Introduction

What does it mean to be resilient in a societal or international context? Where does resilience come from? From which discipline was it "imported" into International Relations (IR)? If a particular government instrumentalises the meaning of resilience to its own benefit should scholars reject the analytical purchase of the concept of resilience as a whole? Does a government have the monopoly of understanding how resilience is defined and applied?

This book addresses these questions. I develop a novel understanding of what resilience is and its added-value in world politics. To do so, I have chosen an approach that is both eclectic and multidisciplinary, borrowing insights from disciplines as varied as psychology, engineering, social work and ecology. A pluridisciplinary perspective on resilience moves away from a disciplinary silo and rather limiting understanding by legitimising and reinforcing a cross-disciplinary dialogue. It allows and encourages scholars to seek "external" correctives to their own literature gaps and go beyond in-field incomplete and reductive positions, as we shall see later.

Resilience in IR is not new. For example, in the 1990s Robert Powell underscored that for neoliberal institutionalism "international institutional history matter," i.e. that "the cost of changing or constructing new regimes thus gives existing regimes some resilience to shifts in the balance of power."[1] Peter Hasenclever and his colleagues contend that international institutions may be more effective or less, and "more or less robust (or resilient)." For them, "regime *robustness* (resilience) refers to the 'staying power' of international institutions in the face of

[1] Powell, Robert, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate," *International Organization* 48.2 (1994): 342.

exogenous challenges. . . . In other words, institutions that change with every shift of power among their members . . . *lack* resilience."[2]

However, a major shift is currently happening in how we understand and apply resilience in world politics. Resilience is indeed increasingly theorised, rather than simply employed as a noun; it has left the realm of vocabulary and entered the terrain of concept. Resilience has emerged as an important and much-discussed theme in the public policy realm and in various sub-fields of world politics, including security studies, international interventions, urban studies, state-society relationship in the neoliberal era, environmental regimes, terrorism and counter-terrorism studies, and international human rights to name just a few.[3]

This book moves IR's scattered scholarship on resilience a step further towards the theorisation of its application into world politics. The overarching objective of the present book is to tell a broad socio-political story of the connections between resilience and world politics. The book revisits resilience, demonstrates the multiple origins of

[2] Hasenclever, Andreas, Peter Mayer, and Volker Rittberger, *Theories of International Regimes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 2, their emphasis.

[3] Ancelovici, Marcos, "The Origins and Dynamics of Organizational Resilience: A Comparative Study of Tow French Labor Organizations," in *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*, ed. Peter A. Hall and Michèle Lamont, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Bourbeau, Philippe, "Resiliencism: Premises and Promises in Securitization Research," *Resilience: International Policies, Practices and Discourses* 1.1 (2013); Corry, Olaf, "From Defense to Resilience: Environmental Security beyond Neo-Liberalism," *International Political Sociology* 8.3 (2014); Chandler, David, "Resilience and Human Security: The Post-Interventionist Paradigm," *Security Dialogue* 43.3 (2012); Bourbeau, Philippe, "Migration, Resilience, and Security: Responses to New Inflows of Asylum Seekers and Migrants," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41.12 (2015); Jenson, Jane and Ron Levi, "Narratives and Regimes of Social and Human Rights: The Jack Pines of the Neoliberal Era," in *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Era*, ed. Peter A. Hall and Michèle Lamont, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Ryan, Caitlin, "Everyday Resilience as Resistance: Palestinian Women Practicing Sumud," *International Political Sociology* 9.4 (2015); Wagner, Wolfgang and Rosanne Anholt, "Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic or Promising?," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37.3 (2016); Young, Oran R., "Institutional Dynamics: Resilience, Vulnerability and Adaptation in Environmental and Resource Regimes," *Global Environmental Change* 20 (2010); Bourbeau, Philippe and Caitlin Ryan, "Resilience, Resistance, Infrapolitics, and Enmeshment," *European Journal of International Relations* OnlineFirst (2017).

resilience, traces the diverse expressions of resilience in IR to various historical markers and proposes a theory of resilience in world politics.

