14 Collective resilience

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A classic pitfall of transitional justice discourse and practice resides in creating a binary between active perpetrators and passive victims (Gready and Robins 2014; Shaw et al. 2010). Affected civilians are generally assumed to be powerless, helpless and subject to various forms of suffering, whereas the ways in which they socially organize to avoid or cope with violence are typically neglected. Accordingly, transitional justice measures are all too often limited to institutional mechanisms dominated by international elite networks of donors and professionals, who claim rights on behalf of the victims (Madlingozi 2010). The participation of affected civilians is usually limited: a small number of citizens are involved in transitional justice mechanisms through prescribed roles, such as witnesses and defendants. Consequently, those most affected by violations frequently have little or no opportunity to impact upon the goals of the transitional justice process or the nature of particular mechanisms (Gready and Robins 2014).

This account of civilians as passive victims, however, tends to overlook emergent forms of coordination, solidarity and collective agency within survivor communities and, consequently, the role they could play in a process of conflict transformation. A growing number of studies suggest that collective violence does not necessarily disrupt communities and that collective coping with the adversity of war may be much more common than traditionally assumed. For example, a recent meta-analysis (Bauer et al. 2016) of nearly 20 studies conducted in over 40 countries has found a strong, persistent pattern that exposure to war violence tends to *increase* social cooperation at the local level, including community participation and prosocial behaviour (for similar findings see also Arjona et al. 2016; Bellows and Miguel 2009; Fritz 1961/1996; Gáfaró et al. 2014; Gilligan et al. 2014; Nussio 2019; Vélez et al. 2016). Why this occurs, however, is still poorly understood.

In sum, this chapter makes the argument that the capacity for collective resilience of civilians in armed conflicts represents an important forgotten resource for conflict transformation. We suggest that a better understanding of the processes through which communities cooperate to face war, and its aftermath, will also open new ways of thinking about conflict transformation, and that concepts developed in recent social psychological research on

collective emergencies and disasters can inform our understanding of both types of processes.

A social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience

The overemphasis on passive victimhood and mental disorder as an outcome of conflict appears to echo a long tradition of thinking about collective behaviour in mass emergencies and disasters. Early theories of “panic” suggested that emergencies inevitably lead to psychological vulnerability and a breakdown of norms, with the crowd as the conduit for these pathological outcomes (see Quarantelli 2001). Yet one of the most frequently observed patterns of behaviour in emergencies and disasters is the very opposite of what “panic” theories would predict. The evidence of widespread supportive behaviours across a variety of types of emergency and disaster (e.g. Fritz and Williams 1957; Drury 2018; Grimm et al. 2014) contradicts the notion that individualistic flight and mindless contagion represent the default reactions, as “panic” theories suggest.

Existing social bonds – whether family ties or wider social capital networks – account for much of the evidence of supportive behaviours in emergencies and disasters (e.g. Aldrich and Meyer 2015; Feinberg and Johnson 2001; Mawson 2017). However, in many major incidents, there is evidence of widespread helping, cooperation and other forms of social coordination even among people with no prior connections (Clarke 2002). “Disaster community” and similar terms have been coined to characterize the emergent collective relationships of support and spontaneous cooperation commonly found immediately following an emergency (Kaniasty and Norris 1999).

The social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience (Drury 2012; Drury et al. 2019) attempts to explain this evidence of spontaneous social support and coordination among strangers in emergencies. It suggests that the sense of common fate people may experience in relation to a fire, bombing or other threat can lead them to see themselves as a single group. In gestalt terms, the figure-and-ground shifts from “*me in relation to other individuals*” to “*us in relation to the emergency*”. Such common fate created by the disaster setting forms the basis of an emergent social identity, shared with others in the same situation.

