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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MIGRATION NARRATIVES AS CATALYSTS OF IDENTITY RESILIENCE

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Abstract

This implemented pilot study articulates a comprehensive framework for "research, action, and training" designed to enhance migrants' resilience through interventions assisted by diaspora community organizations. Drawing from both social psychology and political science, this research synthesizes the existing literature on assisted resilience, placing particular emphasis on the creation of autobiographical narratives as tools for bolstering cultural identity and self-actualization during the migrant integration process. By employing autobiographic qualitative interviews framed within a family intergenerational dialogue this investigation interrogates cultural identity transformation and resilience mechanisms, delineating protective factors that facilitate migrant integration, with a specific focus on the Romanian American

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diaspora in Minnesota. The discussions elucidate themes of cultural shock, the interplay between assimilation and integration, language acquisition as a vehicle for cultural retention, and the multifaceted nature of belonging within host societies. Participants' reflections on the complexities of acculturation underscore how familial dialogues can shape perceptions of belonging and construct identity narratives that serve immediate contextual needs. The findings advocate for community-based historiography projects that leverage narrative methodologies to foster resilience, combat social marginalization, and enhance civic engagement. This article emphasizes the critical importance of culturally sensitive mechanisms in promoting narrative construction to strengthen familial bonds and establish supportive diaspora networks in increasingly polarized host societies.

Keywords: diaspora; transnational families; assisted resilience; autobiographical narratives; qualitative interviews; community-based historiography; acculturation strategies

1. Introduction

This study integrates principles from social psychology and political science to develop a comprehensive framework for "research, action, and training" aimed at promoting effective interventions within diaspora community organizations and transnational migrant family structures. The research component synthesizes existing literature on assisted resilience, highlighting the benefits of crafting autobiographical life narratives that not only support the retention of cultural identity but also enhance self-actualization in the process of integration into the host society. Such narratives empower migrants to navigate their vulnerabilities and experiences of marginalization, while simultaneously fostering self-esteem and civic engagement; all within a context that acknowledges and appreciates their contributions to the host community.

Adopting Serban Ionescu's conceptualization of resilience which emphasizes learned attitudes toward risk-taking and resource-seeking for successful adaptation in situations of personal or social trauma, this project

conducts an analysis of qualitative interviews conceived as assisted resilience interventions among migrant families.[1] The primary objective is to identify protective and promotive factors within resilience that facilitate adaptation to challenges and encourage success within the host society. In this context, resilience is framed as the capacity of individuals to adapt, recover from trauma, and thrive amidst adversity, with significant influence from cultural factors and context-dependent variables.[2] This exploratory framework may inform diaspora community intervention strategies aimed at addressing trauma while promoting positive skills for integration[3].

While ongoing discourse surrounding resilience has achieved a certain degree of conceptual clarity in social psychology, cross-disciplinary definitions and operationalizations remain complex. This complexity underscores the importance of examining diverse goals, values, and social dimensions that extend beyond individual development to encompass moral and political considerations.[4] Resilience is recognized as a socially constructed phenomenon, shaped by factors across multiple ecological levels, including individual characteristics, family dynamics, community environments, and overarching cultural values.

To operationalize vulnerability and resilience in varied contexts, researchers employ mixed methodologies, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, particularly within the political economy of health. Common themes emerging from the literature include social support structures, learned coping strategies, self-efficacy, and cultural consonance. The interplay

[1] Șerban Ionescu, *Tratat de reziliență asistată*, Editura Trei, 2013.

[2] A. Terrana and W. Al-Delaimy, "A Systematic Review of Cross-Cultural Measures of Resilience and Its Promotive and Protective Factors" in *Transcultural Psychiatry*, no. 60(4), 2013, pp. 733-750.

[3] Sergiu Mișcoiu, Bettins Mitru and Sergiu Gherghina, "Migrants Away from the Polls: Explaining the Absenteeism of People with Sub-Saharan African Origins in the 2022 French Presidential Elections" in *Identities*, 2024, pp. 1-18.

