

Beyond Resilience in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Research on Critical Terms

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Unthinking Resilience to Reimagine Life

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Introduction: Iterative Research

Unthinking Resilience to Reimagine Life

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What Is the Story of This Project?

The conditions that have made this work possible are the opposite to those demanded by a resilience discourse that reduces living, and working, to survivability. I first road tested the idea for this project in an unsuccessful job interview in 2015. Other job interviews followed that one and unsuccessful grant applications too. Eventually, with a community of thinkers and less immediate precarity, the idea has been able to grow into this book. *Resilience assumes the possibility of a status quo.*

The iterative is because we cannot work all the time. We cannot work all the time because death is all around us. Our research workshop took place weeks before the start of the Genocide in Gaza, and I now write the introduction opposite the US Capitol, weeks into Trump's rapid destruction of functioning government, with global ramifications. The forward-drive of resilience pushes against a more pressing question, and one that threads through this project, of which lives are grievable and when. That drive grows, worryingly, and threatens to take up the time-space of academic life, keeping our mind-bodies away from the work of marking and lamenting death, of being struck dumb by the violence of the world, of convalescing and converging. *Resilience insists that we bounce back.*

The iterative is because ideas are enriched as they are shared. I am grateful to all those—known and unknown—who have engaged with the unthinking of resilience. Stirling students have been integral, generous, and energising for this work. More scholars were involved in this project than those published here, and I acknowledge their contributions below. It is heartening to become aware of the breadth of intellectual common ground that exists and that is what the field of critical resilience feels like. *Resilience insists that we go it alone.*

The iterative is because this is slow scholarship. The terms here are offered as a toolkit, for scholars to take and use, to probe and develop. The lingering questions in this research endeavour took shape in a project

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funded by the British Academy, between 2023 and 2025, which included an international workshop, online conversations, email exchanges, and many drafts. It has now culminated in this edited volume. I am grateful to the British Academy for the Small Research Grant that facilitated this process. Sharing work in progress has built trust as well as appreciation among colleagues, and this has opened space for expansive thinking. *Resilience is fast and measurable, paired alongside crisis language which always speaks of speed and destruction.*

What could be recuperated, if we slow down our work and stay with other wor(l)ds?

Resilience Pervades

Part of the value of the disciplinary breadth of the chapters here is that they signal the extent of the reach of resilience discourse (Alexander 2013, Walker and Cooper 2011). In the early 1970s, resilience as a concept came onto the scene within forest ecology, shifting that discipline away from ideas of homeostasis and self-containment to accounting for continuous flux and adaptation. Within ecology, resilience refers to the ability of a system to continue to function in the face of disturbance. Stanley Holling is thought to have introduced the term to the ecological sciences in 1973, also drawing human social systems into the discussion later that decade. At a similar time in the field of psychology, an early research focus was on individuals' capacity to cope with stress and withstand risk (Garmezy and Streitzman 1974). Psychosocial research into resilience viewed it increasingly as part of an individual's developmental toolkit, as opposed to an inherent quality, in other words a set of strategies for positive adaptation that vary from individual to individual (Luthar et al 2000). Ann Masten (2014) has demonstrated how this adaptability is affected by a complex combination of neurobiology and developmental context. This conceptual transfer from the natural world to the social can in part be attributed to the increasing political attention given to global challenges (Evans and Reid 2014). As the subject has dominated parallel fields since the last decades of the twentieth century (engineering, environmental science, economics, urban planning, development and security to name a few) cultural, geographical and political context have been necessary parts of the discussion (Chandler and Coaffee 2017, Fraile Marcos 2020, McRobbie 2020, Meerow and Newell 2019, Robin 2014, Weaver 2022). And yet, in its hyperactive circulation in public discourse, it is received largely as some universal form of common sense. Indeed, the once distinct focus on systems and individuals has been conflated, in a process of cultural and political decontextualisation and flattening. As Susie O'Brien (2024, 94) attests in

her mapping of these processes onto coloniality, ‘resilience has largely been accepted as part of the basic toolkit of environmental, organizational, and personal maintenance’. The regulatory power of this term, used ubiquitously for individuals and organisations, assumes that everybody has an equal capacity to develop resilience and that this is the optimum approach to challenge, change, and crisis.

There is no doubt that resilience as a phenomenon exists and that rightly used, in clearly defined disciplinary terms, the concept facilitates necessary, world-leading research as well as personal transformation (Cyrulnik 2024). However, the speed and scope with which resilience has come to dominate the public domain are disturbing. It is the stakes of the last 20 years’ mobilisation of the term in a range of spheres that concerns the writers of this volume. It has become a tool for managing the shockproof robustness of whole populations, but a tool that measures such capacity in biopolitical terms. In other words, from maternal health to education to interventionism, resilience has become a measure of economic power and performance. What is more, in transposing the term from the ecological to the social, an inordinate amount of pressure is placed on the individual. The narrative of resilience, pressed onto debilitated individuals and groups, fortifies the myth that it is down to them alone to adapt and thrive. Where it can be both useful and appropriate in a context of mental health intervention and an analysis of systems, it is more insidious and dangerous when operationalised by neoliberal politics, that is, when mobilised for projects geared towards market forms of life (Povinelli 2011).

The ubiquitous scope of its application is dizzying, and its demands can be stultifying. As pop psychology enters the public domain, the workplace, and the education setting, we hear it everywhere. Resilience as a directive is ‘something that takes us from mundane tips about how to live well to the world of national security, emergency planning and capital accumulation’ (Neocleous 2013, 3). As it circulates, those insisting on resilience will more than likely be those set to benefit from the individual cogs being as well-oiled and efficient as possible. Whether in a political speech, an instruction about job cuts within higher education, or as the theme of a UN conference in Palestine, the concept of resilience is ubiquitous. As Sandra Harding (2008) observes, northern sciences take their ‘ontologies and background assumptions, and preferred methods of collecting and evaluating data from their local historical contexts’, and then aim to universalise them (140). When a concept then becomes part of a dominant cultural script across multiple public spheres, that universalisation process is extended. The further resilience pervades, the further its claims of universality risk establishing themselves.

