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# National resilience in multinational societies

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**Abstract.** Resilience at the level of any system reflects its capacity to manage successfully unexpected pressures without losing its structure and stability. The most generic level of resilience – national resilience – is closely related with shared vision and values in society at the level of the nation. It refers to the ability to maintain national social fabric and cohesion when confronted by threats. During massive transitions, the established boundaries of nation-states and the definition and nature of citizenship are challenged. Risks related to diverse ethnic and religious identities may not be apparent before crises arise. In expanded societies, societal fragmentation poses a threat to national security, highlighting the importance of strategic nation-building and national resilience. Nation-building is influenced by trust and practice of communication between citizens, the state and its sub-communities. In order to mitigate security risks and enhance the capacity of multinational societies to cope with crisis, there is a vital need to develop a conceptual understanding and screening methodology for national resilience.

**Keywords.** National resilience, national identity, multinational society, ethnic and cultural diversity

## Introduction

Migration, driven more often by vital need than free choice, transforms human communities in a fundamental way. The nature of society can shift within a relatively short period from national to international, from cultural to multicultural, from monolingual to multilingual. Such profound changes are not always well-received or readily accepted by local residents. In multinational societies, the politically encouraged practice of multiculturalism can be perceived by indigenous population as a threat to cultural self-definition and social welfare. Despite the prevalence of the rhetoric of multiculturalism in public discourse, cultural diversity may not be willingly accepted and tolerated as a result. Newcomers face a society that (at least ostensibly) values the expression and preservation of the domicile ethnic identity [1] and are likely to create sub-communities of shared fate, cultural beliefs and customs. The aim of this chapter is to illuminate an important issue of national resilience in multinational societies from the perspective of national security. The chapter covers three interrelated themes with which multinational societies need to contend: (1) national resilience, (2) national identity and (3) nation-building. The section of national resilience refers to conceptual shortcomings pointing to an urgent need for scientific attention. At the level of national resilience, citizens' identification with national values and shared understanding about societal strivings are salient. In the second section, complex dilemmas related to identity formation and dual-nationality are addressed. Finally, the importance and reciprocal nature of nation-building processes in multinational societies is emphasised. A comprehensive understanding needs to be developed about

behavioural antecedents and interactional relations between the individual and the society in order to promote the formation of national identity and increase national resilience.

There are significant variations in what people consider morally and emotionally significant and how they define themselves and others but also in what they believe to be the essence of society and nation. Research reveal that diverse set of immigrant groups' face challenges to residential incorporation in the new areas of settlement leading to heightened levels of immigrant segregation observed in new destinations [2]. Finding reflects that, in order to gain a feeling of belonging and safety, people tend to form close communities with fellow migrants who share their values and beliefs. Settling in communities, groups find ways to protect and propagate that which is valued and central for their survival [3]. In multinational societies those communities can be formed based on perceived similarity, ethnic or cultural background. As result, value-systems present within one society may differ significantly among sub-communities. Related to shared identity those sub-communities can be very cohesive; however, such cohesiveness is not necessarily generalizable to the level of society. In fact, confronting values and visions between sub-communities may diminish the overall cohesive capability of a nation, as group identification appears to be a potent enough resource to lead its members to assert their group identity in case of perceived threat [4]. Based on the well-known phenomenon of social categorization between "us" and "them"[5] we may assume that clustering into cohesive "us" groups implies the presence of "them" groups that are not so positively perceived. When in multinational societies "us and them" groups emerge based on ethnic and cultural backgrounds, social unrest and tension may occur at the level of nation. In case of conflicts, polarization can quickly escalate to overt confrontation or terrorist acts [6].

## **1. National resilience**

The issue of national resilience in multinational societies is complex in many ways. Unfortunately, a collection of resilient individuals does not guarantee a resilient community [7]; similarly, a set of resilient communities does not necessarily comprise a resilient nation. In addition to the conceptual ambiguity, this topic is also politically driven and can appear to be sensitive as it refers to responsibilities of political leaders and state authorities in conflict hotspots around the world.

