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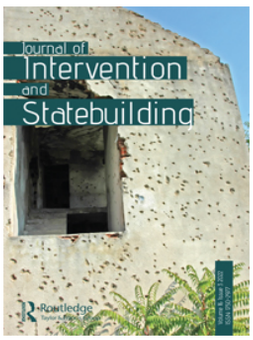

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Thinking about Resilience through the Interdisciplinary Lens of Connectivity: A Study of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary article uses connectivity as a framework for thinking about resilience and its relevance for conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). It specifically draws on ecology literature, where connectivity refers to interactions and movement within and between ecosystems. Viewed through the lens of connectivity, thus, resilience becomes a 'moving' story of dynamic and multiple connectivities between individuals and their social ecologies (environments). This approach to resilience fundamentally challenges neoliberal critiques of the concept. In particular, the article emphasizes important linkages between connectivity, resilience and care, and it argues that supporting victims-/survivors of CRSV also means extending care to their social ecologies.

KEYWORDS

Conflict-related sexual violence; resilience; connectivity; social ecologies; care

Introduction

In his 2020 report on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General (2020, 3), António Guterres, underlined the importance of 'contextualized solutions that build resilience and address the diverse experiences of all survivors'. In a speech delivered in Guatemala City in 2021, Pramila Patten – the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict – addressed a group of women who testified in the Sepur Zarco trial[1] and told them: 'Your courage and resilience are an inspiration to us all' (UN 2021). At the international policy level, references to resilience are typically cursory and seldom elaborated on. At the same time, it is striking that extant literature on CRSV has, to date, largely overlooked resilience. It is necessary to caveat this by pointing out that there is important research exploring related concepts. As one example, scholars have examined some of the ways that victims-/survivors[2] of CRSV manifest agency, including through social activism and the pursuit of legal justice (e.g. Berry 2018; Campbell et al. 2019; Kreft 2019; Schulz and Touquet 2020; Zulver 2016). Studies specifically focused on resilience, however, are rare (see, e.g. Clark 2022a; Koos 2018; Zraly et al. 2013).

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One possible reason for this is that resilience is not an uncontroversial concept. A significant set of critiques proceed from the basic premise that resilience serves a neoliberal agenda that 'places the onus squarely on local actors and communities to further adapt to the logics and implications of global capitalism and climate change' (MacKinnon and Derickson 2013, 266). Individuals are thus encouraged 'to live with insecurity because the status quo is deemed insurmountable' (Diprose 2015, 44; see also Aradau 2014; Chandler and Reid 2016; Joseph 2013). While such arguments have themselves met with criticism (see, e.g. Bourbeau 2018; Corry 2015; Juncos 2018), it is easy to see how they might diminish the space for thinking about resilience in the context of CRSV – and how they might fuel concerns that 'There is a significant burden placed on "victims" to develop resilience' (Gordon 2017, 41).

It is important to make clear from the outset, therefore, that this interdisciplinary article does not approach resilience as a neoliberal concept that individualizes responsibility (Hajir et al. 2022, 2) and dilutes the responsibilities that states and governments have towards (in this case) victims-/survivors of CRSV. Rather, it theorizes resilience as a process that is 'co-facilitated' by both individuals and the wider systems with which their lives are interwoven (Theron et al. 2021, 361). In short, it adopts a social-ecological approach that underscores 'the social and ecological systems and associated resources that are important to human resilience, including supportive relationships, quality education opportunities, meaningful employment, well-being-promoting built and natural environments, and enabling cultural heritage' (Theron et al. 2021, 361; see also Moletsane and Theron 2017, 3; Ungar 2012, 15). Resilience, in other words, is about much more than just individuals.

This article argues that the study of resilience – which it defines as 'the capacity of both individuals and their environments to interact in ways that optimize developmental processes' (Ungar, 2013, 256) – can make a substantial contribution to the rich corpus of existing scholarship on CRSV. Drawing on empirical data (discussed in the Methodology section) from Bosnia–Herzegovina (BiH), Colombia and Uganda, it illustrates that exploring resilience offers new insights into the experiences of victims-/survivors of CRSV and, relatedly, their social ecologies (environments). These social ecologies are highly relevant from the multi-layered perspective of what they lack, what they provide and what victims-/survivors themselves may actively contribute and 'give back' to them.

Central to this article and its arguments is the concept of connectivity. In fields such as political sociology and International Relations, scholars have examined, inter alia, biopolitical aspects of connectivity and the role of information technologies in determining 'our existence as informationalized subjects' (Reid 2009, 622); the relationship between connectivity and resilience governance, as the former becomes 'the condition for societies to establish resilience and recuperate security' (Kaufman 2013, 58); and the function of connectivity among international organizations as a 'driver of diffusion' (Sommerer and Tallberg 2019, 403). This article's approach to connectivity, in contrast, has a different disciplinary grounding based in ecology.