I am not against all of these transpositions, but what we draw attention to in the essays presented here is the conceptual work they require and the

limits of those transpositions. I am troubled, with Evans and Reid (who pioneered the intellectual project of unthinking resilience), ‘by the pace with which this doctrine went from being an ill-defined curiosity to a universal dogmatism that was bereft of any rigorous critical reflection’ (2014, xi). It is fundamentally the unthought over-extension of this term across disciplines, historical contexts, and cultures that has led to our starting point. Given that ‘all political locations arise from a sense of place; existing, constructed, and imagined’ (Menon 2), we need to *place* resilience in order to ask: What are the limits of this keyword? Which cultural scripts does it fortify, furnish, favour, or forget?

Resilience is certainly one of the buzzwords of our time. And it goes hand in hand with another: crisis. Where other scholars have considered resilience as one half of a pairing with trauma (Chemaly 2024) or security (Bracke 2016), our interest is to ask these questions alongside the simultaneous and related pervasiveness of the language of crisis. Trauma studies scholars have rightly questioned ‘the pre-existence of a state of perceived psychic unity, which ‘healing’ aims to restore’ (Stocks 2007, 74) and the ‘individualizing, psychologizing, pathologizing and depoliticizing tendencies of the dominant trauma model’ (Craps 2013, 28). For these reasons, we wish to disentangle the two and shift the focus away from a depoliticised individual. How does the context of ongoing, overlapping crisis shape understandings of the subject? How does an acknowledgement of systemic oppression reveal blind spots in common narratives of adaptation? How do we account for instability as inherent to daily existence? Setting resilience in dialogue with crisis moves us away from this notion of a stable, healed self as ultimate goal, and situates the discussion amidst other critical terms that circulate in the public sphere today. Crisis is a productive reference point for resilience, because it allows for attention to the politically and linguistically produced dynamics of instability and oppression that are compounded and structural. This dialectically bound pairing ensures we examine the ways personal experience is entangled with a wider security agenda.

‘Crisis’ is diagnostic of our time, and another dominant descriptor for whole groups’ sustained suffering. As Janet Roitman (2014) has argued, the term facilitates both the demarcation of time into historical epochs and the heroisation of those who usher in their beginning or end. Crisis, in its interrogatory judgement of ‘what went wrong?’ enables those designating it as a label to find fault and solution, then, often, claim credit for the latter. It signifies contingency and establishes a post hoc (short-term) temporality, both of which rest on and restore a rationale of neoliberal progress. Roitman (14) advocates for a ‘consideration of the ways in which crisis, as an enabling blind spot for the production of knowledge, entails unremitting and often implicit judgment about latencies, or errors and failings that must be eradicated and, evidently hopefully, overcome’. What

is more, the ubiquitous circulation of crisis (and its cognates), alongside resilience, feeds into the anxiety-ridden culture of preparedness fortified by the state. ‘The state now assumes that one of its key tasks is to imagine the worst-case scenario, the coming catastrophe, the crisis-to-come, the looming attack, the emergency that could happen, might happen and probably will happen, all in order to be better prepared’ (Neocleous 2013, 4). The development of a corresponding consciousness makes even more sense in light of Ulrich Beck’s account of risk society (1992), where inhabitants are condemned to live in uncertainty. Resilience cannot exist without crisis, and both concepts facilitate a policing of the political imagination. The current volume proposes alternative vocabulary to shed light on the blind spots sustained by this terminology.

What Are the Stakes?

The heart of our research endeavour has been to consider and respond with alternatives to what Susie O’Brien terms a meta-resilience narrative, that is, to acknowledge ‘the constructedness and historical specificity of our understanding of the stakes of resilience’ and to ask, ‘What constitutes resilience, who or what is understood to be resilient, against what, and to what effect?’ (2024, 17). This last question is of particular interest to us, especially when ‘resilience’ and ‘crisis’ pervade together.

I start from the same premise as Evans and Reid (2014, 2):

[T]hat liberalism is aimed today not at solving or preventing the manifestation of dangers and threats to security, but at making us forego the very idea and possibility of security, through the embrace of the necessity of our exposure to dangers of all kinds as a means by which to live well.

Drawing on the rich potential of the arts, humanities, and social sciences to explore notions of living well in light of this, contributors to this volume explore specific consequences being felt in a range of geopolitical locations. Accordingly, the chapters consider resilience as a keyword or buzzword, a thematised public discourse, an ethos, a disciplinary measure, a political category, a form of subjectification, and a state target and organising logic. It is alternately used as a code word for security, labour, performance, and acquiescence: the neoliberal deceit of which Evans and Reid (2014) write. I cannot summarise the reach of this discourse (that each of us feels) better than Mark Neocleous, so I quote him at length here:

It is here that one finds the relationship between the economic development of neoliberal subjectivity and the political development of resilient citizenship. Resilience comes to form the basis of subjectively dealing

with the uncertainty and instability of contemporary capitalism as well as the insecurity of the national security state. This is one reason human resources departments of large organizations such as universities are so interested in it. Good subjects will ‘survive and thrive in any situation’, they will ‘achieve balance’ across the several insecure and part-time jobs they have, ‘overcome life’s hurdles’ such as facing retirement without a pension to speak of, and just ‘bounce back’ from whatever life throws, whether it be cuts to benefits, wage freezes or global economic melt-down. Neoliberal citizenship is nothing if not a training in resilience as the new technology of the self: a training to withstand whatever crisis capital undergoes and whatever political measures the state carries out to save it.

