

## Media, Mobility, and Resilience Among Diasporic Young People

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This article examines how diasporic youth resilience is acquired and strengthened through communication. Communication is central to diasporic youth resilience, but communication and media scholars are often absent from theorizing diasporic youth resilience. Using the material social practice of mobile photography, and through original research with young migrants and refugees in Australia, I critically develop a new theory of diasporic youth resilience to demonstrate how adaptability, rather than adaptation, is key to diasporic young people's empowered experiences of relationships, identities, access, social cohesion, and future life plans, as well as advance communication, diasporic youth media, and social resilience studies.

*Keywords: diasporic youth resilience, mobile photography, mobility, resilience communication, adaptability*

In this article, I examine how diasporic youth resilience is acquired and strengthened through communication. Communication is central to diasporic youth resilience. From arrival to host destinations to processes of settlement and citizenry, communication is crucial to imparting information and activating practices that enhance the social, political, economic, and cultural belonging of diasporic young people. Communication and media scholars are often absent from theorizing diasporic youth resilience. Using the material social practice of mobile photography, and through original research with young migrants and refugees in Australia, I critically develop a new theory of diasporic youth resilience.

This article makes three original contributions to extend communication, diasporic youth media, and social resilience studies. First, existing communication studies on resilience are dominant in the subfields of risk, environment, and crisis communication, which tend to focus on the short-term strategies of preparedness by framing resilience through its negative association with vulnerability (resilience-as-deficient; e.g., Brajawidagda, Reddick, & Chatfield, 2016; Fernandez & Shaw, 2016; Houston, Spialek, Cox, Greenwood, & First, 2015; Hyvärinen & Vos, 2015; Kyung, Ho, & Jung, 2017; Napawan, Simpson, & Snyder, 2017; Pond 2016; Reuter & Spielhofer, 2017; Stoffle & Minnis, 2008). The article extends this literature by drawing on the field of social-ecological-evolutionary studies to retheorize resilience from a longer-term perspective and as positive, generative, and transformative (resilience-as-dividend). Second, existing diasporic youth media studies draw on such materials as film, television, photos, and digital storytelling to

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predominantly focus on the political economy of media and media-as-text (e.g., Gifford & Wilding, 2013; Harris & Roose, 2014; Johns, 2014; Mansouri & Mikola, 2014). This article widens these media forms and approaches by focusing on mobile photography and emphasizing media-as-practice from the approach of material social technology. This approach focuses on how media function as a material object that conditions the everyday life of subjects.

Third, this article broadens social resilience studies, which have normatively framed ethnic minority young people as more at risk than the general peer population and have used this hegemonic understanding of vulnerability to develop protective indicators to strengthen diasporic youth resilience. Drawing on a new theory of resilience-as-dividend, which I describe below, and through case study results, I propose that adaptability, rather than adaptation, is key to diasporic young people's empowered experiences of relationships, identities, access, social cohesion, and future life plans. The new theory of resilience-as-dividend departs from the normative discourse of resilience that views resilience as a psychological human trait that "vulnerable" individuals need to possess to bounce back from stress and adversity. Resilience-as-dividend eschews this trait-oriented deficit model and borrows from social-ecological-evolutionary studies to view resilience as contextual, created through the long-term relationship between individuals and the environment, and focuses on the ability of individuals (on their own and collectively) to navigate the resources they need to do well when confronting adversity, as well as their capacity to negotiate for these resources to be provided in ways that are meaningful. This new orientation to resilience is crucial to address the current social policy context for diasporic young people so as to improve this cohort's life chances.

These three scholarly contributions address this special issue's theme on mobility in two ways. First, pivotal to the new theory of resilience-as-dividend is an understanding of the mobility of systems as open and multidirectional rather than bidirectional and in equilibrium. This understanding draws from the systems approach in engineering resilience studies that traditionally views resilience in a closed system and discusses its capacity in terms of the ability of the system to return to its original state. In social-ecological-evolutionary studies, however, resilience is theorized as an ongoing process of change as part of an open system that is also impacted by other social, political, environmental, and cultural forces. Instead of a closed systems approach to adaptation as integration, the multidirectional networks of resilience-as-dividend highlight adaptability as a resource-rich process of flexibility, learning, and transformation of individuals, groups, communities, and systems. Second, this article draws on the mobility of media and people to theorize diasporic youth mobility as the process of how mobility—characterized through adaptability—shapes the resilience of young migrants and refugees. Through the vernacularism of everyday mobile photography such as in mundane photos of going to school, shopping, eating, and commuting, this article reveals the politics of (geographical) migration, (life) transitions, and (governmental) incorporation as contradictory and embodied. On the one hand, diasporic youth mobilities are structured by the unequal distribution of economic, social, and cultural capitals; on the other hand, such mobilities are actively constructed by young people's self-performance of portable identities that allow them to acquire new skills to imagine a future adult mobility that resists precarity. Adaptability exposes the sensory, affective, and material impacts of diasporic youth adaptation, and furnishes as resources for young people to create fluid belongings that are multiscalar and multitemporal. This is especially pertinent to those arriving and growing up in an extremist Australia where an entrenched racist border protection regime has seen the long-term incarceration of

refugees and a spike in migrant hate crimes. A new critical framework of diasporic youth resilience will improve policy delivery and boost the well-being of these young people.