Extending the boundaries of identity from the personal self to a collective self (which might be defined as “those of us affected by the emergency”) means extending the boundaries of concern. Shared social identity motivates solidarity behaviours towards “us” in the form of support and cooperation. While the proposition that shared identity increases supportive behaviours towards ingroup members is well established (e.g. Gaertner and Dovidio 2012; Levine et al. 2005), the model described here applies this notion to events where there is time pressure and threat to both helper and helped. It also suggests that the shared social identity in question is one specific to, and

a function of, that threatening context. Evidence that shared social identity arises in emergencies and increases supportive behaviours to others affected by the emergency is provided, for example, in interviews and archival analysis of a range of emergencies and disasters, including the 7 July 2005 London bombings, the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, sinking ships, floods and earthquakes (Drury et al. 2009a, 2009b; Ntontis et al. 2018).

In addition to providing the motivation to support others in the group, shared social identity can lead people to *expect* support from others who share their group membership. Expecting support, in such contexts, has a number of consequences. First, it increases people's sense of efficacy or empowerment. Second, it facilitates joint action, as people are able to anticipate and to coordinate each other's actions. Third, it enables people to regulate each other's behaviour and to ensure the collective response is in line with common norms and values. These different pathways, and how they produce coordinated support activities (such as, for example, the collective self-regulation of looters), have been documented empirically in a survey conducted among a representative sample of over 1,000 people who survived the Maule earthquake in Chile in 2010 (Drury et al. 2016).

Expected support, and the actions that flow from that support, make it easier for crowd members to help each other to reach safety, and hence contribute to their well-being and survival. Thus, collective psychosocial resilience, in this context, refers to "the way a shared identity allows groups of survivors to express and expect solidarity and cohesion, and thereby to coordinate and draw upon collective sources of support" (Drury et al. 2019).

Most "disaster communities" decline over time. Those affected exhaust their material and psychosocial resources, and previous social divisions resurface (Kaniasty 2020; Kaniasty and Norris 1999). Floods are a good example, here. In these events, the secondary stressors (Lock et al. 2012) following the disaster may cause more distress than the disaster itself, as people try to cope with insurance, continued disruption and damage to their homes. As a consequence, the need for psychosocial support through shared social identity can peak just at a time when the contextual affordances that produced such an identity – that is, the common fate experienced during the flood itself – may be diminished.

Recent research has investigated the processes by which the benefits of emergent shared identity may be retained in the "recovery" phase of a flood. Interviews carried out some months after the floods in York, UK, in 2015–16 suggested that those affected used a range of criteria to define themselves as a group (e.g. not just common fate in relation to the flood but also shared experience of secondary stressors afterwards). They also actively posited a group identity in various ways to keep the new community alive. This included referring to a shared history in conversation as a reminder of the common past, as well as organizing meetings, Facebook groups and commemorations in which a version of the shared identity of the flood community was invoked and celebrated (Ntontis et al. 2020).

Some would argue that people affected by disaster eventually need to move on from the identities associated with the disaster and that, therefore, part of the recovery process is to let go of such identities rather than keep them alive. However, an important distinction should be made between different types of identities associated with disasters. If a “victim” identity in which “others can never understand our needs” prevails, the possibility of forming supportive relationships with external groups may become closed off. But survivors also develop “resilient” collective identities, which are defined broadly enough to enable the mobilization of external solidarity. As an example, the support groups associated with the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017 have successfully created alliances with others to help survivors, families and the local community to campaign for justice (Tekin and Drury 2020).

Collective psychosocial resilience in the context of political violence

Because war and other forms of political violence can be so destructive, most research and practice related to transitional justice has been guided by a focus on the negative psychological and social impact of trauma (Vollhardt 2012). But a growing number of studies suggest that exposure to collective violence does not automatically have a debilitating effect, and that individuals and communities can be remarkably resilient. For example, several studies suggest that most people directly affected by traumatic events do not develop psychiatric disorders (Barber and Doty 2013; Linley and Joseph 2004) or that exposure to collective violence can increase social cooperation, prosocial behaviour, egalitarian preferences, community cohesion and participation (Bauer et al. 2016; Blattman 2009).