(Neocleous 2013, 5)

Our critical starting point is that resilience discourse belies a baseline that is comfortable for politics. As O’Brien (2024) evaluates:

Though it acknowledges that things are complicated and getting more so, and though it recognizes difference as inherent in, rather than opposed to, systems, resilience as it is conventionally evoked speaks to the possibility of conserving (with minor adaptations to changing environments both natural and social) the white, heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial foundations of late liberalism.

(15)

Resilience is a conservative concept that conserves a status quo which tries to make individuals forget the structure beyond themselves that could absorb both crisis and care. The emerging field of critical resilience situates this discourse, assessing what its usage ensures and simultaneously forecloses (Amo-Agyemang 2021, Bracke 2016, Chandler and Reid 2016, Evans and Reid 2014, Hart et al forthcoming, Joseph 2013, Neocleous 2013, O’Brien 2024). Resilience resurrects ‘a form of self-sufficiency and hence a fantasy of mastery’ (Bracke 2016, 58) while keeping neoliberal subjects (so-called entrepreneurial individuals) ignorant of their position, ensnared on a path to capitalist progress. While cruelly promising transformation, at the very same time, resilience offers the return to a status quo. But that status quo, indeed the exigence of resilience, is to maintain specific relations of instability, relations of dependence, and precarity long established within the structures of settler colonialism and patriarchy. Resilience functions as a tool to return us to the same trajectory and project of modernity hinged on coloniality (Arvin et al 2013; Bohland et al 2018; Menon 2022).

Vulnerability

In this context, the structural pervasion of precarity remains unaddressed, and vulnerability is operationalised. One must ask which specific communities and which racialised, gendered, and other-marked bodies are expected to be resilient and labelled as such. Who risks being neglected or abandoned as a consequence, or denied abundance and vitality? As Dorothy Allison writes,

I was asked to speak about survival. The difficulty for me is that survival is the least of my desires. I'm interested in a lot more than mere survival.

I have lived my life in pursuit of the remade world.

(1994, 209; 211)

Since resilience acts as a marker of success in the neoliberal game of life, and since that game's foundation is anti-Blackness, colonialism and racial, patriarchal capitalism, those ongoingly debilitated (Puar 2017), dispossessed, and made vulnerable (Butler 2020) are disqualified. Indeed, resilience 'promotes the ideals of white Western man as the index of human fitness' (O'Brien 2024, 94), master of necropolitical death worlds (Mbembe 2019). More than this, those designated as vulnerable are kept so, in turn reduced to mere survivability by the very institutions with power to reduce their conditions of precarity (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2019). In Bracke's words, 'the resilience of the wretched of the earth is arguably fetishized' (2016, 60). It suits a greedy global economy to have a resilience-enhanced global South, highly practised at survival and ever ready for more crisis. At the same time, when seen as resilient, marginalised communities are in a double bind: neither allowed to be visualised beyond those griefs (Allison 1994) nor allowed to express genuine fragility. They are designated ungrievable, not granted the condition of a life's emergence and sustenance (Butler 2016). As Malaka Shwaikh (2023, 11) concludes,

This cheap (re)production of struggling communities as extraordinary people who will endure all suffering imposed on them strips them of the cores of their human values that liberally entail moments of fragility, at times in the corner of one's bedroom away from public eyes. It places the burden on them for issues beyond their control.

Resilience may promise individual, personal transformation but it stops short of the social. The neoliberal subjectivity it curates renders resilience the political opponent of vulnerability, while also proposing itself as the method par excellence of overcoming (Bracke 2016). In sum, vulnerabilities

are simultaneously sustained, reduced, celebrated, and invisibilised by resilience discourse. The stakes of this, as both Feng and Teklu discuss in their chapters, are slow death or letting lives die: a seemingly inactive but in fact sustained killing in the slow creep of the everyday (Berlant 2007).

Industry

As an industry becomes attached to this set of assumptions, it furthers the growth of new behavioural norms. So for instance, when reams of self-help books are published that celebrate resilience, a 'specific biopolitical power at work through resilience as a keyword produces a new regime of subjectivity, that is to say, new resilient subjects' (Bracke 63). This has come into sharp relief as I walk around the neighbourhood of Capitol Hill, drawn naively to the free miniature libraries hosted in front gardens, only to find that the vast majority of the contents are self-help books. This just steps from the offices where civil servants are being disposed of and structures of governance undermined by an ignorant and unelected body known as the Department of Government Efficiency. Indeed, resilience's claims to ideas of efficiency and effectiveness create the very rationales for institutions to be (perpetually) reorganised and staff retrained. Claims that the US government is committed above all to improving national resilience (read security) provide an overarching justification for all kinds of policing and impositions. This is unique to neither the United States nor government institutions.

Coloniality

The way these impositions echo and replicate earlier colonial crimes is plain to see. The usefulness of the concept of resilience supports the projects of white supremacy and settler colonialism, sharing with the latter a *raison d'être* of growth and progress. Participants in the unthinking resilience project were invited to consider how alternative terms might help disrupt colonial structures of power and thought. As O'Brien expands,

Settler colonialism justifies itself through an awkward dance between the symbolic poles of identity and belonging on the one hand and the ideas of infinite expansion on the other. Indigenous people are necessary to this dance, as a source of (stolen) cultural markers of belonging, but also obstacles to it; their connection to the land impedes its exploitation. They are likewise enlisted by the discourse of resilience—Indigenous people exemplify resilience! They have been here forever!—and cast out by it, their attachment to the land inimical to the kind of flexible accumulation settler futurity is based on.

(O'Brien 2024, 14)

That paradox of conservation (driven by nostalgia) and transformation maps onto resilience (Rosaldo 1989). Resilience has become a colonial way of framing victimhood, in the wake (Sharpe 2016) of perpetual waves of crisis, which themselves occur in the ruins of empire (Stoler 2013). As a method of subjectification, resilience requires the humanities to test the edges of the progressive rationality it reinforces, in short, to unthink and unimagine it.