This volume, then, makes three contributions. First, it proposes, by defining resilience as the *process of patterned adjustments adopted in the face of endogenous or exogenous shocks, to maintain, to marginally modify, or to transform a referent object*, a theorisation of resilience as applied to world politics. The main contention is that of the three logics underpinning the scholarship on resilience in IR – i.e. the logics of persistence, agential self-reliance and processual duality – only the third offers convincing grounds on which to theorise its application in IR. Second, it proposes a multidisciplinary genealogy of resilience. I believe that understanding the multiple and multidisciplinary paths through which resilience has percolated into world politics is an essential first step to conducting an analysis of the application of resilience in international politics. Third, by providing a unique and elaborate conceptualisation of the relationship among resilience, security and migration while outlining a much-needed terrain of debate between resilience and current IR fields of research, I argue that resilience is an *intra-social sciences* bridging concept. That is, resilience might well be one of those concepts that cuts across several social sciences disciplines to help scholars make sense of issues and problematics that do not neatly fit within the disciplinary way academia has structured the production of knowledge over time. Overall, this book reflects on the normativity, the practices, the challenges and enticing opportunities of applying resilience to IR questions, and offers several suggestions for unpacking theoretically the concept of resilience.

What Is Resilience?

A great deal has been written in the scholarly literature about the role of resilience in our social world. Numerous disciplines and fields of research, including psychology, child development, biology/ecology, criminology, mental health theory, socio-ecology and social work have by turns studied, delimited, criticised and exalted the resilience approach.

Yet, one often reads in IR journals that ecologists (and one ecologist in particular: C. S. Holling) "invented" the concept of resilience in the mid-1970s. Readers are *informed* that "it is no accident that the

concept of resilience derives directly from ecology,"[4] that resilience was first "developed within systems ecology in the 1970s"[5] and that only in *the past few years* has resilience "infiltrated" other disciplines such as "the psychology of trauma" while remaining utterly "under-theorized."[6] Indeed, Claudia Aradau writes that up until very recently, resilience "was quasi-absent from academic debates … C. S. Holling's [article] and Jerome Kagan's [article] appeared to be the only significant contributions, which lacked any substantial follow-up for quite some time. Hardly any other articles mentioned resilience at the time."[7] She states that it is only over *the past decade* that resilience has been presented as offering an answer to several issues, including "children's education."

These statements are not argumentative; these authors are not *arguing* that ecologists and C. S. Holling initially developed the concept forty-five years ago and that other disciplines recently jumped on the resilience bandwagon. Rather, the "ecological" origin of resilience is presented as a fact, as an undebatable truth.

The problem is that for anyone interested even tangentially in resilience, this claim is surprising. It is a supposedly "accepted truth" that does not sit well with a vast body of literature in psychology and social work, for example. A quick search in the two main databases for psychology and psychiatry (PsycINFO and MedLine) between 1955 and 2000 reveal the term "resilience" (or "resiliency") in the title of 1315 peer-reviewed articles and academic press books, in the abstract of 3211 articles and books, and as a keyword in 1310 publications. Nearly 500 PhD dissertations focusing on resilience were completed between the end of World War II and the close of the twentieth century.

This hardly qualifies as absence of debate. If IR critical theorists are right in suggesting that a focus on silenced discourses reveals as much as a focus on dominant discourses – and I think they are – then one is

[4] Reid, Julian, "The Disastrous and Politically Debased Subject of Resilience," *Development Dialogue* 58 (2012): 71.
[5] Walker, Jeremy and Melinda Cooper, "Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation," *Security Dialogue* 42.2 (2011): 143.
[6] Walker, Jeremy and Melinda Cooper, "Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation," 143.
[7] Aradau, Claudia, "The Promise of Security: Resilience, Surprise and Epistemic Politics," *Resilience* 2.2 (2014): 1.

led to wonder why, and for what purpose, vast swaths of literature on resilience are so bluntly ignored. Certainly, the consequence of this choice is obvious: claiming that an eco-system specialist invented resilience permits IR scholars to treat expressions of resilience in world politics as a logical extension of the literature on ecological systems' adjustment capacity (that is, a literature that emphasises equilibrium and management). On the other hand, if one acknowledges that resilience has been around for more than half of a century in numerous theoretical capacities, this direct association is harder to justify. In the remainder of this chapter, I set this issue aside (returning to it in Chapter 1) in order to discuss some of the definitions of resilience that scholars have provided over the years. I will then offer a novel and integrative definition of my own.