### **Resilience Communication: Theorizing Resilience-as-Dividend**

*Resilience* refers to the ability of a system—ecological, organizational, individuals, or material—to recover from shocks. In recent years, the impact of climate change has seen resilience studies burgeon to become what is now a “fledgling canon” (Bahadur & Thornton, 2015). This influence is also evident in communication studies, which also have seen the concept taken up within the subfields of risk, environmental, and crisis communication, an emergent area this article will term, for the descriptive purpose of nomenclature, *resilience communication studies*. Common to these writings is how better communication strategies can assist in strengthening community resilience. This focus is evident in extant scholarship across three thematic clusters. The first examines the use of new media technologies to facilitate communication during emergency management (Brajawidagda et al., 2016; Kyung et al., 2017; Pond, 2016; Reuter & Spielhofer, 2017). The second highlights barriers to communication drawing on approaches such as the two-communities theory or strategic public relations (Houston et al., 2015; Stoffle & Minnis, 2008). The third applies action research to engage community stakeholders by focusing on the media training of community groups (Fernandez & Shaw, 2016; Hyvärinen & Vos, 2015; Napawan et al., 2017). Although these scholars have productively engaged the transformative capacities of nonhierarchical information channels, the creative capacities of digital storytelling by migrant youths to empower marginal population groups, and the learning capacities of communication ecologies to improve community resources, most of them have not critically interrogated the concept of resilience. Most take the concept at its basic level of meaning such as promoting the trait-oriented discourse of vulnerability and adopting its hegemonic discourse of preparedness, which negatively associates resilience with vulnerability. This discourse has genealogies in engineering resilience and social resilience studies.

*Engineering resilience* refers to the property of the system to retain its original form after being subjected to stress, and the focus is on the amount of time it takes to return to equilibrium following a disturbance (Holling, 1996). This systems attractor approach conceives of the system as stable, closed, and in equilibrium. It assumes that stress in the system (environmental, social, economic, political, social, and cultural) can be coped with and resisted, and views mobility as bidirectional and reactive. A dialectical framing of preparedness orders its ontology. This genealogy assumes that there are two binary poles—before and after—that, if resilient, the system that has experienced stress because of shocks can automatically return to the original state it was before the experience of stress. Whereas this approach has been criticized for romanticizing this act of bouncing back to an imagined state and place (Folke, 2006), this discourse of vulnerability is ascendant in technoscientific studies to risk management and prominent in disaster reduction, prevention, and policy studies. Such popular application has elevated this discourse of resilience as the normative framework for preparedness in emergency management and community resilience. This representation has produced dominant ways of seeing and knowledge-making across these practices and in scholarly work that has foreclosed other ways of being resilient (McGreavy, 2016). Because the main focus of resilience communication studies to date has been on emergency management (evident in the aforementioned articles’ common usage of the word *preparedness* or related synonyms such as *preparing for emergency* and *responding to disasters*, and as the *raison d’être* for these disciplinary subfields

of risk, environmental, and crisis communication), it is not surprising that the field has implicitly adopted these negative ideologies of resilience.

The social resilience approach, which examines the impact of climate change and disasters on people, places, and population, is the most common research topic in resilience communication scholarship. The aforementioned articles, for example, evaluated marine destruction in the Bahamas, terrorism in Norway and Indonesia, and the MERS epidemic in South Korea. Social resilience highlights “the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change” (Adger, 2000, p. 347). Although it embraces the promising potential of robust governance and collective action (Adger, Hughes, Folke, Carpenter, & Rockström, 2005), its empirical application has been predominantly preoccupied with the social vulnerability of groups and their coping capacities (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). This ideology repeats the normative discourse on preparedness that views mobility as reactive and bidirectional, assumes that at-risk groups can easily learn from their past and adjust to future challenges, and has been criticized as a “delusionary optimism” that misjudges the vulnerabilities of the poor and their circuits of structural disempowerment (Amin, 2013, p. 145).