Neocleous (2013) notes that after 9/11, the state needed a way to connect its bureaucracy with the political imagination. ‘Resilience is the concept that facilitates that connection: nothing less than the attempted colonization of the political imagination by the state’. (4). Though I am wary of the overuse of (de)colonisation, especially when metaphor occludes the actual contest for territories (explored in Part II), resilience’s takeover of the public imagination is so widespread, insidious, and aligned with capitalist expansion that (de)colonisation is useful here. Whence our invitation to unimagine resilience, to decolonise the political imagination, drawing on reason and resistance (Evans and Reid 2014). This kind of policing demands that we improve the resilience of state and capital, but what else might we work towards? In the words of Evans and Reid (2014), ‘Our task, the political task of our times, remains learning to live finally, to thrive beyond the catastrophe of our times, such that we may announce the death of liberalism and welcome with confidence a more poetic subjectivity’ (203). The chapters, which follow, offer alternative terms for nurturing such a subjectivity.

Resilience sees itself as a means and an end, but this intervention is a semi-colon, a juncture to invite alternative rationales through other vocabulary. Like Dilip Menon’s *Changing Theory*, this project ‘asks that we broaden our archive of concepts not only through engaging in transdisciplinary conversations, but also through moving away from Euro-American formulations to a conversation across regions, that is also necessarily multilingual’ (Menon 2022, 2). The remainder of this introduction will concentrate on the four thematic areas of engagement which make up the volume’s sections. These are, broadly speaking, how critical vocabulary for contemporary scholarship on crisis must move beyond: the imperative to bounce back quickly, the neglect of collective, land-based knowledge, the insistence on hyper-individualism, and the depoliticised reduction of subjects living with crisis to compliance and victimhood.

Endurance to Open Futures

This section counters the premise of a return to a status quo and the urgency which surrounds expectations of ‘bouncing back’ via three chapters on Québécois literature, Palestinian craft as activism, and psychoanalytic

processes. As Neocleous attests, ‘Resilience is nothing if not an apprehension of the future, but a future imagined as disaster and then, more importantly, recovery from the disaster’ (2013, 4). At the centre of cultural scripts of resilience is an understanding of time that sees crises as primarily short term and urgent, and recovery as a sequential set of actions that happen only in response to those crises. In other words, keeping the linear frame of its psychological origins, resilience assumes a punctual trauma model. When we think of it, the idea of bouncing back to move forward is counterintuitive, but it also overlooks the longer term in two ways: both the long-standing conditions, which render a context unliveable, and transgenerational praxis, which works to create and sustain, more than just survive, are neglected. By contrast, the three chapters here unpack different forms of slow endurance where ideas of futurity are shaped by the past (O’Brien and Lousley 2017), rather than by grit (Slater 2022). For Sophie Feng (this volume) ‘to “endure”, rather than “to move on”, or to “snap back”, evokes a sense of continuity and an extension of life rather than a return to a normative state’. There is something in slowness and preservation that refuses the forward jolt of capitalist productivity, too, resting instead with dignity, respect, and other non-monetary values. The future stance of this section is deliberate, towards a channelling of intellect and imagination that thinks beyond resilience, rather than being paralysed by a critical position opposed to it (a characteristic O’Brien denounces in what she labels a ‘dismal scholarly left’ 2024, 45).

Roitman (2014) demonstrates that naming certain periods as ‘crises’ engenders a demarcation of history into eras and facilitates the emergence of heroes who rule those eras and victims who suffer through them. Vizenor (1998; 2008) by contrast demonstrates the kinds of strategies and practices that subvert such notions of heroism and victimhood. The nascent methodology of ‘survivance’ articulates a combination of survival and resistance that is more than the sum of its parts, and its suffix (indicating a condition or action) is echoed in this section’s title. For Vizenor, ‘survivance is an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry’, and ‘the practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence’ (2008, 11).

For *Sophie Feng*, resilience has been used to designate a response that bears no other choice but survival to conditions that produce death. She finds Vizenor’s concept of survivance a more promising term for the way it renounces victimry. Yet as she reroutes Vizenor’s term through the literary context of Québécois Indigenous writing, she interrogates its untranslatability, given it carries colonial history in its nomenclature. As she asserts, ‘If the French language’s survivance in Québec is intrinsically tied to the absence of Indigenous life, then Vizenor’s survivance cannot be enacted

within the same frame of reference'. Her own neologism, *surviv/venance*, nuances this to emphasise resurgence and provenance, asserting the presence and abundance of Indigenous women and their agency. While this volume in general focuses on the stakes of the semantics of resilience discourse, Feng extends this focus with a perceptive reading of grammatical structures. She reads the playful and destabilising use of bilingual Innu-Aimun and French sentences by Naomi Fontaine as an instance of *surviv/venance*, whereby hierarchical interpersonal relations and autonomous, self-guided subjects are replaced by enumeration and parataxis. Feng argues that such structures, and this occupation of textual space, can assert disruptions, which help materialise more liveable futures beyond the text. Methodologically, her critical rerouting of Vizenor's term in an expansive consideration of how we think about resilience demonstrates the kind of potential for as-yet-unknown futures.

As Sarah Bracke argues, 'the concept of resilience has a tendency to dispossess individuals and communities from future visions beyond the future imagined as disaster and overcoming disaster' (2016, 70). Or in the words of Sophie Feng (this volume) it dissuades us from imagining alternatives to 'a neoliberal future, driven only by survival, in which no one wants to live'. Against the destructions of settler colonialism, narrow notions of progress (seen as superior to tradition) are destabilised when indigenous practice and intergenerational wisdom are mobilised in new ways. As such, the requirement to adapt to an already decided future reality is undermined by the reason, power and resistance in working towards open futures. What is more, there is an emphasis here on individuals and collectives being the agents and authors who decide what that optimum future might be (Arvin et al 2013).