While IR scholars seem puzzled by the problem of how to define resilience as we shall see shortly, distinct conceptualisations exist side by side in psychology, criminology and ecology.

Psychologists were among the first scholars to theorize resilience. A large strand of the psychological literature on resilience aims at uncovering the qualities that help people to positively adapt to profound adversity in a way that is substantially better than would have been expected given the circumstances. Mildred C. Scoville refers, in her 1943 discussion of wartime psychiatric work in Great Britain, to the "astonishing resilience of children"; a few years later, M. Brewster Smith remarks in his study of frame of reference for mental health that "the person who achieves (social desirability) at the expense of personal integrity lacks the resources of strength and resilience to maintain his adjustment against environmental stresses which a more highly integrated person could stand."[8] Several studies quickly followed, most notably a series of articles by the Blocks (Jack and Jeanne, both University of California-Berkeley scholars) and their associates. Jack Block and Hobart Thomas conclude in their 1955 study of the self and the individual's tendency to seek control over its surroundings that, "a certain resiliency or potential for oscillation is required in order for a personality system to cope with the stresses and strains of life."[9]

[8] Smith, M. Brewster, "Optima of Mental Health: A General Frame of Reference," *Psychiatry* 13 (1950): 504.

[9] Block, Jack and Hobart Thomas, "Is Satisfcation with Self a Measure of Adjustement?," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 51.2 (1955): 258.

Similarly, Jack Block and Emily Turula, in their examination of the relationship between self-identification, ego-control and adjustments, argue that resilience should be understood as "the individual's adaptation capability when under the strains set by new environmental demands. Some individuals can react to the press of new and yet unmastered circumstances in resourceful, tenacious, but elastic ways. In the present time, such people possess ego resiliency."[10]

The scholarship on resilience was fine-tuned in the 1970s and 1980s with works focusing on the notions of "invulnerability,"[11] "invincibility"[12] and "protective factors."[13]. In child development literature, children reared by seriously mentally ill parents were argued to be have become resilient "by taking on responsibilities for coping with the stress situation, and doing so successfully."[14] The focus of the literature in this period was on "successful adaptation despite the odds against good development."[15] Subsequently, psychologists have used resilience to convey the idea that "some individuals have a relatively good psychological outcome despite suffering risk experiences that would be expected to bring about serious sequalae."[16]

Social workers and criminologists have also participated in the debate on how best to define resilience. While Hamilton and Marilyn McCubbin's work on family relations sought to study the "characteristics,

[10] Block, Jack and Emily Turula, "Identification, Ego Control, and Adjustment," *Child Development* 34.4 (1963): 946.
[11] Anthony, James E., "The Syndrome of the Psychologically Invulnerable Child," in *The Child in His Family: Children at Psychiatric Risk*, ed. E.J. Anthony and C. Koupernik, New York: Wiley, 1974.
[12] Werner, Emily E. and Ruth S. Smith, *Vulnerable but Invincible*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982.
[13] Garmezy, Norman, "The Study of Competence in Children at Risk for Severe Psychopathology," in *The Child in His Family: Children at Psychiatric Risk: Iii*, ed. E. J. Anthony and C. Koupernik, New York: Wiley, 1974; Rutter, Michael, "Protective Factors in Children's Responses to Stress and Disadvantage," in *Primary Prevention of Psychopathology:* Vol. 3., ed. M. W. Kent and J. E. Rolf, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1979.
[14] "Resilience in the Face of Adversity. Protective Factors and Resistance to Psychiatric Disorder," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 147.6 (1985): 607.
[15] Masten, Ann S., Karin M. Best, and Norman Garmezy, "Resilience and Development: Contributions from the Study of Children Who Overcome Adversity," *Development and Psychopathology* 2.04 (1990): 426.
[16] Rutter, Michael, "Implications of Resilience Concepts for Scientific Understanding," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1094.1 (2006): 1.