This article departs from these approaches that discusses resilience-as-deficient by drawing on social-ecological-evolutionary studies to develop resilience-as-dividend. Resilience-as-dividend updates normative understandings of resilience that connote its qualities through vulnerability and lack (resilience-as-deficient) to refer to qualities of advantage that arise from the flexible and creative ability of individuals, groups, communities, and systems to persist and transform through change. Ecologist C. S. Holling (1973), one of the earliest theorist to coin the term *resilient*, challenges engineering resilience’s stable equilibrium approach by identifying resilience as the capacity of the ecological system to absorb impact and still persist (see also Folke, 2006). Key here is the notion of a system as open, dynamic, nonlinear, and uncertain. This approach is not just about being persistent or robust to disturbances; it is also concerned with change mechanism and attendant new trajectories opened by the constantly evolving structures and processes of the system. In this approach, mobility is multidirectional and change is transformative, generated through the fold of the threshold as open-ended, iterative, and creative. Evolutionary scholars further this model by taking a long-term view of change (Caputo, Caserio, Coles, Jankovic, & Gaterell, 2015). Rather than reactionary or conventional emergency planning, ecological-evolutionary resilience is better expressed through the transformative capacities for learning, robustness, innovation, and flexibility (Davoudi, Brooks, & Mehmood, 2013). Elaborating these capacities to the realm of the social, they include prerequisites such as learning how to live with change, uncertainty, and diversity, and the ability to combine different knowledge to create self-organizing opportunities (Folke, Walker, Scheffer, Chapin, & Rockström, 2010).

Significant here is the shift from adaptation to adaptability. Where *adaptation* is short-term focused and refers to highly specialized and specific skills, *adaptability* is long-term focused and refers to general flexibility and inherent capacities (Pike, Dawley, & Tomaney, 2010). The latter is also used by ecologists and social scientists synonymously with terms such as *adaptive capacity* (rather than *adaptedness*) to draw out the capacity to undertake new, alternative, and sometimes unexpected trajectories (Walker, Holling, Carpenter, & Kinzig, 2004). Although this tension has shaped debates in resilience studies, it is not adequately addressed in resilience communication scholarship. For example, despite Houston and colleagues (2015) proposing a revised model of communication ecology based on adaptive capacities, their articulation

of community resilience is still subsumed under the discourse of vulnerability and its hegemony of preparedness. As discussed earlier, this conceptual weakness has narrowed resilience communication to the service of emergency communication management.

Similarly, social resilience studies on migrant youths also have tended to emphasize the adaptation of culture rather than the adaptability of cultural difference as important well-being resources (Ungar, 2011). *Culture*, defined as intergenerational heritage, systems, and values, as well as ways of doing and being in the world that are cocreated between people and society, plays a key role in establishing diasporic youth resilience. The capital derived from these cultural practices provides them with strengths and skills that are sometimes overlooked because they differ from mainstream culture. However, dominant frameworks in migrant youth social studies continue to encourage adaptation by using acculturation to highlight different expectations between home and school and normative criteria to evaluate change behavior in the context of mainstream culture and community (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012). The concept of adaptability is an attempt to account for cultural differences and the role culture plays in supporting or hindering young people's ability to learn and transform.

In sum, rather than reproducing the ordering logic of vulnerability, identifying short-term coping strategies to compensate perceived resilient-deficit competency, and relying on the integration of cultural adaptation, resilience-as-dividend addresses these shortcomings by thinking of resilience as a longer-term process in which cultural resources are developed from the transformative capacities of adaptabilities. The following widens the scope of resilience communication by using mobile photography to critically demonstrate how adaptability is evident in the everyday life of young migrants and refugees in Australia. However, before analyzing this, it is necessary to critically contextualize the contradictory mobilities that shape the everyday life of these young people because adaptability is central to negotiating these mobilities.

### **Diasporic Youth Mobilities and a Material Social Technology Approach to Digital Media Use**

Youth mobility is most commonly discussed in the literature through the framework of life transitions in youth studies and as a key component of contemporary youth identities (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008). Transitions in this literature refer to the period of physical and social change that falls between the life course of childhood and adulthood (Heinz, 2009). Normatively conceived of as a unidirectional and linear process, this framework discusses youth mobility in terms of life transformation, imagined through physiological, aspirational, and future mobilities (Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2007; Skelton, 2002; Woodman & Wyn, 2015). This article extends this framework by extrapolating diasporic youth mobilities not simply as part of life-course transitions, but also as a contradictory resource that is empowering and restrictive.

For those marginalized through subjugated diasporic, classed, racialized, gendered, and sexualized identities, youth mobility is more complex than the telos of life transitions. Foremost here is the mobility experienced through migration. As a result of wars in conflict zones as well as the search for better education and employment opportunities, more and more young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years are travelling or forced to travel. In 2013, it was estimated that there were 28.3 million international youth

migrants worldwide, making up 12% of the world's total migrant population (Cortina, Taran, & Raphael, 2014, p. 2). Youth mobility experienced through migration is not only geographical; it is also cultural, psychological, and social. For many young migrants, the angst of life transitions is also intertwined with the loss of familial networks, as well as the traumas of physical uprootedness, cultural outsidership, and social isolation. Mobility, in this context, functions as a contradictory resource (Kofman, 2004). Although a tool for accumulating mobility capital (e.g., Kauffman, Bergman, & Joye, 2004; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Yoon, 2014), it can also lead to social and economic descent because of precarious work and/or the differential class stratification between home and host countries (Rutten & Verstoppen, 2014).