Iman Sharabati details this kind of mobilisation through the creativity of what she describes as a new Palestinian heritage movement. Her chapter presents the work and reflections of several craftspeople who enact a reworking of long-established practices. She situates this reworking within *Sumud*, a multifaceted term and deeply ingrained concept in the collective consciousness of the Palestinian people. Reading a UNDP paper which aligns *Sumud* with 'transformative resilience', Sharabati instead demonstrates how *Sumud* differs drastically from common circulations of resilience, particularly within the politics of dependence imposed ongoingly on Palestine. It contains notions of resistance, endurance and refusal in the face of settler colonialism. Sharabati's analysis of crafts unpacks how the research, practice and decision-making of her participants resists spatial erasure, creates economic independence, forms new networks, and creates projected futures which sustain the presence of site-specific visual language. She demonstrates how slowness, sensitivity, and preservation enact *Sumud*, affirming post-displacement rights within this remaking as

political memory work. In the ways it is enriched through contemporary collaboration, while also reaching into the past and future, this new heritage movement gives material form to *Sumud* as a philosophy of confrontation against the destructive power of settler colonialism.

Alongside these literary and craft forms of cultural production, Alix Fauqueux and Catalina Hidalgo take psychoanalysis in their chapter to focus on going beyond positive adaptation by introducing the dimension of the unconscious. They trace parallels between ego psychology and the common tropes of resilience discourse, such as a focus on the individual and the repression of the Real, of the unassimilable. They take the recent, shocking case of Gisèle Pélicot who was the victim of mass rape, while drugged, at the hands of her husband and dozens of other men. Against the event-based trauma timeline imposed by both ego psychology and resilience, which rely on an evolutionary model of growth and adaptation, they draw on the vocabulary of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to foreground the unconscious and the mark of the Real of trauma. In other words, the authors argue against models which suppress the unconscious by imposing adaptation-centric rationales. They politicise Lacan's Real via Butler and Worms's notion of the 'unliveable', which they discuss in the context of domestic abuse. Drawing inspiration from Freudian psychoanalysis, they propose the concept of working-through as an alternative grammar to resilience discourse. As with resilience, the authors show that there is much to be reconfigured in ego psychology. Ranjana Khanna argues the same regarding psychoanalysis itself, which though having formalised an idea of primitive colonised peoples, can be worked to provide a 'means through which contingent postcolonial futures can be imagined ethically' (2003, xii).

Faultlines

This section addresses the kinds of breaking points which occur when damaging policies meet a particular commitment to place, grounded in belonging to and knowing the land. While imperial legacies become tangible in ruination (Stoler 2013) and detritus (Nganang 2007), long-term coping strategies must be curated to form climate resilience. Yet the resistance at work here looks less like a decontextualised survival and more a determined fight to stay in place. This stems in part from Indigenous contexts where 'land is knowing and knowledge', rather than property (Arvin et al 2013, 21). The focus on land and materiality in this section allows writers to explore the earth-human relationship overlooked by a resilience discourse that individualises the neoliberal subject to the point of isolation, from environment as well as from others. These forms of activism and artistic or literary representation rely on different forms of rootedness and

attachment (to place, to ideas, to objects, to others) and here are shown too to uncover the colonial roots (Ferdinand 2022) of, for instance, a slum demolition. Each of the scholars also looks beyond the surface: to hidden vulnerabilities in both those living with the consequences of land destruction and the narratives that come to define them in public spheres. They reveal what is rendered invisible, in terms of both damage and responsibility within the long emergencies of slow violence (Nixon 2011). In these contexts, political activism and personal optimism emerge as ongoingly fragile to the forces set against them. Yet collective and individual resistances can form epistemological cracks (Baaz and Lilja 2022) in persistent norms imposed by hegemonic state and international power. For instance, where visions of Indigenous nationhood are based on interrelatedness, care and responsibility, such an articulation poses a threat to assumptions about the nation-state system (Smith 2008). This section takes these questions of materiality and land to explore the limitations of resilience via critical geography, postcolonial literature and visual arts. It considers care and preservation in ethical and political terms (Faniyi and Omotoso 2022; Paperman and Laugier 2011). Where resilience might paper over the cracks of complex vulnerabilities and insist on a narrow understanding of strength, these chapters shed light on a wider range of human experience. Examinations of a commitment to solidarity and vitality, the use of cunning as covert resistance, and the imaginative potential of the absurd all expand our understanding of what resilience may contain or foreclose in these examples.

Chyna Dixon takes the *acequia* (communal irrigation and water management) systems of Northern New Mexico as a case study through which to address how resilience discourse falls short in terms of accounting for relational practices. Her fieldwork and interviews inform a rigorous discussion of the concept of *querencia*, which she describes as a reciprocal complex of interconnected relationships and an enduring love for and rootedness to place. Dixon is careful to note the untranslatability of certain terms (such as *querencia*) and thereby their un-immediate equivalence with resilience. She moves beyond resilience's grand narrative of adaptation to demonstrate the kinds of rooted world-making practised by *acequia* communities and recognises that resilience emerges from deeper, shared obligations of care and commitment. These include relationships between humans and between humans and land and water—in what she terms 'the unique hydrosocial fabric of these systems'—bringing a focus on the entanglement of the social and ecological that sets the tone for this section of the volume. From this exploration, she concludes that we can 'reinfuse power and politics' into the analytical purchase of resilience, 'using the term not as an apolitical panacea, but as reflective of the role relationality, autonomy, and *querencia* play in shaping and sustaining *acequia* practices'.