The significance of ecology in the development of resilience research – reflected particularly in the pioneering work of C.S. Holling (1973) – cannot be over-emphasized. Some scholars have nevertheless problematized the application of ecological ideas to social systems. In this article, I especially want to challenge the argument that resilience 'has been plucked from the ecology literature and used in a fairly instrumental way to

justify particular forms of governance which emphasise responsible conduct' (Joseph 2013, 40). I demonstrate that the ecological concept of connectivity – which denotes interactions and movement within and between ecosystems (Tischendorf and Fahrig 2000, 7) – offers a novel framework for thinking about resilience not simply as a concept or process, but as a 'bundle of storied lines' (Pálsson 2018, 137) about individuals' relationships with the worlds around them – and how they live and 'move' within them.

Far from justifying 'particular forms of governance', the connectivity approach to resilience that this article adopts is fundamentally about exploring different ways of supporting victims-/survivors. The research thus highlights important linkages between resilience, connectivity and care. It demonstrates that caring practices (and the connectivities that they reflect) can be an expression of, and scaffold to, resilience. More than this, the article argues that its social-ecological framing of resilience ultimately necessitates the widening and extension of caring practices to include, in addition to victims-/survivors themselves, the 'webs of connectivity' (Whatmore 1997, 45) that constitute integral parts of their everyday lives.

Ecology, connectivity and resilience

While extant scholarship on CRSV has given little attention to resilience, the idea of connectivity, loosely defined, is present in the literature in various ways. As one example, scholars have expressed concerns that a heavy focus on CRSV risks artificially severing the phenomenon from its deeper structural roots, thereby downplaying the significance of 'the continuum of violence which connects multiple forms of SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence] across both war and peace' (Gray 2019, 190). In other words, decontextualizing CRSV detracts from important causal connectivities in the sense of underlying factors that facilitate such violence (see, e.g. Baaz and Stern 2018, 297; Boesten 2017, 507; Kirby and Shepherd 2016, 381).

Scholarship has also examined some of the ways that CRSV can damage connectivities (without specifically using this terminology) – and in particular connections and relationships with others (Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008; Schulz 2018a; Yagi et al. 2022). In their research in northern Uganda, for example, Oliveira and Baines (2021) describe some of the challenges – including social stigma – faced by women with children born of rape, and they talk about 'repairing systems of relatedness'. This article brings together different dimensions of connectivity into a single framework, as a way of thinking about resilience and, more broadly, about some of the many legacies of CRSV. A crucial preliminary step, however, is to explain its 'interdisciplinary borrowing' (Byford and Tileagă 2014, 361) from the field of ecology, and there are two key points to underline in this regard.

The first is that scholarship on resilience, which spans diverse disciplines – including human geography (Adger 2000), neurology (Horn et al. 2016), security studies (Coaffee and Fussey 2015), education (Hernandez-Martinez and Williams 2011) and law (Garmestani et al. 2019) – has shifted away from person-centric, psychology-based explanations. Many resilience scholars now focus on the dynamics between individuals and their social ecologies, from families and schools to neighbourhoods, communities and ecosystems (Berkes and Ross 2013; Masten 2021; Theron 2016; Ungar 2011), in ways that problematize some of the aforementioned neoliberal critiques of resilience. Relatedly, there is a

growing field of resilience research focused on social-ecological systems (SES) – a concept that underlines and reflects interconnections between human societies and ecological systems (Cinner and Barnes 2019, 51; Folke et al. 2005, 443–444). For some scholars, however, the application of ecological principles to study social dynamics is problematic. As just one example, Cote and Nightingale (2012, 479) maintain that it has fostered 'a kind of social analysis that hides the possibility to ask important questions about the role of power and culture in adaptive capacity, or to unpack normative questions such as "resilience of what?" and "for whom?" when applied to the social realm'. While such arguments must be taken seriously, one of the aims of this article is precisely to offer a different way of thinking about ecology for the purpose of studying resilience in a social science context, with a specific focus on CRSV.

The second point is that in ecology, the concept of connectivity is quintessentially about movement. As Brown et al. (2016, 2447) comment, 'The persistence of many species depends on individuals successfully migrating among multiple, connected, patches or habitats' (see also McRae et al. 2008, 2712). My argument, therefore, is that when we think about connectivity in relation to resilience, it 'stories' the concept. Looked at through the lens of connectivity, in short, resilience is about more than just the interactions between individuals and their social ecologies. It becomes a 'moving' story of dynamic, changing and multiple connectivities, including what they do and what shocks and stressors do to them. With regards to CRSV, thus, not only does connectivity provide an expanded storytelling framework, but it also offers a new way of supporting victims-/survivors that reflects 'the liveliness and interconnectedness of the world' (Singh 2018, 2). Operationalizing connectivity is not specifically about 'centring' victims-/survivors (see, e.g. UN 2019), their needs and priorities. It is about being contextually attuned and responsive to the dynamics of their lives and relationships with their social ecologies, and to the various ways that these dynamics can both support and hamper resilience.