There is a fast-growing body of academic literature referring in one way or another to the phenomenon called resilience. The concept has appeared to be attractive for different fields, and is used within those fields at different levels. A search for relevant Subject Terms in a scientific database (EBSCO) reveals 3462 hits about "resilience"<sup>1</sup> from 1972 to 2014. The meaning behind the term, however, is profoundly different, ranging from mechanics [8] to socio-ecology [9], and from clinics [10][11] to national policy [12] [13]. Definitions provided become vaguer horizontally (from exact to social sciences [7]) and vertically (from person to nation [14]). The most criticized [15] and the least elaborated [14] is the concept of resilience at the level of large human societies or nations, especially from perspective of practice [16]. Defining and

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<sup>1</sup> This search was conducted on 22.02.14.

measuring resilience becomes increasingly difficult with regard to amorphous systems without clear structures or definable borders. The nation, especially in the globalized world, is one of these ever-changing phenomena; accordingly, national resilience is certainly a challenge to define and measure. However, it seems that beyond the various definitions there is tendency to agree that national resilience means society's sustainability and strength in several diverse realms including component like patriotism, optimism, social integration, and trust in political and public institutions [17].

A comprehensive framework for multi-layered social resilience is proposed, emphasizing interactional relationship between enabling factors and capacities at different levels of society. Two aspects are relevant to highlight the resilience at the nation level: (1) resilience is a process and depends on the threat we examine; and (2) some groups can be privileged by international, national and local efforts [16]. Even within the same society, all groups are not necessarily exposed to similar threats and support; by experience, they develop different abilities to cope. Thus, in the social world the relation is interactional, and resilience has as much to do with shaping the challenge faced as responding to it [18]. In trying to link individual resilience with that of a community or nation, it might be useful to look for frameworks linking resilience with the capacity of systems to absorb disturbance while still being able to continue functioning [19]. The Resilience Alliance<sup>2</sup> has developed a wide body of knowledge about 'ecosystem resilience', encompassing aspects of sustainability, adaptability and transformability. The group defines ecosystem resilience as the *capacity to tolerate disturbance without collapsing into a qualitatively different state that is controlled by a different set of processes*<sup>3</sup>. Resilience as applied to ecosystems has three defining characteristics which can be applicable to system of communities at the level of a nation:

- The amount of change the system can undergo and still retain the same controls on function and structure
- The degree to which the system is capable of self-organization
- The ability to build and increase the capacity for learning and adaptation.

A survey of the literature regarding the various level of resilience indicates that individual resilience has received the most, and national resilience the least, research attention to date (for an exhaustive review, see Kimhi, in this volume). Compared with individual or community resilience there is limited knowledge available regarding national resilience; we have just a few studies to rely on. This status, however, is likely to change in the near future, as one function of community and nation level resilience is to provide to its members the feeling of security, sense of belonging, and social identity [20] which is a political cornerstone of the nation and of national security.

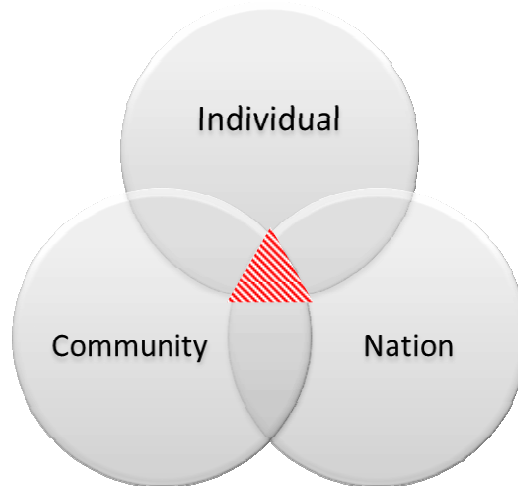
Weak but significant correlations found between individual, community and national resiliencies [20] reveal variations in their content but indicate also systematic overlaps. Heuristic model of resilience levels and relations is provided (Figure 1) to model conceptual challenges in resilience between personal attributes (individual level), cultural factors (community level) and citizenship in political systems (nation level). To fuel further research, potentially conjunctive mechanisms are proposed. Ultimate

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<sup>2</sup> A research organization comprised of scientists and practitioners from many disciplines who collaborate to explore the dynamics of social-ecological systems

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved 09.02.2014 <http://www.resalliance.org/index.php/resilience>

interest lies in the overlap of all the three levels. It is for future research to answer whether and what overlap exists between the individual, community and nation levels of resilience. Latter two levels (community and national) are shown to collapse into a single construct and called public resilience in previous research [20].