Elizabeth Olaoye reads Chris Abani's *Graceland* to unpack the fragile resilience of the novel's marginal figures: women characters who ongoingly face struggle in Maroko after the slum's demolition. She takes the Nigerian pidgin idiom 'nothing spoil' to explore what it conveys beyond conventional discussions of resilience which work in a binary with 'trauma', namely a way of responding to living with ongoing trauma and precarity. She addresses the compounded layers of postcolonial suffering depicted in the novel and how destabilising these can be particularly for women at the margins of the plotline. This comes by reading the characters' strategies for survival in the context of postcolonial urban displacement. As they experience flooding, the demolition, and ongoing poverty—which all speak of destructive global patterns whose faultlines have hyper-local ramifications—these marginalised women characters insist that 'nothing spoil', even as they are constrained in the ongoing binds of patriarchal power. With recourse to feminist readings of endurance and coded resistance, she outlines specific, intersecting examples of women's survival, and the ways it emerges in its rawest, least idealised form. The gendered labour highlighted in Olaoye's reading in this chapter is one iteration of the 'material, intellectual, and emotional labor an ethos of resilience requires', which along with 'the temporality in which it is caught up, undermine precisely the possibility of substantial transformation' (Bracke 2016, 64). Though resilience ignites some sense of possibility, then, its burdens persistently outweigh this.

Charlotte Kent, in her chapter, considers resilience thinking via the absurd in order to underline how resilience, rather than being concerned with a known stability, depends on a system's fundamental instability. She presents absurdism as a critical alternative to either the paralysis caused by pessimism in the face of permacrisis or productivity that insists art must be used for positive change. In their place, there is 'real imaginative work' to be done by taking the absurd seriously, in the ways it helps us attend to the flux and instability inherent in any system. Those systems include the individual consumer, and Kent presents the work of Mary Mattingly as a case study for this line of inquiry. What happens, she asks, when the 'grip of habit' is loosened by an encounter with the absurd? Mattingly's *Blockades, Boulders, Weights* saw the artist pack her belongings into seven monumental masses and haul them across New York City in 2013. She performs the load of human responsibility and the permanence of material objects, both of which are so easily (considered) disposable. In this way she highlights how possessions create the impression of stability while in fact forming part of the unstable relations within which we exist and points to the shifting ways in which matter continues to matter (personally, culturally, environmentally). This has implications for the hyper-individualist attitude towards resilience, as well as the complex of problems resilience

can aim to hurry us through. What is more, the artwork gestures to the requirement an ethos of resilience makes of those so often required to develop adaptability, that is, to say the capacity to lose one's belongings and sense of belonging. One of the resonances to emerge from this section is the unevenness of this faultline and the very labour of loss inherent in being resilient, which perpetuates long existent vulnerabilities.

Collective Knowing

This section addresses the isolation and individualism inherent in the kinds of normative subjectivities taken as given within pervasive public discourse on resilience. The myth of the empowered and unfringeable individual explored by Harvey (2005) and Chemaly (2024) denies both the persistent vulnerabilities engendered by systemic injustice and the vital need for collective approaches for care, repair, and living in the worlds of instability detailed here. Indeed, we must insist on the fundamental relationality in which 'we are constituted, as well as dispossessed, by others' (Bracke 2016, 58). This section contains an interview with choreographer and scholar LénaBlou as well as two articles on responding to so-called natural disaster. Each chapter addresses examples of collective practices which refuse the neat disentanglement of vulnerability and agency. Crucially, the solidarities here are not the 'pulling together' processes of subjectification that render a group compliant rather than imaginative. Instead, there is long-standing, lived, embodied knowledge, mediated cross-generationally, which speaks of abundance and vitality within a politics of life (Vergès 2021). Thus, where resilience is a neoliberal social ontology that revolves around the individual, this section offers insights into pluralistic formations of politics, repair, and living in instability. These insights were also enriched through this project by the work of Peter Baker on ch'ixi and Jawispachata (see Baker, forthcoming) and Lyna Ami Ali (Emory University) on the lakou as a decolonial space. These chapters aim to render somewhat legible different models of collectively relating to precarity.

In 'Perspectives on Bigidi as a Breath for the World', Hadley Galbraith interviews scholar and choreographer Lénablou about Gwoka dance and the philosophy of *Bigidi* she has developed. For Lénablou, *Bigidi* is a way of understanding the world, a kind of posture, that takes the body as the centre of knowing. The forms of responding to instability which she traces in traditional Gwoka dance in Guadeloupe—in particular a pattern of nearly but not quite falling—demonstrate 'a thinking bigidi-ing body', an experience lived by Afrodescendants in the Caribbean facing inequalities on multiple levels. In the circular form of the swaré-léwòz where this takes place, she observes a social immanence, a Glissantian form of relation that elides lines that might separate the individual from the collective. Indeed,

like Charlotte Kent argues via a different artistic paradigm later in this volume, Lénablou shows that ‘individuality is a complex manifestation of the collective’. The *Bigidi*-being integrates disorder and unpredictability and thus underlines our inclination to adapt. More than that though, *Bigidi* offers a starting point for approaching the chaos of the world, not as a way of combatting its vicissitudes but as ‘a miraculous weapon for honouring life’.

There are cyclical and repetitive layers of disaster, and within and alongside them, ways of knowing how to live with crisis become clear. These forms of expertise and praxis emerge in dance forms, storytelling, and climate risk reduction. Furthermore, the ways of knowing which are shared and evidenced within these collectives demonstrate that an imposed model of universal resilience, if understood as one size fits all, is always set to fail. This is countered by different forms of embodied subjectivity. At the same time, the championing of survival is critiqued when it is seen as a form of competition that in its own brutality tramples others in its wake.