I conclude this section by outlining the article's connectivity framework, drawing directly on ecology literature. An important example of connectivity within this literature is landscape connectivity, which 'encapsulates the combined effects of (1) landscape structure and (2) the species' use, ability to move and risk of mortality in the various landscape elements, on the movement rate among habitat patches in the landscape' (Tischendorf and Fahrig 2000, 8). The first of these highlights the concept of structural connectivity, which is about physical connectivity and 'is what we portray on maps or geographic information system (GIS) images and analyze using spatial statistics or programs' (Weins 2006, 24). The second is about functional connectivity and the practical use of structural connectivity (Galvin 2008, 370–371).

Although connectivity is not always something positive, it is often discussed as a way of dealing with fragmentation; this refers to disconnects that undermine healthy ecosystem functioning, thereby leaving particular species potentially more vulnerable to extinction (Crooks and Sanjayan 2006, 7). Fostering connectivity in this regard – which foregrounds the idea of dynamic connectivity (see, e.g., Czuba and Foufoula-Georgiou 2015) – means taking action 'to reverse some of the effects of fragmentation – to reconnect small, isolated populations and restore their ability to function as larger, more resilient populations' (Doerr et al. 2014, 2).

Embedded within this brief overview of connectivity are three ideas – structural and functional connectivity, fragmentation and dynamic connectivity – that this article 'borrows' and reshapes to create its conceptual (and applied) framework for analyzing resilience and the interview data from BiH, Colombia and Uganda. First, as an adaptation of structural connectivity, it examines the supportive and sustaining connectivities in the interviewees' lives – and the clustering of different connectivities in diverse contexts. As an extension of this, it repurposes the idea of functional connectivity to explore how interviewees in the three countries actively used these connectivities. Second, it explores fragmentation in the sense of broken and ruptured connectivities, thus drawing attention to some of the social-ecological and relational legacies of CRSV. Third, using the idea of dynamic connectivity, the article discusses how, as an important dimension of resilience, individuals may build new connectivities with and within their social ecologies. To cite Jordan (2004, 49–50), 'As individuals, we all have […] particular patterns for transforming disconnections back into expansive connections'.

Methodology, fieldwork and ethics

This article draws on fieldwork undertaken as part of a mixed methods study about resilience and victims-/survivors of CRSV. The study, which is nearing completion, is exploring what everyday resilience 'looks' like and how it is expressed in different societies and communities, how different social ecologies and connectivity clusters support and hinder resilience and how common protective resources function in different cultural contexts. To drill down into the significance of diverse social ecologies in shaping resilience, the study focuses on three case studies – BiH, Colombia and Uganda – that reflect a maximum variation logic across multiple dimensions (including conflict dynamics, patterns of CRSV, history and cultural context).

In the qualitative stage of the project, semi-structured interviews with 63 victims-/survivors of CRSV (21 in each country) were undertaken between January and July 2019 (by the author and two researchers). The interviewees were selected from a larger quantitative dataset of 449 respondents (BiH $n = 126$, Colombia $n = 171$ and Uganda $n = 152$). All of the respondents had suffered CRSV (most often rape), in addition to many other (and often related) forms of violence – from forced displacement and witnessing brutality against others to domestic violence and earlier childhood abuse.

The 449 participants in the overall dataset completed the study questionnaire, which included the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM; Resilience Research Centre 2016). This 28-item scale measures the individual, relational and contextual resources that a person has in his/her life to help deal with stressors and adversity. A higher overall ARM score (range 28–140) indicates a greater number of protective resources to support resilience (for a detailed discussion of the research results from the ARM, see Clark et al. 2021). Participants within each country dataset were divided into quartiles based on their ARM scores, and interviewees were then selected from each quartile. The rationale for this was to explore whether and how differences in ARM scores translated into the qualitative findings. Selection choices reflected both the demographic diversity (especially gender,[3] age and ethnic diversity) and the spread of ARM scores within each quartile.

The host institution, the research funder and authorities in BiH, Colombia and Uganda granted ethics approval for the research. Issues that needed to be comprehensively

addressed included informed consent, incidental findings, data storage and fair benefit sharing. As I have discussed some of them elsewhere (Clark et al. 2021), here I will highlight two particular issues. The first relates to the ethics of interviewing victims-/survivors of CRSV. In a recent article about the politics of sexual violence statistics in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lewis (2022: 58) notes that 'For ethical reasons, this study did not include interviews with survivors'. Without further elaboration, however, it is unhelpful simply to imply that it is not 'ethical' to interview victims-/survivors. In her work on CRSV, focused on BiH, Campbell (2018, 480) has explained her own decision 'not to use sexual violence survivors as key respondents', on the grounds that 'these victims have become "over-researched"' (see also Boesten and Henry 2018, 579). It is essential, however, to ask *which* victims-/survivors have been over-researched. Men who have experienced CRSV, for example, are often marginalized (Schulz and Touquet 2020: 1175). Relatedly, the creation of 'hierarchies of victimhood' (Berry 2017, 833) may result in some groups of victims-/survivors receiving significantly more – or less – attention than others. In BiH, for example, the overwhelming focus has been on the experiences of Bosniak women (Berry 2017, 841; see also Clark 2017; Simić 2018). One of the aims of this research was specifically to ensure (with the support of several in-country organizations) that the samples captured some of the diversity – including ethnic diversity – of victims-/survivors of CRSV in each country.