dimensions, and properties of families which help families to be resistant to disruption in the face of change and adaptive in the face of crisis situation,"[17] Froma Walsh was studying the "ingredients of family resilience: how it is possible for some families to emerge hardier from adversity – not in spite of, but actually strengthened through their experience."[18] And Robbie Gilligan argues for the value of resilience as a key concept in social work with young people, characterising a resilient child as someone "who bounces back having endured adversity."[19]

For these scholars, resilience is a set of dispositional qualities that permit some individuals to "bounce back" or to do better than expected under certain circumstances. In short, the often-cited maxim of Friedrich Nietzsche that "whatever does not kill me makes me stronger" captures well the bulk of this literature.[20]

More recently, some scholars have moved away from the understanding of resilience as a set of qualities that someone possesses or can develop. These scholars recast resilience as a *process*. Consider the following definitions of resilience from the early years of the twenty-first century: "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity";[21] a "process that persons demonstrate over time and indicates that persons who have experienced adversities actively use the resources available to them to help them cope with, adapt to and overcome risks that threaten their development and pro-social adaptations to their life circumstances";[22] a "dynamic process whereby individuals show adaptive functioning in

[17] McCubbin, Hamilton I., and Marilyn A. McCubbin, "Typologies of Resilient Families: Emerging Roles of Social Class and Ethnicity," *Family Relations* (1988): 247.
[18] Walsh, Froma, "Healthy Family Functioning: Conceptual and Research Developments," *Family Business Review* 7.2 (1994): 183.
[19] Gilligan, Robbie, "Adversity, Resilience and Young People: The Protective Value of Positive School and Spare Time Experiences," *Children & Society* 14.1 (2000): 37.
[20] (1888 [1998])
[21] Luthar, Suniya S., Dante Cicchetti, and Bronwyn Becker, "The Construct of Resilience: A Critical Evaluation and Guidelines for Future Work," *Child Development* 71.3 (2000): 543.
[22] Gilgun, Jane F., "Evidence-Based Practice, Descriptive Research and the Resilience–Schema–Gender–Brain Functioning (Rsgb) Assessment," *British Journal of Social Work* 35.6 (2005): 848.

the face of significant adversity."[23] Perhaps the work of social worker Michael Ungar best characterises this trend away from understanding resilience as a set of qualities. For Ungar, resilience is "the outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy amidst conditions collectively viewed as adverse."[24]

While this conceptual evolution in the understanding of resilience was taking place in the psychology and social work literature, the field of ecology was also deepening its understanding of this concept. Three main strands of literature on resilience have emerged in ecology: equilibrium resilience (or the Pimm resilience), ecological resilience (or the Holling resilience) and socio-ecological resilience (or the Adger-Folke resilience).

Equilibrium resilience is concerned with the conditions that determine how far a system can be displaced from a fixed point of equilibrium and still return to that equilibrium once the disturbance has passed. The work of Stuart Pimm best exemplifies the equilibrium understanding of resilience; for Pimm, the population resilience of a species is "the rate at which population density returns to equilibrium after a disturbance away from equilibrium."[25] This model has proven to be both influential and dynamic in the ecology literature.[26]

In contrast, ecological resilience is defined as a "measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations

[23] Schoon, Ingrid, *Risk and Resilience: Adaptations in Changing Times*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 6.

[24] Ungar, Michael, "A Constructionist Discourse on Resilience," *Youth & Society* 35.3 (2004): 342; "The Social Ecology of Resilience: Addressing Contextual and Cultural Ambiguity of a Nascent Construct," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 81.1 (2011).

[25] Pimm, Stuart L., *The Balance of Nature?: Ecological Issues in the Conservation of Species and Communities*, University of Chicago Press, 1991, 18; "The Complexity and Stability of Ecosystems," *Nature* 307.5949 (1984).