But how does this happen? As pointed by Bauer and colleagues (2016, p. 22), “the research to date has done a far better job of establishing the effect of war violence on later cooperation than of explaining it”. Most available explanations tend to focus on social processes related to conflict dynamics. Some authors argue that experiencing violence collectively increases cohesion by reinforcing the conflict-defined identities (Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Rohner et al. 2013). Similarly, some authors draw on evolutionary theories of parochial altruism to argue that intergroup competition – and collective violence as its extreme form – favours prosociality towards ingroup members (Choi and Bowles 2007; Haidt 2012). Other explanations focus on more local, community dynamics and point to a “*collective coping mechanism* whereby members of communities that have few options to flee *band together* to cope with threats and trauma” (Gilligan et al. 2014, p. 616, emphasis added).

A more comprehensive explanation can be drawn from the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience exposed above (Drury 2012, 2018): the experience of common fate (shared exposure to collective violence) can foster shared social identity, which then serves as a basis for mutually supportive behaviour and coordinated action. Contrary to previous

explanations, the model does not presume that violence necessarily reinforces already established or conflict-defined identities; violence can also be conducive to the emergence of *new* social identities – a new “we” – and sometimes even of inclusive social identities beyond the conflict cleavage. Prima facie, wars differ from disasters in important ways. Yet, in many disasters, there is a clear intergroup context of historical disadvantage (Tekin and Drury submitted) or outright intergroup hostility (Drury et al. 2009). These contexts shape attributions of cause and blame, and they impact relations within the affected ingroup, where social divisions can be exacerbated as well as transcended (Kaniasty and Norris 1999). For these reasons, we suggest that the social identity model carries over from disasters to wars: it can help us to explain the conditions under which collective resilience arises in both types of calamities.

Political violence and the reinforcement of shared social identity

A number of studies have shown that experiencing collective violence can reinforce existing social identities that facilitate prosocial behaviour and coordinated action among ingroup members. For example, in the well-researched aftermath of the “9/11” terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, there was a strong increase in national patriotism (Skitka 2005) and the consequent supportive behaviours, such as increased volunteering and donating (Glynn et al. 2003; Penner et al. 2005). Robert Putnam, a long-time critic of an increasingly individualistic and atomistic society in the United States, has observed in an article entitled “A better society in a time of war”:

Since Sept. 11, we Americans have surprised ourselves in our solidarity. Roughly a quarter of all Americans, and more than a third of all New Yorkers, report giving blood in the aftermath of the attacks. Financial donations for the victims and their rescuers have reached almost \$1 billion. Attendance at places of worship has increased.

New York Times (2001)

The strengthening of shared social identities is also well documented in cases of internal intergroup conflicts, such as civil wars. Studies focusing on the communal level have shown that collective exposure to violence can reinforce social cohesion and solidarity (Bauer et al. 2016). In contrast to the assumption that civilians are passive victims of violence, which predominates in transitional justice discourse, recent studies suggest that organized communities can be successful even in *avoiding* or *limiting* violence. Oliver Kaplan (2017) explored cases from Colombia to show how unarmed civilians can influence armed actors and limit violence. His research highlights the role of social identity processes, particularly the role of community cohesion in reinforcing peaceful community norms and enabling collective organizing.

However, not all studies show that violence reinforces the established social identities; sometimes it has a detrimental impact on community or national cohesion (e.g. Hager et al. 2019; Kijewski and Freitag 2018; Barclay Child and Nikolova 2020; Dell and Querubin 2018; Vélez et al. 2016). According to the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience (Drury 2012; Drury et al. 2019), the emergence of shared social identity is predicated on the sense of common fate in relation to collective violence. In conflict dynamics, violence that is *indiscriminately* imposed on an entire community by an outgroup is particularly likely to reinforce the sense that “we are all in this together” and consequently solidify the shared identity (Drury and Reicher 2009). For example, in the cases of violent political repression in Tunisia and Egypt, Elizabeth Nugent (2020) showed how indiscriminate repression by the authoritarian regime created shared political identity, decreased polarization and increased cooperation among the members of opposition; by contrast, *targeted* repression fragmented the opposition and contributed to its failure to challenge authoritarian regimes. Krzysztof Krakowski (2020) found that, in Colombia, indiscriminate violence against local communities increased community cohesion by spurring individuals to band together, strengthening their shared communal identity. However, asymmetric guerrilla war characterized by *selective* violence against civilians reduced community cohesion by instilling fear and suspicion among community members. Fear of one’s neighbours can contribute to the establishment of a “law of silence” that erodes social bonds and decreases community cohesion (see Kaplan 2017).