For permanent settlers—those who end up staying permanently in the host nation—experiences of contradictory youth mobilities are also made more pronounced by institutional entrenchments and exclusions. In Australia, for example, this group comprises almost 1 million of the population (or 25% of all youth aged 12–24 years; Hugo, McDougall, Tan, & Feist, 2014), which includes migrant children who arrive here with their parents; international students; humanitarian migrants; and second, third, or multiple generations who are Australian-born. Having grown up in a period of rapid globalization and virtual communication, they develop forms of local, ethnic, and cultural belonging that transcend place. Regardless of the reasons for migration, most go through multiple passages of integration, including learning or improving English, adjusting to school, forming new friends, creating social networks, and finding a job. Although they share common challenges with Anglo Australian youths, they encounter distinctive problems in life transitions particular to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds and their status as migrants. Diasporic young people are largely absent from representations of national identity, and they often experience racism and feel a “compromised” sense of Australian belonging (Paredis, 2014). Although they tend to achieve higher levels of education than their Anglo Australian peers, they have less work experience (Hugo et al., 2014).

Central to contradictory youth mobilities is the politics of mobility. This politics draws attention to the unequal mobilities encountered through the movement of people, ideas, and things, and the broader social implications of those movements (Sheller & Urry, 2006). It focuses on how such movements occur, and how they are also embedded in practices of regrounding (Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, & Sheller, 2003). Regrounding practices are associated with institutional fixity (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006). Often highly immobile, institutional embeddings are usually localized and have the capacity to reorganize subject formations and spatial arrangements. For example, the term *CALD*—the official Australian Census acronym for this group to refer to those originating from “culturally and linguistically diverse” (CALD) backgrounds—attests to how migrant identities are shaped by the politics of mobility. As an official classification, it is limited in its value for understanding the complexity of cultural identity. It often problematically positions ethnic minority youth as an “at-risk” group (Inglis, 2011) and has become an institutional strategy to contain difference within the broader policy agenda of social inclusion (Mohanty, 2003). Invoking difference without evoking redistributive justice, it does not capture the structures of exclusion that construct these groups as other (Harris, 2013). Diasporic young people are marginalized when referred to as CALD; they are inhibited by the term's reductionism and fixity, and are also challenged by the definitional complexity of cultural diversity.

Despite these constraints, diasporic young people's everyday practices contest dominant discourses of "Australian values" and "mainstream participation" (Patton, 2014), evincing forms of belonging that are complex, molded by official multicultural policies on social inclusion, everyday multiculturalism, and the imaginations afforded by global cultural economies. Most embrace multiple forms of belongings that express cosmopolitan hybrid identities. These flexible acts of selfhood demonstrate how diasporic youths negotiate contradictory mobilities through adaptability. This is particularly evident in their digital media use of mobile photography.

Diasporic youth's digital media use is a subfield of diaspora media studies that examines how migrant communities use the media for cultural maintenance and negotiation (Cunningham & Sinclair, 2001; Gillespie, 1995). The term *polymedia* (Madianou & Miller, 2012) now describes a range of communication and connection used by migrants to continue relations during separation, and includes not just the tools and devices, but also the skills and confidence to use digital media and the infrastructural cost of access. In Australia, diasporic youth digital media studies focus predominantly on how marginalization experienced in real life is ameliorated by fostering experiences of integration online (Gifford & Wilding, 2013; Harris & Roose, 2014; Johns, 2014; Mansouri & Mikola, 2014). Common to this scholarship is the approach of mediated communication and how media facilitate the copresence of communication that allows people in different parts of the world to communicate together at the same time. Whereas this scholarship captures the structures of exclusion that shape young people's everyday life, and stresses how digital spaces assist in negotiating power, belonging, and cultural understanding, none focuses on digital media as a material social technology.

A material social technology approach draws on media as practice (Couldry, 2012) and focuses not on what media as texts or processes mean, but what people are doing in relation to the media and how the media inform the way they act in everyday life such that taking a photo, for example, is not simply communicative, but a practice that is also social and performative. It focuses on the medium as an object that produces the subject's ways of being in the world, and how the media object and the ways the subject uses it are imbricated in structures of social relations and power. That is, rather than focusing on the media or its image as meaning-making alone, the turn to the material visual practice highlights the complex entanglements that can be found (Lehmuskallio & Cruz, 2016, p. 31). This approach is pertinent to contemporary culture in which networking, convergence, connection, interaction, and participation have transformed traditional models of communication. For diasporic young people, these ways of doing and being in the world are key to developing and establishing the capacity for adaptability.