[26] Tilman, Daniel, "Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning," in *Nature's Services: Societal Dependence on Natural Ecosystems*, ed. G. C. Daily, Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997; Lehman, Clarence L and David Tilman, "Biodiversity, Stability, and Productivity in Competitive Communities," *The American Naturalist* 156.5 (2000); McManus, John W. and Johanna F. Polsenberg, "Coral–Algal Phase Shifts on Coral Reefs: Ecological and Environmental Aspects," *Progress in Oceanography* 60.2 (2004); Loreau, Michel et al., "Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning: Current Knowledge and Future Challenges," *Science* 294.5543 (2001).

or state variables."[27] At the heart of ecological resilience lies the capacity of a system to maintain its function in the face of adversity.[28]

Finally, the socio-ecological conceptualisation of resilience pushes Holling's system of thought a few steps further, directly highlighting the synergistic and co-evolutionary relationship between social and ecological systems.[29] On this understanding, resilience is "the capacity of linked social-ecological systems to absorb recurrent disturbances . . . so as to retain essential structures, processes, and feedbacks."[30] For Carl Folke and his colleagues, the emphasis is on the combined capacity of humans and natural systems to achieve "management that secures the capacity of ecosystems to sustain societal development and progress with essential ecosystem services."[31] How resilience can speak to both natural and social sciences is a theme that will be further discussed in the conclusion.

These definitions from psychologists, social workers and ecologists all share three characteristics that prove problematic for the theorisation of resilience in world politics. First, they define resilience as being about *positive* adjustments. Indeed, all the works referenced in the previous part of this section start with the premise that disturbance (or shock) is inherently negative and that resilience is about positive adaptation to such a negative event. This premise reflects a broad acceptance that resilience is good and thus must be promoted. In some cases, this acceptance amounts to a disciplinary bias; in the psychological literature, for example, resilience is typically employed in discussions of an individual's actions following instances of sexual abuse or severe psychological trauma. Being "resilient," in these contexts, is

[27] Holling, C. S., "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4 (1973): 14.

[28] Carpenter, Steven R. et al., "From Metaphor to Measurement: Resilience of What to What?," *Ecosystems* 4 (2001); Gunderson, Lance H., "Ecological Resilience – In Theory and Application," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 31 (2000).

[29] Adger, Neil W., "Social and Ecological Resilience: Are They Related?," *Progress in Human Geography* 24.3 (2000).

[30] Adger, Neil W. et al., "Social-Ecological Resilience to Coastal Disasters," *Science* 309.5737 (2005): 1036.

[31] Folke, Carl, Johan Colding, and Fikret Berkes, "Synthesis: Building Resilience and Adaptive Capacity in Social–Ecological Systems," in *Navigating Social-Ecological Systems: Building Resilience for Complexity and Change*, ed. Fikret Berkes, Johan Colding, and Carl Folke, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 354.

unequivocally a positive adaptation. Although this inclination makes sense in certain disciplines, a wholly positive portrayal of resilience ignores the potential dark side of this trait, especially in socio-political terms. As I will discuss this in the conclusion, it is important that the definition of resilience we apply to world politics remain normatively open and avoid any such analytical closure; resilience is not always a desirable feature of social, political or economic life.

The second problematic element shared by these definitions is their tendency to depict resilience as a binary concept. Resilience is characterised in this literature as all-or-nothing – either there is resilience or there is not. One direct consequence of this position is the lack of any serious exploration of a *scalar* understanding of resilience. Treating resilience in a binary way also sidesteps the notion that there may be distinct types of resilience. As a result of this attitude, we witness a disconnect – in theoretical and empirical terms – between the complexity of contemporary world policy and the analytical framework proposed to make sense of the different patterns of response that international events inspire.

A third limit of some of these definitions is their tendency to reify the *prior* conditions to resilience. Psychologists, for instance, reify the state of mind or personality that the individual "bounces back to" through resilience. This reified condition may be a fixed point in time, a snapshot of one's personality, or a pre-existing, unchanged and stable state of mind. Similarly, from an ecological standpoint, equilibrium resilience reifies the balanced state to which a resilient system will return. While it may be true that an eco-system can return to a clearly defined previous state after a significant shock, it is hard to translate this concept directly to political systems – the state of social "equilibrium" that a human population might exist in and return to is hard to envision and articulate. Ecological resilience, too, partakes to some degree in the reification of the previous condition, as it emphasises that resilience is about maintaining the *same* relationships between populations or state variables.

Whereas, as we have seen, distinct conceptualisations of resilience exist side by side in the psychology, social work and ecology literature, we are faced with the exact opposite situation in IR. The literature suffers not from a diversity of definitions of resilience but from a limited number of definitions. Despite the growing popularity of the concept in international studies, only a handful of IR scholars have proposed a definition of resilience.