The second issue is about possible re-traumatization. Andersen and Iversson (2016, 14) argue that 'We are hardwired for storytelling'. This does not take away from the fact that it can be enormously challenging for people (and not only victims-/survivors of CRSV) to speak about very painful experiences. It is, however, important to underline that some research participants found the interview process helpful precisely because they had previously had few opportunities to tell their stories (and to do so in a safe space). The larger point is that while researchers have an ethical responsibility to minimize the risks of re-traumatization, this does not mean that interviews should simply be avoided. What fundamentally matters is how they are carried out – and the time and care that are invested in the process (Nadia's Initiative et al., 2022: para. 10.5). Relatedly, the questions that we ask are crucial. As Boesten and Henry (2018, 583) underscore, it is important for researchers to ask themselves 'what data are already available and what is missing?' Because of its focus on resilience, this research sought data that were not already available. The questions in the interview guide (used in all three countries) included: 'If you were to tell the story of your life, what title would you give it?' 'Who or what are the sources of support in your life?' 'Do you think that being a man/woman has influenced how you deal with challenges and adversity in your life?'

The interviews were transcribed, translated into English and uploaded into NVivo. I developed the codebook over a period of 12 months, continually revising it as the coding process progressed. Once the interviews were coded, I ran multiple queries in NVivo and used thematic analysis to develop core themes. The eight themes[4] all speak to the idea of connectivity, which emerged organically during the process of analyzing the data; and they are linked to the three aforementioned elements (broken and ruptured connectivities, supportive and sustaining connectivities and new connectivities) that constitute the article's connectivity framework.

The article's remaining sections apply the framework directly to the empirical data and focus on the stories of three interviewees, to allow for a more in-depth analysis. While

these 'portrait vignettes' (Heaviside et al. 2018, 467) necessarily constitute only a small part of a much larger dataset, they are not exceptional in the overall context of the total 63 interviews. In choosing which stories to present, I have selected a mixture of female and male interviewees with different ARM scores and different conflict-related experiences, to demonstrate the cross-contextual utility of the framework and to illustrate that strong connectivities broadly correlated with higher ARM scores. No actual names or other identifying information are used in this research.

Lamija's story (BiH)

Lamija is a Bosniak woman who was born in 1958. Of the 126 Bosnians who participated in the study, she had the lowest total ARM score (67). Her modest home was up a steep incline, a considerable walking distance from the nearest town. Although she had several neighbours, the location felt remote. Lamija's husband and parents were no longer alive and she was alone, a point that she underlined five times ('I live alone'; 'I am alone, I have no one'; 'you fight alone'; 'I am really alone'; 'I am afraid I might have a stroke and what will I do alone then?'). Her brother and his wife lived close by, but they both had health problems and were not able to give Lamija much support. They mainly called on her to run errands for them. She appeared to have few supportive or sustaining connectivities.

What particularly emerged from this interview were the various ways that the 1992–1995 Bosnian war and its aftermath had broken and ruptured significant connectivities in Lamija's life. Her husband was killed in 1993 during the siege of Sarajevo and she also spoke at length about mistreatment at the hands of her 'own' army (the BiH army). She described how Bosniak soldiers had entered her village and taken food from people's homes; 'when the army arrived, they robbed us of everything. They took everything away. We were hungry'. Such conduct from an army from which she had expected protection had left a deep psychological imprint. As she explained: 'I thought that maybe this, that this was perhaps an honest army … NO! Everything was then … All my illusions, all some … Everything went down the drain, you know? Then, I became a person who no longer trusted anyone or anything'.

This loss of trust had contributed to the fact that, for many years, she had remained silent about the sexual violence that she experienced in 1992. She was afraid and had withdrawn, disconnecting from everything around her. Reflecting on what she went through during the war, she underlined: 'It kills in you all that was before, what you believed in, what you believed was valuable. And then you go through life, you fight alone'.