The following section examines Facebook photographs taken by nine young respondents who were volunteer participants in a larger project on diasporic young people led by me and funded by the Australian Research Council.<sup>1</sup> Although this sample was small and by no means representative of the cohort, it reflects the diversity of this group. Between 15 and 22 years of age, they came from a range of cultural backgrounds—Afghani, Chinese, South Sudanese, Iranian, Eritrean, Kenyan, Malaysian. Some were new arrivals and others were born in Australia. Respondents' photos were collected through the digital visual

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Research Council (LP150100291) (2016–2018). "The Status of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People."

method of Photovoice. Photovoice allows respondents to use photos they have taken themselves to express, reflect, and communicate their everyday lives, to identify, represent, and enhance issues (Wagner, Ellingson, & Kunkel, 2016). Over a period of four weeks, respondents took photos that responded to the themes of people, place, plans, and play. These themes were chosen because of their centrality to the everyday life and future aspirations of these young people. *Place* relates to social and cultural indicators on belonging, identity, and mobility. *People* relates to social indicators on family networks, educational networks, social capital, and diversity of friend groups. *Play* relates to cultural and social indicators on participation, cultural activities, identity, and social networks. *Plans* relates to economic indicators on economic and educational trajectories, aspirations, and imagined futures.

Respondents posted and viewed each other's photos on Facebook and then discussed them in person at a weekly research workshop. Facebook was chosen because of its easy access in Australia and its popularity among young people. This article analyses these Facebook photos. Approximately 200 photos were gathered and 66 pages of transcripts were collected for this research exercise. Although this article is unable to provide a comprehensive analysis of this method, these images, and their coding, the general qualitative findings reveal how diasporic youth resilience is formed through the adaptability of absorbing and interrupting hegemonic norms, and these are evident through their material social practice of mobile photography.

### **The Adaptability of Diasporic Youth Resilience Relationships**

Adaptability is evident in the extended relationships of diasporic young people. Relationships with family networks, together with other social networks, are important sources of social capital for diasporic youth. All respondents regularly post photos of family members. They speak of the importance of and sense of belonging derived from immediate and extended families. Photos from the more recently arrived migrants (such as Abas, Azin, Aziza, and Parisa, who are Afghani refugees) also include family members overseas. These photos inscribe the multiple and contradictory migrant youth mobilities discussed earlier. The refugees' photos express mobility politics in terms of escape, settlement, and the occasional visits to their homelands, but the more settled ones such as Mustafa also express it through racialized class. Mustafa is an Australian-born university student of South Sudanese background who grew up in an inner-city public housing estate. Two of his most distinct photos are those taken from there, one from the basketball court of him having a game with his friends, and another from the neighborhood park of him celebrating his cousin's birthday party with his extended family. His descriptions of these photos turn the stigma of the place (where the estate is notorious in the media for "harboring" African youth "gangs") into a space of cultural pride and social strength.

For affluent young migrants such as Kristy, social networks are discussed through cosmopolitan travel. Kristy is an Indonesian Chinese Singaporean-born international university student. She shares a four-year-old photo of her high school dinner gala showing a glamorous family in well-dressed suits and gowns. She also shares other photos, such as her sojourn with her boyfriend to Sydney, her mother's visits to Melbourne, and her apartment next to the city's national art gallery. These photos evince a middle-class mobility in which international comings and goings are commonplace in one's schedule and itinerary. In the midst of sharing stories of her many trips, she even reveals how lucky she is to be able to have the freedom

to live alone as a young Asian woman in Melbourne. Her mobility is actual (geographical and economic) and draws on the performance of a global citizen, one who is always travelling and at home everywhere. For her, family social capital has also brought about gendered economic capital (capacity to travel as a young woman) as well as cultural capital (capacity to experience internationalism).

Overall, respondents' photos share a common motif centered on how social capital is derived from heterogeneous geographies of social networks. Rather than adapting to Anglo Australian social network norms, these photos and their practices—drawn from past and present archives—evidence adaptability by extending mainstream notions of bonded social capital networks, and showing how they are shaped by the structures of class, race, and gender, as well as homeland and hostland networks, and in the process, highlighting the importance of the extended family as a site of bonding social capital and a model that transcends the White-centered nuclear family network.

### **Identity**

Adaptability is evident in performances of identity. Whether identity is constructed or performed through the sameness and difference of self and group representation, recognition of and respect for migrant young people's competencies and skills are important to their sense of self-esteem. When they post photos of themselves, they are seldom selfies but posed portraits taken by someone else. This suggests an embodied and embedded sociality that is intersubjective, as well as respondents' self-reflexive awareness of their enacted identities (Dijck, 2008; Van House, 2011), evident in the photos of Yasmin and Kristy.