Political violence and the foregrounding of inclusive identities

The reinforcement of conflict-induced identities and internal cohesion due to violence can at the same time enhance the cleavages *between* the conflict groups. Guided by the assumption that “violence begets violence”, some authors have argued that the conflict-induced reinforcement of intragroup bonding and cooperation comes at the cost of further outgroup derogation (Choi and Bowles 2007; Haidt 2012). For example, whereas studies on the 9/11 terrorist attack have shown, as previously described, an increase in national patriotism and prosocial behaviour towards compatriots, they have also shown that the violence fostered mobilization for the invasion of Iraq and widespread Islamophobia (Ross 2013). The troubling corollary is, therefore, that collective violence might enhance intragroup cooperation while simultaneously raising the risk of future social divisions and renewed intergroup conflict (Bauer et al. 2016).

However, a growing number of studies indicate that collective victimization does not necessarily lead to outgroup antagonism but can, on the contrary, foster prosocial behaviour beyond group boundaries. Studies in various conflict-affected societies, such as Liberia (Hartman and Morse 2020), Darfur (Hazlett 2020), Colombia (Tellez 2019), the North Caucasus (Bakke et al.

2009), the former Yugoslavia (Penic et al. 2017, 2018, 2020; Spini et al. 2019), as well as comparative studies conducted across multiple countries (Elcheroth 2006; Spini et al. 2008) show that collective exposure to violence can *enhance* support for peace, human rights or reconciliation with the “enemy” side. Some authors explain such findings in terms of individual psychological factors, such as the “post-traumatic growth” of war-affected individuals, who become more altruistic and socially engaged (see Bellows and Miguel 2009; Gilligan, Pasquale and Samii 2014), or by heightened awareness of the actual cost of war, which makes peace and reconciliation a more palatable option for directly affected individuals (see Bakke et al. 2009; Fair et al. 2018; Tellez 2019).

We suggest that the findings can be further explained by the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience (Drury 2012; Drury et al. 2019): when violence is collectively understood as shared across the conflict cleavage, it can foster the preservation or emergence of *inclusive social identities*, which are the basis for pro-peace behaviour. For example, studies show that inclusive social identities are at the core of rescue and solidarity behaviour in genocides (Monroe 2008; Reicher et al. 2006) and that inclusive identities among victims of violence enhance their support for reconciliation (see Chapter 12 in this volume). Inclusive identities may be new (e.g. inclusive victim groups) or rooted in existing social categories (e.g. inclusive local or national identities).

Particularly telling is a study on the emergence of an inclusive identity and resistance to violence in a context in which it would have been least expected: the trench warfare in the First World War. With strongly bonded “brothers in arms” in a persistent, violent and bloody conflict against the enemy guided by the official “kill or be killed” policy, trench warfare seemingly epitomizes the inherent link between intragroup cooperation and intergroup aggression. Yet Tony Ashworth (2000) showed systematic occurrences of “live and let live” truces, whereby enemies stopped fighting by agreement for a period of time, the best-known example being the Christmas truces in 1914. These truces occurred despite being explicitly forbidden by authority and, hence, were unofficial and illegal. The process of the emergence of truces described by Ashworth largely corresponds to the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience. Ashworth describes how the conditions of close proximity and the shared experience of war eroded abstract images of the enemy and fostered perception of similarities and common fate. This led to the emergence of “a consciousness of kind among antagonists” (p. 133) and “fellow-feelings” (p. 143), further strengthened through shared conversations, humour, reciprocal singing and intertrench gossip. The emergence of the perception of common fate and shared identity among trench soldiers was facilitated by the structural similarities in conditions on both sides, as powerfully voiced by one soldier:

When one is in the front line one cannot help having a fairly deep sympathy for the wretched fellow in the other front line across ‘no-man’s-

land'; one knows that he is going through just as many dangers and discomforts, and that he is simply carrying out the orders of some general whose dangers and discomforts are infinitely less, and the hatred that you both have towards these generals breeds a common sympathy that is irresistible.

(p. 141)

A growing number of studies further emphasize the importance of structural characteristics of violence – in particular, the degree to which victimization is shared across group boundaries – for the emergence of inclusive identities. These studies show that collective exposure to *symmetric* violence, which similarly affects members of opposing groups, can give rise to a perception of commonality of fate and shared grievances that challenge the “us versus them” framing of the conflict. By contrast, *asymmetric* violence, which disproportionately affects one of the groups, tends to freeze group boundaries, leave an enduring sense of the impossibility of togetherness and, thereby, fuel intergroup animosities further (Penic et al. 2017, 2018; Spini 2008; Spini, Morselli and Elcheroth 2019).

Other studies highlight the role of leaders and other influence agents in the mobilization of inclusive identities (Haslam et al. 2010). Jana Krause (2018) conducted a thick ethnographic analysis of two vulnerable communities – i.e. religiously mixed and socially excluded – that managed to *prevent* violence between religious groups in Nigeria and Indonesia. She showed that the key social process involved the active mobilization of inclusive identities across the conflict cleavage by local community leaders. This included the rejection of simplistic conflict narratives and one-sided blame, and the promotion of proactive “we-thinking” and inclusive local community identities (e.g. “us people of Dadin Kowa” as opposed to Muslim versus Christian identities). The inclusive community identity was a basis for the emergence of collective agency and social control, such as the establishment of informal institutions for conflict management, and the emergence of norms of repression of radical individuals who wanted to instigate fighting.

As these various studies show, violence does not necessarily beget violence, but it can foster support for peace and reconciliation. Within the scope of the Pluralistic Memories Project, researchers from Burundi, Sri Lanka and Palestine have collected some 200 testimonies among witnesses of collective violence. The testimonies show that stories about identity-based victimization tend to co-exist with stories that challenge the conflict-defined boundaries and the simple representation of “us versus them”, for example the experiences of help and support across frontlines in the midst of violence. Analyses of nationally representative surveys conducted in Sri Lanka or in the West Bank and Jerusalem show that such diverse conflict narratives are an important resource for conflict transformation: being able to know and freely communicate about diverse experiences that go beyond the simple “us versus them” narrative is linked to increased community attachment and perceived

efficacy (Penic and Elcheroth 2020), and to stronger support for the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth commissions, impartial prosecutions or reparations (Penic et al. submitted).

Yet despite existing as valuable resources in the stock of lived experiences, stories of inclusive resilience tend to remain invisible in public discourse. For what reason? We have seen that leadership matters in mobilizing inclusive identities, and the same observation applies to the mobilization of exclusive, antagonistic identities (Haslam et al. 2010). Intergroup conflicts thus typically involve an interpretative struggle over the delineation of the boundaries of common fate (Elcheroth and Reicher 2014; Herrera and Reicher 1998). As part of this struggle, influence agents may selectively promote or suppress stories of conflict experiences to give credence to their preferred narrative. Stories of solidarity across “enemy” lines, in particular, tend to be omitted by influential warmongering actors who emphasize more readily stories of ingroup victimization (e.g. Ramanathapillai 2006). And such motivated omissions are not limited to discourses of political and military leaders. In the case of the 1914 Christmas truce, for instance, newspapers in belligerent countries either minimized the extent of fraternization or – in the case of France – even censored the stories entirely (Weintraub 2001). In times of war, even in contemporary democracies, the mainstream media channels typically construct conflict-supportive narratives, about ingroup victimization and outgroup perpetration, while marginalizing or omitting contradictory information (Bar-Tal et al. 2014; Feldman et al. 2015; Happer and Philo 2013; Lewis 2004). Such politicized narratives are the main source of information about the conflict for many people living far from the front lines. Ironically, then, studies show that the greater the distance from the front lines, the lower the support for peace (Tellez 2019), transitional justice principles (Elcheroth and Spini 2014) or reconciliation (Bakke et al. 2009).