In lieu of that kind of competitive survival, Margaret Cunningham outlines an alternative collective form of resilience by introducing us to the term ‘rafistolage’ (patching up). This communal commitment to rafistolage covers both the repeated act of rebuilding with what has survived so-called natural disasters and the process of cultural fragmentation and reassembly, which followed the foundational catastrophe of colonisation. Cunningham brings these processes to life via an examination of Daniel Maximin’s 1995 novel *L’Île et une nuit* which traces the aftermath of the cyclone that hit Guadeloupe in September 1989 and came to be known as ‘Hugo le terrible’. Maximin’s literary depiction of man-made disaster draws on older folkloric and Biblical intertexts in order to establish a much longer trajectory of slow violence than popular uses of resilience tend to presume. These emphasise the monumental proportions of this disaster and also draw attention to the specific forms of creolised community practices that emerge in its wake. Her close readings of Maximin’s text reveal a determined, if weary, solidarity working to reconstruct both community and infrastructure. This practice, or collective knowing, becomes embodied in what Patrick Chamoiseau terms ‘postures of survival’, developed in both the historical traumas of colonialism and the contemporary survival of a litany of ecological disasters. There are gestures in what Cunningham writes, as with Olaoye above, to gendered articulations of practices adjacent to resilience. These recall Gina Athena Ulysse’s writing on gendered practices of self-making (2008) and *rasanblaj* as a provocation and method, particularly one that requires communal presence (2017). Other writers have mapped the parallel constructions of resilience and masculinity (Chemaly 2024), as well as how resilience reconfigures qualities commonly considered as feminine or masculine in the name of ‘good subjects’ who turn damage into opportunity (Bracke 2016; Gupta et al 2024; McRobbie 2020).

Continuing a focus on the specificity of setting, Joshua Shepherd proposes an analytical tool that places a dual focus on contextual conditions which create risk and vulnerability and the agency of communities living with(in) those conditions. Through his case studies on carbon offsetting projects in India, Kenya, and Nicaragua, he explores how geographical and cultural specificity informs people's understanding of how residents and environments are mutually constituted. In order to better assess how communities respond to acute and chronic environmental stressors, Shepherd proposes the hazard-agency model as a way of attending to the politico-economic systems communities must endure. A focus on action and agency, for example the mangrove restoration efforts in Kenya, must be addressed alongside this acknowledgement of social vulnerability. Lastly for Shepherd, appreciation of forms of collective knowing must account for unconscious engagement with traditional practices, such as the land management techniques for controlling wildfires his respondents describe. To this end, he suggests a three-way focus on past, present, and future when accounting for community agency and action, which sees communities mitigate damage and modify their geographical conditions.

Beyond Discipline

This final section approaches the ways that resilience discourse is used as a disciplinary device and the kinds of responses that engenders. The concept has largely been depoliticised, leading to a conceptual divergence between resilience and resistance. 'Resilience wants acquiescence, not resistance' (Neocleous 2013, 7); it also seeks measurable results. As the contributors to this section argue, resilience as a disciplinary measure functions 'by targeting and controlling the grassroots practices that shape the meaning of being a citizen and a member of a city' (Chalastanis). This form of resilience, as compliance, induces a state of pacification whereby civil society adapts, forgetting the rottenness of the world against which determined opposition is required. What is more, this approach 'pathologises resistance for survival, [and] may inadvertently suppress valuable political emotions such as anger, which are crucial for resistance and change' (Teklu). When the vital power of resilience language is operationalised in this way, 'it does not advocate for structurally political, economic, and social changes' (Shwaikh 2023, 7). As Bracke (2016, 64–65) puts it, drawing on Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism (2011), this 'positions the resilient subject in the process of overcoming . . . and here resilience becomes a symptom of the loss of the capacity to imagine and do otherwise, and cruelty is one of the more politically cautious names for such a condition'.

Here, the contributors reinscribe political practices and social resistance into the discussion to demonstrate how, even when top-down compliance

weighs heavy and undermines the capacity to resist, creative strategies for survival and defence persist. These are in resistance to the reduction of the subject to, varying: labour-source, passive, apolitical, only biological, or ignorant consumer. They are also enacted plurally, working against ‘the formation of a kind of subjectivity that . . . tends to assume that it is the (more or less isolated) individual that needs to cope with catastrophe, trauma and radical vulnerability’ (Lema Habash, this volume). Such strategies also indicate for us the presence of other sets of laws and obligations. Beyond those mentioned here, the project also discussed marronage, débrouillardise, jua kali, faire avec, and other informal and creative practices. These chapters draw on philosophy, urban planning, and political movements to sketch examples of the creative agency, working towards a ‘liveliness of things . . . techniques of prolonging’ (Simone 2019), to be found in resisting the status quo through, among other practices, neoliberalism from below (Gago 2017). The call of this section is to continue to remain undisciplined (Falkenberg and Tubb 2017) in our political and academic working and worlding.

In his chapter, Nicolas Lema Habash argues that resilience is a form of calculation that operates when adaption is normalised. His nuanced discussion of adaption underlines the crucial paradox at the heart of resilience: that it both accepts change and remains conservative at the same time, in that it is, in Lema Habash’s words, ‘about keeping change within control . . . maintaining a specific relation between the parts of a specific structure, even if those parts are subject to change’. Lema Habash’s return to Marx in this chapter provides an invaluable contribution to the volume’s overall analysis of the ways in which resilience discourse maps onto the neoliberal paradigm. This form of resilient calculation is part of a securitarian regimen that closes down imagination, attempting to eliminate reflections on the conditions which cause vulnerabilities and uncertainties to persist. In contrast to this, he proposes ‘persevering calculation’ as an alternative strategy that affirms and augments collective power and potency. Drawing on Verónica Gagó’s masterful analysis of popular practices as what she calls ‘neoliberalism from below’, Lema Habash proposes ‘persevering calculation’ as a form of resisting those kinds of limitations in a popular pragmatic and collective endeavour.

Dimitris Chalastanis, in his chapter on Athens in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, proposes the term ‘urban resilience-ship’ to describe the process of subjectification that happened via the city’s ‘Preliminary Resilience Assessment’ and ‘Athens Resilience Strategy for 2030’. He analyses resilience discourse and its impact on how residents engage with their relationship to the city, including in their exercising of rights within it, noting a shift from ‘activist citizen’ to ‘resilient citizen’. In the context of a normalisation of crisis, the specific language used by the municipality of Athens in

these strategy documents veils a double disciplinary imperative. The urban subject is depoliticised in a bid to stifle dissent and encourage conciliatory, horizontal sets of relations. Simultaneously, ‘resilience’ is used as code for productive labour in what critical geographers have termed ‘urban philanthrocapitalism’. As he explains, ‘this is achieved by redirecting the focus away from attempts to change the system. . . . The objective is to transform politically charged social initiatives into depoliticized service providers, instruments that could be used by the municipality to fill the gaps of the state’ (this volume). Chalastanis traces how the circulation of terms like ‘collaboration’ and ‘synergies’ is used to veil this policing of the political subject and the uneven power relations that enable it.