Yasmin is a 21-year-old Kenyan refugee. She is completing a fine arts degree at a university in the western suburbs near where she lives. One of Yasmin's earliest photos is of herself with two female Anglo friends on a street in the Melbourne central city (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Yasmin (left) with her friends.**

In this photo, she is the only one riding a bicycle; her different commute is also accentuated by her racial difference. This photo is also juxtaposed with a similar one of her alone on that same blue bicycle in front of an iconic Melbourne city train station (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Yasmin in the city.**

In these photos, Yasmin is at home in mainstream spaces and with White Australian friends. Yasmin's other photos posted to the group workshop Facebook page showcase her interests and skills in broader artistic and cultural activities such as board games (Scrabble), street photography (of street art in the city's iconic Fitzroy hipster precinct), and graphic design. On Yasmin's own Facebook page is a very different profile in which dominant photos posted are almost only images of her Black African heritage, friends, and families, both in Melbourne and in Kamuma, where she is from. This disjuncture in self-representation demonstrates Yasmin's self-awareness of her performance, especially to the Photovoice project, where it is likely that she may be keen to display her enculturation in the Anglo Australian mainstream.

Kristy's self-representation, on the other hand, evokes a solitude that could equally connote loneliness or self-confidence. Her photos showcase skills in art and landscape photography. She talks about spending her weekends catching the train and seeing the sights along that particular train route. She also always posts photos of her other craftwork, such as hand lettering or knitting. Even her food photos are of food rather than of her eating out and being social. Her self-identity is enacted through the assured display of these solitary objects, places, and practices. Although Kristy and Yasmin enact a positive image of an urban multicultural youth, one who is well adjusted, cosmopolitan, and assimilated, it is important to note that mobile photos are sites of public display that foreground visual ideals rather than social realities, and play an important role in the display of a model self (Van House, 2011). For diasporic young people experiencing migratory and life transitions, these self-enactments often also embody performances of idealized citizenship.

### Spatialities

Adaptability is evident in respondents' spatialities—their gendered and racialized mobilities across mainstream and diasporic spaces and groups. This is evident, for example, in Mustafa's and Abas's group photos that showcase membership in school, sports, and community activities.

Mustafa posts group photos that mostly show him active in team sports. Early in the project's workshop, he posted an old photo of a school camp he attended at a high school in Melbourne where he was the only Black boy in the group. He discusses his ethnic and cultural difference in terms of his ability to transcend racial divide, and shares his pride, on the one hand, of being chosen to attend the elite summer camp and be given the opportunity to interact with Anglo Australians teenagers; on the other hand, he is shocked at the overwhelming Whiteness of the group as he has only attended schools with classmates from non-Anglo and African backgrounds. Mustafa juxtaposes this past photo with more recent ones of him in Bali with his mostly White football team members, and of watching Australian football in a packed stadium. Mustafa's mobility is actual (cultural and social) and imagined through the identity performance of social integration.

Abas, on the other hand, posts group photos of himself participating in various community activities, such as attending a cultural conference at the local government council or a harmony day celebration for cultural diversity. Being newly arrived, he does not have many friends, but is proud of these group memberships. One of his photos shows an Islamic protest celebration in front of Parliament House in the city. He remains ambivalent about this event; on the one hand, he is pleased with the recognition of an "othered" religion in his new city-state; on the other hand, he laments the high presence of Muslims in the city. Abas commented,

I was thinking that, [are] there really this [many] more Muslims in Melbourne? I can't believe that. Even so many was at work, they were not there. Because it was on a Wednesday and again there were too [many], I was confused, thinking, this is not an Islam country, so there are too many Muslims! . . . I'm not sure about this.

This ambivalence demonstrates Abas's self-awareness of how his Muslim identity can be made to perform as a source of cultural pride and marginalization. On the one hand, it resonates with the country's multicultural celebration of diversity that affirms the presence of Muslims; on the other hand, it reflects the internalized apprehension of Muslim migrants in an increasingly Islamophobic White-centric country and their eagerness to "pass" and be "under the radar" in mainstream society and spaces so as not to draw unwarranted attention to their religious and cultural distinctions.

These photos evince the respondents' adaptability in navigating dominant spaces and participating in mainstream activities, as well as the ease by which they can also traverse their own ethnospecific multicultural sites. Respondents draw from their mobility experiences to enact a portable personhood as a new kind of identity formation in which mobility shapes self-making and identities become "not merely 'bent' toward novel forms of transportation and travel but fundamentally recast in terms of capacities for movement" (Elliot & Urry, 2010, p. 3). In doing so, they demonstrate how the acquisition of skills and

competencies is tied to various forms of mobilities, including physical movements of personal migration and urban commute, across structures of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and cultural literacies.