**Figure 1.** Heuristic model of resilience levels and relations for further research

Measuring resilience, two important considerations are to be mentioned. The first is related to where we are taking our measures. Typically, a community is considered to be an entity that has geographic boundaries and shared fate [7]. However, geographic boundaries do not necessarily mean shared fate or narratives for people or groups inhabiting the place. This very aspect may be, in fact, the root for regional tension or conflict. Differences in the type of society or community under assessment make it difficult to generalize current empirical findings to other types of communities [17]. We may end up with completely different conclusions about relations between individual-community-national resilience if a small and cohesive rural society or a large and anonymous urban city is defined as community in a particular research project. Another issue is related with *what* we are measuring, distinguishing between the processes of resilience building and the manifestation of resilience after some critical event occurs [16]. Especially at the level of the nation, we need to determine whether our interest lies in resilience or in the potential (predictors) of resilience [20]. A low level of resilience associates with vulnerability. Considering both social and ecological systems to be inherently dynamic, then levels of vulnerability will increase in proportion to reduced levels of resilience, reducing options for coping with sudden and unexpected change [21]. Expanding the scale of resilience from single individuals to multinational societies, we need to be aware that our object of interest becomes an increasingly complex system of interactions among different actors and environments. The scope of potentially intervening factors expands from personality attributes to cultural aspects and trust in political leadership, patriotism, optimism, social integration, as well as other potential component of national resilience waiting to be studied. At the level of the nation, the situation of society becomes very complex since

we have to face two ill-defined variables in one equation: we do not know either what constitutes national resilience or how to define the nation in the context of globalization and multinational societies.

## **2. National identity**

Cultural diversity becomes a challenge if there is no willingness to integrate with other cultures. People, feeling that their accustomed social fabric is at risk may emotionally hold on to the things that they believe are roots of their existence [22] rejecting any other alternative. Building a nation—that is, creating a jointly accepted narrative—in societies where multicultural diversity is increasing may not run as smoothly as political leaders might like. Political rhetoric in public discourse is not enough to reach the aim. Even in historically multi-ethnic countries, the discourse of nation building and integration of ethnic groups is blamed as too often superficial, with the important aspects of its process ignored [23]. However, the process of identity formation at the level of the nation is interactional, referring to potential for conflict resolution and reconciliation. Intractable conflicts trigger changes in national identity, but the conflicts also seem to be affected by changes in that identity [24]. The temptation to link identity and extremism with the internal (or personal) causes of extreme behaviours should not be overestimated; identity formation and the nature of extremists' organizations (or social causes) must be emphasized. From a collectively-held belief about what is best for the nation, means up to and including violence can be justified as worth the sacrifice [25].

Nations are entities conjured through symbols and rituals that do not naturally arise from a pre-existing foundation of shared blood, language or culture. Rather it builds on narratives of sharing and consequent illusions of collective identity [26]. Identity is an individual comprehension about oneself as a person, own unique traits and experiences, and social relations, and affiliation with groups. It determines personal world interpretations and provides grounds for how to evaluate the behaviour of oneself and of other people [27]. National identity and patriotic feelings toward one's country are part of individual attitudes and values. In the case of dual-nationality, this feeling of national identity can be ambivalent and even conflicted, finding expression in attitudes and behaviour toward the political system of the country. People with dual identity may endorse patriotism toward the country where they hold citizenship, while at the same time be committed to their own ethnic group. Balancing between ethno-cultural self-determination and common citizenship is complicated not only for ethnic minorities but also for members of the majority community.

Human identity is not something that is formed until a certain moment and then remains unchanged for life – but the process of identity development extends across one's lifespan. Life transitions demand that people take on new challenges and ultimately deal with how they make sense of themselves [28]. However, there are certain limits within which we can reshape identities that are already formed. If identity changes, it does so in response to both external stimuli and internal realignments - but even then, some elements of identity do not change [29]. Thus, identity is situational yet rooted in certain intrinsic characteristics limiting the extent of identity can be reshaped in social constructions.

Although people are usually members of multiple communities and derive their sense of community from different sources, they are typically centred in a primary community, that which provides values, norms, stories, myths, and a sense of historical continuity [3]. For individuals with multiple social identities, attitude toward societal changes are important factors contributing to their dominant identity. Considering the ethnic diversity of modern multinational societies, there is a risk for community to become fragmented, creating a favourable soil for confrontation among groups. Without proactive policies to promote common citizenship and national identity, mutual understanding and respect, new immigrants could quickly become an isolated underclass, standing in permanent opposition to the larger society. Multiculturalism may be perceived as risk in society when immigrants are seen predominantly as potential carriers of practices not understood by locals or as a social burden; since the mid-1990s, recognition of diversity has been replaced with ideas of nation building, common values and identity [30].

It is also known that a turbulent environment with a high degree of uncertainty prevents collective identity formation for societies and its members. Uncertainty has been identified as the most basic cause of anxiety in humans, increasing religious conviction and mutual derogation among religious (as well as non-religious) groups [31]. Ethnic identity is one of the most meaningful kinds of identity, which exists on the basis of opposition between "us" and "strangers," and in which separation from other groups is stressed [32]. It has been demonstrated that social uncertainty is related to the choice of social identity. Two steps are proposed for individuals with identity confusion to negotiate their intergroup attitude: in the first step, by choosing one identity, people develop a clearer distinction between the in-group and the out-group; in the next step, they likely develop a prototypical out-group attitude [33].