Theodros Teklu undertakes an examination of resistance in Tigray and its diaspora during the 2020–2022 war with and siege by the Ethiopian Federal Government. He argues that ‘resilience humanitarianism’, as a form of governance under the cover of humanitarian emergency and post-conflict resilient recovery, shapes subjects to be acquiescent and adaptive rather than resistant. Drawing on interviews, Teklu proposes the Tigrigna term *mekete* as an alternative to resilience: encompassing both survival and resistance, he explores where this term stands, and how it is used, in relation to resilience. He takes examples of published descriptions of ‘war resilience’ and rearticulates these in terms of survival mechanisms that fostered *mekete* in both Tigray and its diaspora. What emerges in his conclusions is that *mekete* rejects both the disciplining of political agency and the insistence on self-interest in resilience thinking. What is more, after the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (November 2022), *mekete* refers to the collective action that resulted in not only that agreement but also recovering from crisis including while surviving ongoing internal displacement. In this way, the concept combines both mitigation and renewal in the wake of crisis and, thus, attends to the broader timeframe and set of agencies also evoked by other studies in this volume.

Critical Terms

Finally, I turn to language. As Charles Amo-Agyemang (2021) contends, resilience ‘reverberates a neocolonial Western episteme and going beyond this coloniality of knowledge and power’ requires a decolonial turn ‘to build new critical communities of thought, interpretation and intervention’ (20). In my work, and in this volume, language is both material and method. Language is an entry point. At the word level, we ask what does that mean? How is the term used and by whom? And how would one translate it? The necessary jarring involved in working across languages and cultures invites us to (fail to) understand different modes of imagining and making the world and to pause at untranslatability (Syrotinski 2015).

As researchers, we stop there to ask what it might mean ‘not to fully comprehend the lives upon which we make epistemic claims’ (Page 2017, 17). Indeed, working multilingually helps us remember that ‘the issue is not of producing one-to one commensurability’ (Menon 2022, 8). Translation (done sensitively, by thinking and feeling humans) reveals the conceptual assumptions and gaps inherent in terms as they hit up against contextual difference. Crucially, this kind of study in linguistic and conceptual ethics allows us to consider how language operates politically.

This is the basis for the multilingual collection of terms explored in this volume. The geographical, linguistic, and disciplinary scope could always have been broader. My hope has been that this translational friction and mis-mapping will reveal the blind spots of resilience, as well as underscoring its non-universal nature. This works against the ‘aspiration to epistemological transcendence’ that Seema Arora-Johnson identifies in resilience science (2016, 100), to situate the concept in a variety of cultures. At the same time, we consider the semantic and conceptual fields within and across which the term dwells. What are the cognates and co-habitants of those fields? Alternative concepts and terms help us recuperate and acknowledge what is happening in the world and what the language of resilience obscures: pain, vulnerability, detritus, rot, slow violence, delinquency, kindness, endurance, reciprocity. Alternative terms also reveal what it subsumes and surpasses: tenacity, elasticity, resistance, agility, recovery, healing, ruse. The chapters which follow probe the ethical stakes of this term and the normalisation of its circulation.

Our express aim is to offer this volume as a disruptive linguistic intervention (Sterken 2020). As two participants in the project summarise:

A more critical alternative language acknowledges the reality of asymmetrical power relations and structural injustices while centering the language that the oppressed communities deem right. This language will move us towards tackling root causes of injustice and resisting all forms of oppression instead of expecting already struggling populations to cope with them.

(Shwaikh 2023, 11)

‘This task generates Indigenous knowledge as an alternative to the Western-honed resilience through rethinking the world as multilingual and pluriversal by making use of case studies that bring forth alternative vocabularies and social ontologies’ (Teklu, this volume).

I am a scholar of postcolonial literatures and theories, and my ideas have been sharpened by the specific focus on conceptual ethics brought by colleagues working in philosophy. The contours of this project have been stretched by work in critical geography, choreography, and psychoanalysis.

Our common ground has been to examine the disciplinary and cultural traditions in which words sit and to consider what underlies them. It is our hope that the range of subjects reach and challenge readers in their own specific ways. This follows a provocation by Vergès, who argues that ‘the most enlightening and productive analyses in recent decades have been those that have drawn the greatest number of threads together to highlight the concrete and subjective networks of oppression that weave the web of exploitation and discrimination’ (2021, 22). *The boundaries of a discipline can seem safe and comforting, but threads need to be pulled apart from multiple positions and angles in order to dismantle something with such a tight hold. What else could happen to our thinking, as it finds resonance and rejection in diverse scholarly domains?*

This volume could be considered a sketch of practices adjacent to decolonising resilience or resilience from below (Amo-Agyemang 2021, Borges-Méndez and Caron 2019, Roxas 2023). Above all, it is a kind of lexical Venn diagram based on place-based studies that account for the persistence of vulnerability, the nature of care and collaboration, and the need for justice-oriented modes of being in and with ongoing crises. The intertextual and multidisciplinary abound here, offering different ways of reading the new moral codes of neoliberal discourse around resilience, as well as its inscriptions of older (racialised, gendered, and class-based) codes. We offer it as a toolkit to scholars, with indicative trials of how these terms might shed light on living-with-crisis across specialist subject areas. The hope is that with a more robust vocabulary at hand, we will avoid the pitfalls of an unwary usage of resilience as a buzzword, attend to those invisibilised by its pervasive power, and be replenished to imagine alternative ways to work and think and live.

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