### **Imagined Mobilities**

Respondents' performances of imagined mobilities are new sites of youth adaptabilities. Imagined mobilities deploy mobility as an entry ticket and an avenue for self-experimentation and self-growth, to anticipate and project a desired future based on the ways one acts in the present (Cuzzocrea & Mandich, 2016). This is most distinct in John's photos. John is an Australian-born son of the post-1989 wave of Chinese amnesty migrants. He studies urban planning at local city university. His most distinct photos are of construction sites and iconic laneways from his school projects. He discusses these images through their embedded histories as well as improved potential, such as rendering old laneways with street art and enlivening a dockland precinct. His photos aestheticize a well-planned cityscape rejuvenated through inclusive town planning, more affordable housing, sustainable development, and creative reuse. Other photos include a house among the rural green fields where he envisions his future dwelling, as well as those from various "Climathon" events and "Architects for Peace" talks that he recently attended. For John, imagined mobility is literal and disjunctive: literal because it is about remaking his neighborhood when he succeeds in his career in urban planning; disjunctive because it enacts a life-course mobility that also uses the past to shape the future. John leverages these mobilities as a platform to fashion himself in the present toward his future development. For diasporic youths, imagined mobilities not only draw on present and future mobilities, but also introduce a temporal disruption to challenge a normative life course. John's imagined mobilities have additionally opened multiple spatialities that extend geographic scales and allow him to create a new agency as a resistive pathway to future precarity.

### **Access**

Adaptability also exposes the negative impacts of the process (and thus concept) of adaptation, evident in the politics of access revealed through the photos' social aesthetic frame. As mobile photos present only chosen slices of social reality that make up the online performance of the networked self, it cuts off the broader social field of actors and actions that make up the context of that photo. The concept of the social aesthetic frame, developed to address what is concealed from the frame, aims "to capture the patterns of digital stratification that encompass the online construction of networked selfhood in the peripheries of the global network society" (Uimonen, 2013, p. 123). Respondents' use of the mobile phone and their photos of the computer provide insight into these structures of exclusion.

Younger respondents, such as Azin, Aziza, and Parisa, did not have access to Facebook because of parental restrictions. To post weekly photos, they e-mailed them at the end of each week to one research team member who then uploaded them online. A few others, such as university students Mustafa and Abas, did not have much paid data access, and only uploaded photos using the free Wi-Fi available during the workshop. The most frequent user of the page was Kristy. This socioeconomic class dynamic is also evident in the long commute some respondents undertook to attend the city-based workshop discussions. Azin, Aziza, Parisa, and Abas, who live in the outer suburbs, used these weekly train trips as opportunities to immerse themselves in the excitement of the city. As avid tennis players, a significant number of their

photos include shots of the Melbourne Grand Slam tournament courts taken from the windows of their train compartments. Others, such as Yasmin, regularly missed workshop sessions because of the inconvenience of the long commute. This group's digital divide reflects the country's unequal Internet access among diasporic young people. Currently, in Australia, despite 91% of young people having access to the Internet (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2016), Internet access remains uneven for migrant and refugee youths. Among young people in their first five years of arrival in Australia, one in three does not have broadband access in the home compared with about one in five among the general youth population (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2017). This is in spite of the fact that most had come to Australia with higher than average levels of digital literacy.

A common photo motif is the image of a computer at a desk or a screen capture of the computer screen. Mustafa, Abas, and John regularly post these photos, reflecting, perhaps stereotypically, how men express masculinity through hardware machinery and software mastery. Mustafa's photos of his school's computer lab are appended with comments that detail his study subject choice. John's photos are from his computer screen, showing his penchant for devouring social media news such as Reddit. These photos support the self-constructed personae of these young men as diligent and studious. Abas's photos, on the other hand, show the struggles of a recently arrived refugee trying to fit the mold expected of a good young man. He posts photos of his classmates at their lab workstations and screenshots of multiple files being downloaded; with the latter, he adds a mischievous comment stating he was waiting for "the code to crack." His images reveal irregular practices such as hacking or covert photographing, and amplify an authenticity that strives to negotiate the excess of online risk-taking with the confines of proper conduct. His digital dissonance is also evident in the wider context of his everyday life, such as his street fights (because, as he told us, he did not know it was illegal for him in this country to punch someone simply because s/he blocked his footpath).

These social aesthetic frames—from the perfunctory object of the computer, the banality of its photos, and mundanity of its practice—reveal how diasporic young people's lives are stratified across the digital divide. For some, access is restricted to age and socioeconomic background, and functions as a site to perform the idealized norms of the good student-citizen; for others, access is a site through which to expose that which mobility cannot contain, such as the norms of regulation and adaptation, and in doing so, produces an excess as testament to the trauma of settlement. Abas, in particular, eludes the ideals of good citizenship through his transgressive online and improper public behaviors. His practices expose the limitations of the law that shape the codes of proper conduct and personhood in Australia. In his eagerness to become the good citizen, his acts betray the psychological upheaval of multiple migrations experienced by a recently arrived young refugee. His practices, from online risk-taking to being at risk socially, as well as becoming a champion for the state's risk management apparatuses, evince mobility as a site for exposing the conditions and contradictions of citizenship.