### **3. Nation-building in multinational communities**

In a globalized world, a nation cannot be defined geographically; instead, it is defined by people or communities who have been unified by causes and values. The quantity and quality of social cooperation at the national level is paramount, since the applicability of individual resilience is limited without taking factors of social life in account [34]. The key to success is to understand that relations between the society and the state are interactional in a sense of mutual reciprocity. At the national level, comprehensive nation-building projects have important consequences for multinational society, in terms of: what values citizens are willing to stand for, with whom they see themselves to be connected, and how they construct their individual and collective futures.

Risks related with societal segregation based on ethnic or cultural differences tend to remain latent until crises arise. An inward-looking approach to security has been proposed as resilient states would lead to regional resilience, which would constitute a foundation of national security [35]. National resilience, if neglected, constitutes an asymmetric threat to the nation's social fabric and political stability. Resilience thus involves planning, preventing, evading, mitigating, avoiding as well as coping with and reacting to challenging livelihood conditions. It refers to proactive capacities like capabilities to anticipate, change and search for new options [16] and as such reflects the nation's societal resilience. This capacity has to be continuously assessed,

particularly at times of unease or major changes to monitor the level of resilience in different communities and make predictions relevant to national security.

The trust and practice of communication between citizens, the state and its sub-communities become crucial when some type of threat or risk is present in society. Rapidly changing environments are always confusing, and the importance of trusted leadership should never be underestimated. To reduce ambiguity and promote resilience in the face of danger, a process of collective sense-making has been proposed [36]. Three sub-processes of organizing ambiguity are described as key characteristics of goal attainment within contexts of danger: (1) framing helps to differentiate the significant from the non-significant, providing participants a common focus; (2) awareness of interrelations fosters a common understanding among people of the level of risks and danger present; and (3) adjusting is related to constant awareness of the surrounding circumstances, reconsidering and reassessing as necessary.

For strategic nation building, it is important to acknowledge that people do not operate as autonomous elements in a vacuum. Expressed behaviour simultaneously is both influenced by events in an environment (in a social environment, in our case) and partly determines the nature of these events. Behaviour as it occurs always changes both of its interacting components – the individual and the environment. An individual, experiencing something new, may change behaviour toward society; meanwhile, society, as result of observed behavioural reactions, may adapt its norms, attitudes and applied control with regard to those behaviours.

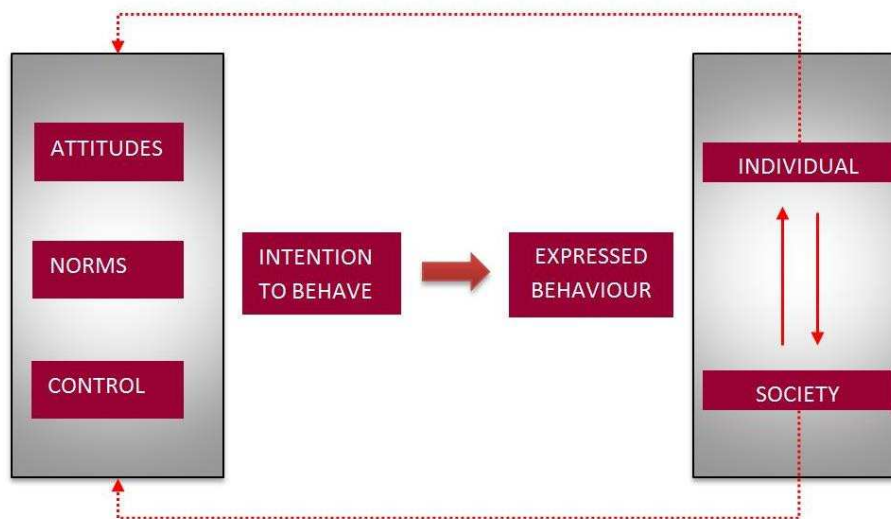
In assessing resilience in societies, it is important not only to register expressed behaviours but also to analyse active components of behavioural intention and to understand the phenomenon of reciprocal looping. Two theoretical standpoints are helpful to consider: the theory of reasoned action [37] [38] and the concept of reciprocal causation [39] [40] [41]. The theory of reasoned action states that individual behaviour is driven by behavioural intentions. Behavioural intention is a function of an individual's attitude towards the behaviour (positive or negative), the subjective norm surrounding the performance of the behaviour (acceptance by others), and the perceived behavioural control (options to behave). The concept of reciprocal causation postulates that the situation (environmental factors), person (perceptions, emotions, meanings) and behaviour (reactions of particular person in particular situation), all influence each other.