What further contributed to the idea of broken and ruptured connectivities in Lamija's interview was her belief that she herself was to blame for the sexual violence that she experienced. Her husband had told her to leave the area and go somewhere else, but she had not listened; 'I blame myself for staying there, for having this happen to me'. The broader socio-cultural environment was also relevant in this regard. When asked, for example, whether the fact of being a woman had affected how she deals with challenges and adversities in life, she answered in the affirmative and reflected: 'Here, still, yes … I think that, that some people, even today, perhaps they blame us, women who were raped, well, because there are those opinions, those people, those primitive

thoughts'. This was another reason for her aforementioned silence; she had only spoken for the first time about what she went through a year earlier (to a women's NGO). Kiewisch (2015, 499) argues that 'When we think about resilience […] it has to be understood in the context of whether an individual or household has access to sufficient resources at critical times'. However, the bigger point is that access to resources is often gendered;[5] in Lamija's case, gender norms and cultural expectations of women, and her fear of consequently being judged, had stood in the way of her seeking support much earlier.

If broken and ruptured connectivities were the dominant thread running through Lamija's interview, towards the end the idea of new connectivities also emerged. She described how she helps several elderly people in the community (cooking for them, giving them their medicines, cutting their nails) and what she gains from this emotionally. With tears in her eyes, she explained: 'This keeps me going'. At the beginning, it was a way to make extra money for essentials. However, over time, it had become something more meaningful. By establishing new connectivities with people, she had started to feel needed and this had motivated her to want to do more. In her words: 'They have given me a lot of strength, these old people, not knowing what it is I went through in my life'.

Policy discussions about CRSV overwhelmingly focus on the needs of victims-/survivors (see, for example, UN 2019). However, needs also have relational dimensions. Lamija's sense of being alone, and the disconnections that had resulted from her war experiences, had made her reach out and seek reconnection with vulnerable people in her community whom she felt she could help, and they too had helped her in ways that they would never know. This example illuminates an important relationship between connectivity and an 'ethic of care' that 'provides opportunities for people to analyze their own care activities as well as to understand the broader place of caring in human life' (Tronto 1998, 19–20). That Lamija was building connections with others by developing mutually beneficial 'caring webs of relations' (Crossweller and Tschakert 2020), moreover, underscores that there is far more to resilience than broad systemic dynamics or neoliberal agendas.

Aida's story (Colombia)

A similar age to Lamija, Aida is an Indigenous woman who was born in 1956. She is a widow and has six children. Her total ARM score was 123, which put her in the top quartile. Like many of the Colombian interviewees, she was internally displaced. In 2016, she had set up her own association to help fellow women who had experienced CRSV and other forms of violence. Although she had received death threats, she drew energy from her work as a social leader. In her words,

> I'm very active – I wasn't always like that, but now I'm super active. And well, I try to get the people around me to have that same self-control and keep busy and believe in themselves; that they do their thing – whatever: if you're a craftsperson, make crafts; if you sew, start dressmaking. I try to get them the space where they can relax and have their therapy.

Right from the outset, Aida conveyed a strong sense of being connected to everything around her. When asked what title she would give her life story, she answered 'My new dawn', and she evoked natural imagery ('light', 'horizon', 'roots', 'water', 'river',

'chrysalis', 'butterfly') throughout the interview. Nature and her relationship with it were one of the supportive and sustaining connectivities in her life. Maintaining that support comes from 'all the little bits of help you get every day', she reflected: 'It might be some little creature that keeps you company – hearing the sound of a bird singing in the morning. It's a little bit of companionship and it's the everyday things that keep you wanting to live each moment'.

Her supportive and sustaining connectivities also included the various forms of help that she had benefitted from, including from *Profamilia*[6] – one of the organizations involved in this study – and from the International Committee of the Red Cross. She spoke particularly about the psychological support that she had received from a university and from a women's network in Colombia, and the huge difference that this had made to her life. In her words, 'when you feel a friendly hand around you and you can count on their support, well, my goodness, it changes everything – 100 per cent. All that love enables you to believe in people again, trust people again'. She further explained that she felt valued – 'more than gold or silver' – when people asked for her point of view, wanted to know things about her and listened to her; 'After you speak to someone and express your pain to someone else and that person listens to you, then you begin to heal'.

Regarding family, Aida described the pressures of being the head of her household and having elderly parents who depended on her. What made her feel 'desperate' in this regard, she explained, is that because of her age (62 at the time of the interview), no one wanted to give her work. Indirectly, thus, she drew attention to broader structural violence in her environment that limited her access to resources in the sense of employment opportunities. This lends support to the argument that 'Women living in poverty in contexts threatened by complex crises are required each day to be resilient and withstand stresses and shocks which threaten the wellbeing – and sometimes the very lives – of themselves and their dependents' (Smyth and Sweetman 2015, 410). Such 'compulsory' resilience highlights and reflects important issues of power that are central to many critical analyses of resilience, including feminist critiques (see, e.g. Grasham et al. 2019; Jordan 2019; Sultana 2010). Aida also maintained, however, that being a woman, and having the responsibilities that she had, made her feel strong. In this regard, she commented on her own mother's strength and the impact of this. She recalled: 'My mum was a feisty woman, she had 14 children. Seeing how amazing my mother was, I think that rubbed off on me'.