### **Social Cohesion**

Furthering the social aesthetic frame of reading mobile photos developed above, two respondents' photos are worth discussing in detail to draw out the sensory, affective, and material impacts of adaptation because they challenge the normative discourse of migrant adaptation commonly theorized in studies on

social cohesion (e.g., Markus, 2016). In Australia, this discourse applauds the successful integration of the migrant into a White-centric mainstream that also commodifies the embrace of popular multiculturalism. Sesuna is a recently married refugee from Teheran. She is studying arts at a local city university in Melbourne and her husband teaches at another local university in the same city. Two of Sesuna's photos stand out in contrast to others from the respondents. The first is a close-up shot of a vegetable stand at a local market beaming with the luminescence of fresh produce. The second is a wide shot of a suburban shopping mall floor replete with shops full of goods and expansive foyers. Sesuna comments that these are the places that make her happy as she can buy fresh vegetables and hang about in the air-conditioned shopping malls. Parisa, the cousin of the Afghani twins Azin and Aziza, also posts a similar genre of photo of her family picnic at a local nature reserve. Although Parisa is the quietest participant in the group, she is animated when discussing that photo and seems eager to share how her family had enjoyed that weekend outing by the lake. In Parisa's photo, their side profiles are seen gazing out into the stillness of the serene lake.

These photos share a common motif: They are the regular places that mainstream Australians flock to—markets, shopping centers, and nature parks. These photos capture the micro practices (Burnett, 2004) of migrant adaptation practices by showing them learning and enjoying the ordinariness of everyday Australian life. Although marketing, shopping, and recreationing may not be entirely new to them, it is the freshness of the food, the comfort of the shopping center, and the wilderness of the park (and its crisp fresh air) that mark these places as familiarly strange and different. Sesuna tells us she enjoys cooking new varieties of vegetables. Parisa also says her family loves discovering local places to visit. Like Kristy's photos, these photos also capture things, places, and people in isolation. Unlike the composed solitude of Kristy's art photography, these photos show the expanse of space and its emptiness. Shopping centers and markets are meant to be full of people, but there is no one in Sesuna's photos. This void is similar to the vastness of the landscape that dwarfs the family in Parisa's photo. Like bereft monuments enveloping the flesh of life, these sites expose the haptic materiality of "fitting in." The intoxication of touch and smell is also accompanied by the distance of loneliness.

These sensory, affective, and material impacts of adaptation challenge the dominant discourse of social cohesion popularly defined as national integration. If social cohesion is to be built around a genuine shared vision based on universal values, mutual respect, and identity, these conditions can be fulfilled only if there is equal acknowledgment of these impacts of adaptation. For diasporic young people, it is important to recognize that belonging does not mean adhering to just the values of the host or home nations. Young migrants foster cultural adherence in adaptable ways that are discussed in this article.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, I have critically developed a new theory of diasporic youth resilience to extend resilience communication and social resilience studies. Rather than adopting the resilience-as-deficient approach common to these fields, this new theory of resilience-as-dividend conceives of resilience as positive, creative, and transformative, and is characterized by adaptability. Through the material social practice of mobile photography and using original case study research with young migrants and refugees in

Australia, I also have demonstrated how adaptability is a resource-rich capability that shapes the contradictory mobilities of diasporic young people.

Adaptability is characterized by the following features that shape diasporic youth resilience. Relationships include social networks drawn extensively from extended families in home and host countries, providing new models that challenge the traditional nuclear family. Identities and spatialities are performed through mobilities to provide new forms of self-making, such as that of the portable personhood. Imagined mobilities are crafted and embodied as a way of life and deployed as an asset. Adaptability is also a critical site to problematize the norms of access and adaptation. It calls to task how resources toward technological affordances and social cohesion must also engage the social aesthetic frame to make visible the periphery, as well as the sensory, affective, and material impacts of migrant adaptation.

Key to this article also is the new pathway of mobility across Asia and Australia. Here, the new North–South migration flow presents a new optic to challenge extant frameworks that discuss the normative routes of East–West or South–North migration. Where Southern theories pose the site of the South as a periphery that challenges Western and First World centers, the South emplaced by the antipodes of Australia re-presents the site as a place of White-centric monocultural incorporation. For diasporic young migrants and refugees settling in Australia, the antipodean South is also a site that exposes these dominant practices of settlement. Through the new resources furnished by adaptability, these young people survive and thrive by continuing to acquire the competencies of resilience as part of their diaspora advantage (Yue, 2018).

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