Combining concepts of reasoned action and reciprocal causation from the focus of an individual in societal environment, an interactional mechanism<sup>4</sup> of expressed behaviour is presented in Figure 2. The interaction between person and society does not have a reciprocal loop to behaviour directly but instead indirectly via influencing psychological components of behavioural intention. Reciprocal looping integrates environmental consequences and behavioural causation. Solid arrows refer to observable processes; dotted arrows to psychological processes that are not directly observable.

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<sup>4</sup> The model does not cover behaviours outside of awareness, addictive behaviours or strong emotions that can overpower reason





**Figure 2.** Reciprocal looping between components of behavioural intention and interactional mechanism behind expressed behaviour

Thus, behaviour of human actors does not appear in a vacuum, but is systematically influenced by actors set of attitudes-norms-beliefs in interaction with diverse environmental variables potentially influencing and simultaneously being influenced by this set.

Behavioural intention is an immediate antecedent of behaviour, and is based on attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. Political authorities have access to powerful means to influence necessary preconditions from the point of national resilience and nation-building, such as prevalent norms, attitudes and behavioural control in society. To guide people to behave in a specific way or convince them to change previously expressed behaviour, positive attitudes have to be elicited (the suggested behaviour is positively valued), norms have to be established (engaging in the behaviour is socially desirable), and feasibility to perform has to be warranted (the behaviour is doable). However, acceptance of guidance and suggestions depends both on how credible the communicator is perceived as well as on the conditions in which the communication is received. Reception and acceptance are more likely to occur when suggestions meet existing needs or desires of recipients. This highlights the importance of intercultural sensitivity what is needed for strategic nation building in multinational societies. Acknowledging active components of behavioural intention behind expressed behaviours is vital not only political but also society level.

#### 4. Conclusions

Just as communities are composed of individuals, nations are composed of communities. National resilience is closely related to trust in authorities, patriotism,

optimism and social integration. Excluded or unintegrated sub-communities may prove to be very resilient for themselves but not for the nation, thus in fact posing an additional threat to political stability in time of crisis. Nation building has become a topic of close interest in diverse and multinational societies as large-scale immigration has challenged long and closely held notions of national identity [42] which is part of national resilience. Whether people move for economic or political reasons, the issues of social positioning and identity arise inevitably and have to be solved. Issues related to national identity becomes more and more politicized as allied nations are supposed to stand for common values and rules.

From the perspective of planning theory and practice it is stated that rather than viewing resilience as bouncing back to an original state following an external “shock”, the term should be seen in terms of bouncing forward, reacting to crises by changing to a new state that is more sustainable in the current environment [43]. Ethnic diversity, if perceived in society to be related to occasions of radicalization, diversion and subversive recruitment, creates anxiety and unease. Securing society and being able to respond to both internal and external crisis disasters is one of the central elements of the functioning of any nation or alliance of nations. National and international security initiatives to increase national resilience are strongly encouraged. Two of the five objectives in the EU’s internal Security Strategy [44], for example, are directly related to the issue of national resilience as a capacity for successful adaptation in the face of disturbance, stress or adversity [24].

The definition and composition of the nation is changing, and so national resilience remains an everlasting dynamic process influenced by interaction between society and its sub-communities. In multinational societies different concerns interact with one another, with the potential to raise anxiety about ethnic and cultural differences [42]. In the context of national resilience in multinational societies those concerns are relevant and worth listing here for further conceptualization:

- Cultural: the sense of loss of control of the markers of one’s identity
- Social: the costs to the relative social “constancy” and familiarity in neighbourhoods
- Economic: the high perceived costs of integration and redistribution of public goods
- Political: the public’s loss of confidence in the ruling classes and supranational bodies
- Security: the fear that society’s newest members might contribute to social unrest.

Over the last few decades, social scientists have been exploring the concept of resilience in humans and human societies with keen interest. Up to now, research on different levels of resilience (and the relationships among them) has not been proportional, and lacks interdisciplinarity in most cases. Clinically orientated psychologists consider the individual the most exciting, while cultural psychologists are attracted by the system of communities. Political interests and security concerns will ideally push future research in security psychology towards further exploration of the least elaborated and most complicated level of resilience – national resilience. To begin with, a comprehensive conceptual framework of all three levels of resilience has to be developed and empirically validated across different nations and communities

worldwide, including variables of ethnic identity and religiosity as well as economic and political background.

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