Aida also expressed a strong sense of broken and ruptured connectivities. She had lost several members of her family during the armed conflict in Colombia; her husband and brothers were 'disappeared'. She also described how her relationship with the opposite sex had changed due to the sexual violence she suffered. She had become disconnected from the sensual side of herself; 'I could watch a sexy film, but it would be like when I was two or three. It does nothing for me, it doesn't interest me. So, you see, all that died for me – affection'.

What particularly stood out from Aida's interview, however, is that she had invested significant efforts in building new connectivities. As previously noted, she had set up her own local association three years earlier; and when asked what she does to secure the resources that she needs, she focused on what she does to help the 130 women in her association. In addition to the connections that she had built with the women, her efforts to help them had also generated new connectivities ('all this endears you to

people'). Moreover, her association offered both her and the women in it new supportive and sustaining connectivities. Highlighting this, she described how the association worked; 'we help each other out and the ones in most need – because they have lots of children or whatever – they get most. It is on rotation, though, so if you got something one week, the next week it's not your turn – somebody else gets it and so on'. As in Lamija's story, these examples underline that connectivity is about much more than being connected to someone or something. It is also about relationships of caring and reciprocity, illustrating the idea that people 'grow through and toward connection' (Jordan 2008: 2).

Joseph's story (Uganda)

Joseph is an Acholi man and a subsistence farmer. He was born in 1967 and is married with seven children. His ARM score (117) was lower than Aida's, but it still put him in the top quartile. He was publicly raped by government soldiers during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in northern Uganda. He could not remember the exact year when it happened, but he explained: 'We were forced into a pit. Both the women and men were then abused'.

Like many of the Ugandan interviewees, Joseph often gave brief answers that did not offer the same richness and detail as Lamija and Aida's interviews. It was clear, however, that he had various supportive and sustaining connectivities in his life. He particularly spoke about his wife. She helped him with cultivating the land and he noted that she had stood by him despite everything that he had gone through. He also referred to his 'brothers' (paternal male relatives) on whom he could depend. These men 'propped his back' (supported him) in various practical ways; 'Sometimes they give me some money. They will say: "here, go and help yourself with it. Another day, you will come and do something for me"'. They had particularly helped him after his actual brothers were killed during the war. He was still grieving their loss, and 'that is what prompted some of my brothers [male relatives] to come and strengthen my heart'. He spoke more broadly about support from relatives in the form of 'counselling' and how this had helped him; 'some of my relatives kept advising me that I should not think about what happened in the past. I should live my life freely. That is how they kept propping my back, by giving me advice'. What thus emerged strongly from Joseph's interview was the significance of extended family (Kiconco and Nthakomwa 2018, 66), which, for him, was an important cultural resource.

Joseph's supportive and sustaining connectivities, however, stretched beyond his family and extended family. As a subsistence farmer, he talked about other connectivities that 'propped his back' and sustained him in a financial sense, by helping him to earn a living and to feed his family. In this regard, he mentioned goats, hens and cassava. These resources also enabled him to do what was expected of him as an Acholi man – 'Men should live life as a good cultivator of fields' – and the fact that his efforts were reaping benefits was helping him to deal with the past. He had bought a cow and maintained that his life was now changing 'because the old thoughts are not in my head anymore'.

Broken and ruptured connectivities were also a prominent theme in Joseph's story. The aforementioned death of his brothers was a loss that had affected him not only

emotionally ('This is the problem that is bleeding my heart'), but also practically and financially. In addition to his own children – four of whom were still at home – he was also now responsible for his brothers' four children. Hence, for Joseph, a major worry was finding the money to pay the children's school fees; 'That is the problem that I now find pressing me hard [disturbing me]'. Nevertheless, to date he had managed to keep the children in school, burning charcoal and using the money he made from it to negotiate with the teachers a late payment of fees.

Some of his relationships and connectivities had also ruptured due to the sexual violence he suffered. Like many of the Ugandan interviewees, for example, he spoke about stigmatization from certain members of the community. The verbal abuse made his 'heart bleed', although it did not happen as frequently as it once did (he spoke about sensitization efforts by local NGOs). However, reinforcing the idea of ruptured connectivity, Joseph's way of dealing with hurtful comments had been to distance himself; 'I must leave and go away from them [the people abusing him], to go and sit by myself'.