Political violence and the emergence of new identities

While collective violence can foster a sense of common fate along the boundaries of already existing, psychologically meaningful groups (e.g. one’s nation or local community), it can – through the same socio-psychological mechanism – produce new forms of social categories and actors, such as emergent survivor communities, for example (Drury and Reicher 2000; Drury, Cocking and Reicher 2009a, 2009b).

The power of events of collective violence to shape social identities has been shown by Bady (2020), who examined how war experiences related to social identities among a representative sample of the Sri Lankan population eight years after the end of the civil war that tore the country for almost 30 years. Participants were asked to evaluate how 12 potential markers of identity (e.g. religion, language, economic situation) mattered to them and others in various ways, as a basis for social identification, social support, discrimination or perceived social norms, for example. Bady’s analysis not only

showed that participants' understanding of identity depended on the area's cumulative exposure to violence, but that it was shaped by specific historic war events. These findings suggest that localized experiences of war have sparked the emergence of shared conceptions of identity that remain tied to the triggering event over years (in one case, the impact was still discernible two and a half decades later).

To understand such longevity of identities that have arisen in specific circumstances, it is important to consider that subsequent (post-)war experiences may be as important as the triggering event itself in drawing the boundaries of common fate. Research among Syrian refugees in Jordan showed that the longer refugees had been in exile, the more secondary stressors (e.g. being unemployed) predicted identification with other refugees through a sense of common fate (Alfadhli et al. 2019: 5–11). In line with the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience (Drury 2012; Drury et al. 2019), identification with other refugees predicted providing as well as expecting support from other refugees, the latter in turn predicting a sense of collective efficacy (among Syrian refugees in both Turkey and Jordan; Alfadhli et al. 2019).

Ethnographic observations and interviews with Syrian refugees in Jordan further show that external actors and institutions create the context that defines which shared identity is relevant and which forms of resilience are possible. In order to access basic humanitarian aid, institutional mechanisms categorize and treat refugees as a group, and hence help to define the boundaries of mutual support by reinforcing a sense of shared identity among them (Alfadhli and Drury 2018). The refugee identity is also a basis of stigma and discrimination from the locals, which further reinforces a sense of common fate and identity (Alfadhli and Drury 2018).

The so-called Northern Muslims in Sri Lanka constitute another instructive case discussed in detail by Surenthiraraj (2020; see also Chapter 6 in this volume). It illustrates how a resilient community can emerge out of a war experience, but also shows that the "victim" image entailed in transitional justice and humanitarian mechanisms can, ironically, constrain possibilities of resilience. In the midst of a civil war raging between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan armed forces, the LTTE forcibly evicted the entire Muslim population from the five Northern Province districts of the island under its control. The expelled relocated mostly among Muslim communities in other parts of the country, guided by expectations of solidarity based on shared Muslim identity (Brun 2010; Surenthiraraj and de Mel 2019). And, indeed, testimonies from the displaced typically emphasize how host communities initially assisted them in many ways, such as offering them shelter in their homes, land and schools, and providing them with food and clothes (Brun 2010; Citizens' Commission 2012; Surenthiraraj and de Mel 2019). The label "Northern Muslim" gradually came to denote the new community created by the common experience of expulsion, both for the evicted themselves and for other Sri Lankans (Thiranagama 2011, 2013).

