University College London.

**Patric C. Nordbeck** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Lund University, Sweden. His current research focuses on creating experimental paradigms based in relational and processual psychological theories. He also teaches philosophy of the social sciences, process-relational theories of psychology, and linear & non-linear statistics. Dr. Nordbeck's future research program is based on exploring the universality of these paradigms by applying them within interdisciplinary contexts. The core methodology has been inspired by interdisciplinary critiques of resilience and social resilience, and this Edited Volume forms part of formalizing the philosophical grounding of process-relational theory and methodology.

**Azher Hameed Qamar** is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Münster, Germany, within the COFUND-MDC Fellowship Programme. His research focuses on migration, diasporic citizenship, and social resilience, with a particular interest in grassroots community networks and migrants' lived experiences. Before joining the University of Münster, he worked as a Postdoctoral Researcher at Lund University, Sweden, where he focused on social resilience and migrants' lived experiences, contributing to the development of a theoretical framework for social resilience in the context of migration and social integration. He has organized interdisciplinary workshops and published on themes related to social resilience and migration, community engagement, and participatory research in migration studies.

**Tove Lundberg** is an associate professor of psychology and a senior lecturer in qualitative methodologies at Lund University. Their research mainly focuses on LGBTQI issues, sexuality, and well-being. As principal investigator (PI), they have recently completed a research project exploring how minority stress at work is experienced and how it can be counteracted. Tove is part of the research group Queer Psychology Sweden (QueerPsy).

**Anna Malmquist** is a senior associate professor of social psychology at Linköping University. LGBTQ psychology is at the heart of her research. Her research interests include LGBTQ minority stress and joy, parenting, fear of childbirth, and birth trauma. Anna is part of the research group Queer Psychology Sweden (QueerPsy).

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**Christine "Yani" Shi** is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati, where she also completed her PhD in Community and Organizational

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**Carlo Nicoli Aldini** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology of Law at Lund University, Sweden. He is interested in socio-legal theory and practice, with a particular focus on the double-edged role of law as an instrument of both power and resistance across cultural and political contexts.

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**Prof. Dr. Anne Dienelt**, maîtrise en droit (Aix-en-Provence), holds the Chair of Public International Law, with a focus on Sustainability and Resilience Research at the Faculty of Law at Saar University in Saarbrücken, Germany. Her current research explores different notions of resilience and their translation into legal frameworks, with a particular focus on international and German climate change law. In her most recent book, *Armed Conflicts and the Environment* (Springer, 2022), she analyzes the intersection of international humanitarian law, international environmental law, and human rights law as they relate to environmental protection in armed conflicts.

**Sarah H. Whitaker** is a Research Associate in Anthropology at Boise State University, USA. Her work focuses on how social and ecological systems interact to shape human and animal well-being under conditions of climate and environmental change. Her current research projects address flooding and infrastructure, how people make decisions under conditions of uncertainty, and how climate and environmental changes are affecting agricultural practices and human well-being in rural mountain areas.

**Anna Giorgi** is a Full Professor of Environmental and Applied Botany at the University of Milan. She directs the Mountain University (UNIMONT), a satellite campus of the University of Milan located in Edolo, in the Central Italian Alps, and the associated Research Center for the Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas (GESDIMONT). She has been delegated by the Rector of the University of Milan to coordinate "teaching, research and third mission activities for the enhancement of mountain territories." She is president of both the Bachelor's and Master's degrees at UNIMONT and is a member of the main national and international working groups and networks for the development of mountain areas, including NEMOR, EUSALP, ISCAR, and EUROMONTANA. She is responsible for the scientific coordination of numerous national and European research projects on sustainable development in complex socioecological systems, such as those found in mountain areas, and has produced over 100 scientific publications.

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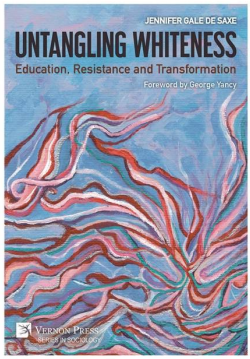


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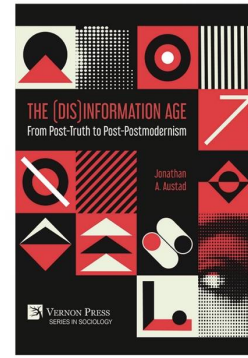


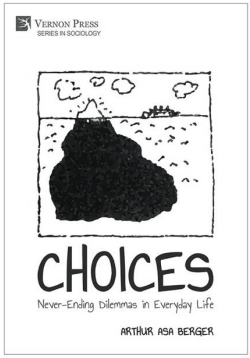


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