Early in the interview, Joseph maintained that he had not suffered any sexual violence. He subsequently admitted that he had, stressing that it was something that, as a man, he found very difficult to speak about. According to Schulz (2018b, 1110), 'In northern Uganda's patriarchal societal context – characterized by heteronormative and vastly unequal hierarchical gender relations and expectations as well as by hegemonic ideals of masculinity – sexual violence against men implies immediate effects on survivors' gender identities'. What Joseph implicitly expressed was a sense of ruptured masculinity; he articulated the firm belief – informed by his cultural environment – that 'men must not be "sat" with [a euphemism for having sex]'. Using the term *tek-gungu* (literally 'bending is hard'; Schulz 2021, 56), he also repeatedly stressed that the sexual violence 'placed my life in a tight spot'. The use of the word 'tight' conveys the idea of restricted or limited movement – contrary to the idea of functional connectivity. Illustrating the interaction of different connectivities, however, there was also a strong sense that the supportive and sustaining connectivities in his life had helped him to start 'moving' again; and this is significant because masculinities are at least partly constituted through body movements – and how those movements are performed (Joy and Larsson, 2019).

Relatedly, Joseph – like Lamija and Aida – was building new connectivities in his life. He frequently used the word *roco*, meaning renewal, in this regard. Just as there are important linkages between connectivity and renewal in the field of ecology (see, e.g. Lesack and Marsh, 2010), for Joseph renewal effectively meant disconnecting, as much as possible, from the painful memories of his past and re-connecting with life. '[I]f you say you won't renew it [life] by yourself', he stressed, 'nobody else will come to renew it'. Notwithstanding the pressures of looking after his deceased brothers' children as well as his own, caring responsibilities and relationships – which are frequently gendered female within existing scholarship (see, e.g. Chopra and Sweet, 2014) – were for him an additional reason to re-connect with life and to get the most out of it. In his words, 'I should renew my life so that the children can have light bodies [be healthy] and have a good life in the future'.

Comparing connectivities

This article's framework offers a novel way of thinking about resilience. It accentuates not just the connectivities between individuals and different parts of their social ecologies, but also the stories of those fluid and dynamic connectivities as regards, inter alia, how they change and what happens to them. It also helps to explain the fact that Lamija, Aida and Joseph had very different ARM scores. Returning to the ecological roots of the framework, in Lamija's case there was limited structural connectivity (and hence limited functional connectivity) in the sense of what her social ecology offered her. Her brother and sister-in-law were her only remaining family, she lived in an economically depressed part of BiH and she had been officially unemployed for 14 years. Moreover, the war had altered the demographics of her environment, meaning that some of her pre-war friends were now living elsewhere – just one of the many examples of broken and ruptured connectivities (an illustration of fragmentation) in her story. At the same time, her war experiences and their emotional legacies had affected how she 'moved' within her environment and how she used the limited resources within her social ecology. For many years, she had engaged very little with the world around her.

However, her interactions with her social ecology were starting to change and she was beginning to 'move' differently, through the new connectivities that she was building – thus highlighting dynamic connectivity – and the caring responsibilities that she had taken on. In this sense, she had actively found a way to make her social ecology support her needs and help her emotionally to deal with life's challenges. In her words, 'When you go to a woman, and she does not know whose house she is sleeping in, and today she makes you cry and makes you smile five times, this is it. This has given me strength'.

In Aida's story, in contrast, there were many supportive and sustaining connectivities, creating a solid structural connectivity in her life. This enabled a functional connectivity that Aida was using to the full. While there was also fragmentation in her story, in the sense of broken and ruptured connectivities, what emerged most strongly from her interview was the importance of getting on with life and doing something with it. In her words, 'Life isn't about material things; life is what you make of it and how you move on with things – day to day'. She was also determined in this regard to help the women in her association. She reflected: 'They need something to keep them busy, so that they are moving on with their lives, so they don't stay shut in their houses thinking about the pain they have to put up with'. Energized by her work, Aida's interview relayed a strong sense of dynamic connectivity. She herself had changed ('I think of myself as a different woman now – more spiritual, full of abilities, fuller with all sorts of things') and she was seeking, through her interaction with the world around her, to bring about transformative change.

Like Aida, Joseph also had various supportive and sustaining connectivities in his life. These formed a structural connectivity that he was functionally using in his determination to move his life beyond everything that had happened – including the fragmentation caused by the loss of his brothers – for the sake of his family and his brothers' children. As an Acholi man, moreover, his culture and traditions created an additional structure that further shaped his movements and use of the resources around him. Joseph did not

exude the energy and enthusiasm that Aida did, and his connectivities did not have the same dynamic quality. More implicitly, however, he conveyed a sense of dynamic connectivity through his repeated emphasis on his desire to actively 'renew' his life – and, thus, to keep on 'moving'. It was also significant that he held a leadership role in his community, as a mobilizer for his clan. This meant that he needed to communicate with members of the community and keep them informed of relevant news and developments. Through this role, he was further building new connectivities, actively addressing some of the ruptured connectivities caused by stigma and keeping himself attuned to new opportunities that could additionally help him to renew his life. In his words, being a clan mobilizer 'enables me to know what is happening in the community […] It helps me to hear about other issues'.