As the displacement – first believed to be temporary – persisted, a number of circumstances fostered tensions between guest and host communities. As the Northern Muslims proved resilient in terms of educational and economic advancement as well as in terms of political activism, some members of the host communities came to perceive them as threatening competitors for limited resources who benefited from unfair advantages due to their displaced status (Brun 2010; Citizens' Commission 2012; Haniffa 2015). When return became possible with the ending of the war, state and humanitarian agencies considered that assistance for the Northern Muslims should have a low priority compared to that for those displaced during the last stages of the war. This illustrates an ironic consequence of humanitarian and transitional justice discourse that evaluates victimhood in terms of “the greatest need” (Haniffa 2015): their very resilience in facing the challenges of displacement eventually complicated the implementation of the Northern Muslims' rights as well as their relations with the host communities where they have lived in displacement. As a result, three decades after their eviction, many Northern Muslims have to prove their resilience once more in managing life between two places.

As the case of the Northern Muslims shows, the resilience of war-affected communities should not imply negating the responsibility of their state, or of the international community, to protect and support them. The discourse of “resilience” has sometimes been used as a cover by those in power to avoid their responsibility of looking after the most vulnerable. For example, Juliet Gardiner (2010) explains how the British government used the slogan “Britain can take it” as a propaganda tool when many people in London were being killed and suffered during the Blitz air raids of the Second World War. Civilians' capacity to prevent and cope with collective violence cannot replace adequate external protection, but should rather be acknowledged as a crucial first step in planning protection and prevention. Models of resilience need to specify and be explicit that the “strengths” of survivor groups and others, in the long term, often depend on the role of the authorities in *scaffolding* their agency – through provision of appropriate information and resources (Drury et al. 2019).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reviewed multiple studies from various conflict-affected societies that empirically show that civilians in armed conflicts are not just passive victims, but can be remarkably resilient. These studies point to the social and collective nature of resilience: whereas individuals may have limited capacity to face collective violence alone, when they band together they can develop social resources to jointly cope with hardship but also to confront the divisive logic of violence itself. We have applied the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience to explain this process: under certain circumstances, collective violence can foster a sense of common fate

and the emergence of shared social identity, which then serves as a basis for solidarity and collective agency. Going beyond the predominant focus on the conflict-defined identities in research on intergroup conflicts, the studies we have reviewed show that violence can reinforce various existing social identities (e.g. local community identity), but also foster the emergence of new social identities, and sometimes even inclusive identities beyond the conflict cleavage.

Whereas collective resilience seems to be ubiquitous in conflict settings, it remains a forgotten resource for conflict transformation in transitional justice discourse and practice, which tend to focus on the victimhood of affected civilians. Yet there are concrete dangers of such misplaced focus. Whenever transitional justice silences experiences of collective resilience, it is at risk of feeding into history-writing that depicts communities as helpless, disoriented or otherwise dependent on their state or on the international community to guide, contain and protect them. This can be actively disempowering for the affected communities, leaving them with little or no agency in challenging power relations. Moreover, the focus on victimhood as a dominant form of identity politics in post-conflict settings can foster a climate of competitive victimhood claims that deny victim status to the “other”, thereby perpetuating conflict-defined divisions. It follows that when transitional justice practice makes visible how communities have built social resources to jointly cope with hardship or confront the divisive logic of violence, it conveys inspiring experiences of collective empowerment. However, the recognition of community resilience does not absolve the state or international actors from the responsibility of providing adequate civilian protection. Instead, it should be a starting point for designing effective protection together with the directly concerned communities, drawing upon their experiences and capacities.

For example, stories of collective resilience can be an important source for social learning that can empower communities when faced with future risks of violence. Moreover, stories about communities that have stood together against the divisions can serve as symbols of hope, demonstrating that living together and jointly working for reconciliation are valuable and realistic objectives shared across conflict lines (see Krause 2018). The widespread dissemination of such stories through transitional justice practice could strengthen cooperative norms and the legitimacy of pro-peace leadership, which are vital for the establishment of sustainable peace.

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