If Lamija, Aida and Joseph, in different ways, told stories about the connectivities between themselves and their social ecologies, common to all three interviews were ideas of care. Laursen and Birmingham (2003, 240) point out that 'the resiliency literature has shown that a significant relationship with a caring adult is the most important factor in a youth's success' (see also Theron and Engelbrecht 2012). More broadly, and not just in cases of children and youth, relationships of care – both received and given – and resilience are significantly interwoven. That some of the connectivities explored in this article are themselves fundamentally about care between individuals and parts of their social ecologies has wider implications, in turn – as the conclusion will discuss – for policies aimed at supporting victims-/survivors of CRSV.

Conclusion and the significance of connectivity for thinking about CRSV

In his book *The Ecological Thought*, Morton (2010, 7) outlines his theorization of ecology as a broad concept that 'shows us that all beings are connected'. For him, thus, the ecological thought occurs not only in the mind but in life; it is 'a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings – animal, vegetable, or mineral' (Morton 2010, 7). He frames the inter-connections that are central to his understanding of ecological thinking using the concept of 'the mesh'. In his words, 'The ecological thought imagines interconnectedness, which I call the mesh. Who or what is interconnected with what or with whom? The mesh of interconnected things is vast, perhaps immeasurably so' (Morton 2010, 15).

This article, similarly, has underscored interconnectedness (and ruptured interconnectedness) through its emphasis on connectivity. Some of the many criticisms of resilience, and especially of SES, take particular issue with the idea that there are strong synergies between social and ecological systems in terms of how they behave and react to disturbance. While this research does not respond directly to such criticisms, it has used an ecology-based approach to connectivity precisely to demonstrate that the relevance of ecology for resilience extends beyond SES. It has specifically developed what it calls a connectivity approach to resilience as the story of multiple and dynamic connectivities between individuals and their social ecologies.

The article's approach to resilience is not about putting the onus on individuals – and specifically on victims-/survivors of CRSV – to deal with whatever life throws at them 'without dedicated state support or intervention' (Coaffee 2013, 248), and nor is it about leaving them 'to get ready for a brighter future that never arrives' (Bargués-

Pedreny and Martín de Almagro 2020, 359). This research has argued that thinking about resilience through connectivity provides the starting point for a more relational approach to dealing with CRSV. Significant in this regard is Zalewski's (2019, 616) observation that 'relationality, as a concept, a practice or a methodological tool, might have the potential to offer scholarly assistance to better analyse matters of global political importance'.

In discussing Lamija's efforts to help elderly people in her community, Aida's work related to her association and Joseph's responsibilities towards his own and his late brothers' children, this article has emphasized the concept of care. As de la Bellacasa (2012, 198) underlines, 'Caring and relating thus share conceptual and ontological resonance … [T]o care about something, or for somebody, is inevitably to create relation' (see also McEwan and Goodman 2010, 103). As a relational concept, thus, care is intrinsically about connectivity. This linkage, in turn, provides important insights into potential ways of translating connectivity into practice – as an expression and operationalization of Morton's aforementioned 'ecological thought'. According to Phillips (2016, 472), 'Striving for new connectivities of care, responsibility and justice […] has to be extended to natural and social realms as they are bound in the same systems of oppression and cannot be addressed in an atomistic way'. In relation to CRSV, 'striving for new connectivities of care' means prioritizing not only individuals but also relationships (e.g. dealing with broken and damaged relationships, fostering relationships that promote wellbeing). If, as Desai and Smith (2018, 45) argue, we need to think about new ways of coexisting, we also need to think about new ways of supporting those who have suffered CRSV (and indeed any form of violence). This means extending caring practices not just to these individuals, but also to their social ecologies as a 'mesh' of interconnectedness within which resilience develops.

Some of the ideas in this article are developed and explored in greater depth in the author's forthcoming monograph *Resilience, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Transitional Justice: A Social-Ecological Framing*. The book will be published open access by Routledge in 2022.

Notes

1. In 2016, a court in Guatemala convicted two former members of the county's military of, inter alia, sexual violence and sexual slavery against Maya Q'eqchi' women during Guatemala's civil war in the 1990s (see Martin and SáCouto 2020, 244).
2. This article uses the terminology of victims-/survivors. Some of the women and men who participated in this research identified with the term 'victims', some identified with the term 'survivors' and some considered themselves both victims and survivors.
3. One of the study's limitations is that of the 449 total participants, only 27 were men. This gender imbalance reflects the challenges of establishing contact with male victims-/survivors, which, in turn, tells a broader story about 'the silencing surrounding sexual violence against men in hetero-patriarchal societal contexts' (Schulz 2018a, 584).
4. The eight themes are discussed and explored in the author's forthcoming monograph (Clark 2022b).
5. It is important to stress that this gendering can also be unfavourable to male victims-/survivors. As Schulz (2018a, 587) argues, 'Gender-sensitive support services for male survivors of sexual violence remain elusive, especially in societies affected by conflict'.

6. *Profamilia* is a non-profit organization that works on sexual and reproductive health and rights. It has clinics throughout Colombia.

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