[4] S. Raghavan and P. Sandanapitchai, "The Relationship Between Cultural Variables and Resilience to Psychological Trauma: A Systematic Review of the Literature" in *Traumatology* 30, no. 1, 2024, pp. 37-51.

among culturally derived expectations, family-based coping mechanisms, and attitudes significantly influences well-being and adaptive responses across communities.[5]

This research specifically focuses on the Romanian American diaspora in Minnesota, leveraging cross-cultural studies on resilience. It advocates for family-initiated and community-assisted interventions, particularly through oral history projects facilitated by diaspora organizations, with the goal of enhancing positive integration and social mobility among migrants.

The approach conceptually aligns with Dana Diminescu's concept of the "connected migrant," individuals who actively engage with multiple communities, thereby transcending feelings of dislocation.[6] A "connected migrant" wields socio-technical tools that enable influence within both the host society and their country of origin, defining belonging not merely through physical presence but through meaningful engagement across diverse communities. The distinction is that we take this concept to be the ideal form of integration we seek to facilitate not the empirical reality found within a diverse diaspora community.

The study also critically examines resilience research involving both adults and adolescents, accounting for cultural specificities in coping with societal trauma. Proposed interventions are designed to cultivate a sense of belonging while grounding individual identities within multigenerational narratives. This necessitates the creation of an inclusive environment that values diverse cultural backgrounds. Stakeholder institutions in host countries are encouraged to enhance their efficacy by fostering environments that appreciate this diversity, which can, in turn, promote cross-cultural socialization. Concurrently, institutions in migrants' countries of origin should prioritize cultural heritage to support relevant developmental opportunities,

[5] F. G. Castro and K. E. Murray, "Cultural Adaptation and Resilience: Controversies, Issues, and Emerging Models" in *Handbook of Adult Resilience*, ed. J. W. Reich, A. J. Zautra, and J. S. Hall (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), pp. 375-403.

[6] Dana Diminescu, "The Connected Migrant: An Epistemological Manifesto" in *Social Science Information* 47, no. 4, 2008, pp. 565-579.

thereby reinforcing connections with second-generation migrants and their potential engagement in public diplomacy exercises and soft power projection.

The action component of this study encompasses community and individual historiography projects focused on the documentation of oral histories as a strategy to combat social marginalization. Our pilot family interviews may provide a cost-effective alternative to community-based initiatives, actively promoting assisted resilience amid the prevailing political polarization surrounding migration discourse. These narrative articulation exercises rest on the premise that resilience encompasses learned strategies and attitudes, rather than being inherently possessed traits.

Furthermore, the study aims to develop, assess, and implement an intervention toolkit that targets cultural identity resilience among uprooted families navigating transnational lives. Insights garnered from investigations into diaspora communities in the United States may be adapted to address identity affirmation needs in other significant diaspora populations, particularly within the European Union. Given demographic trends indicating that more children of Romanian parents are born abroad than in Romania,[7] a focus on second-generation immigrants is likely to yield policy relevant best practices for state-driven interventions aimed at engaging descendants within diaspora communities.

Practical implications of this research include promoting the integration of first- and second-generation migrants and providing valuable insights for practitioners, academics, and policymakers. Attitudes toward resource access—whether in financial, educational, or health-related domains—are often culturally prescribed. Consequently, family dialogues can facilitate mutual learning by opening discussions about these attitudes. Diaspora community organizations can serve as culturally sensitive platforms for exploring elements

[7] UNICEF, "Romania Country Office Annual Report 2019", New York: UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/media/90171/file/Romania-2019-COAR.pdf>.

of personal resilience, consolidating group strategies to navigate diverse social contexts.

The anticipated outcomes of these interventions are primarily envisioned as relevant public mental health initiatives, with notable implications for both the public perception of diaspora organizations and their standing within their countries of origin. The toolkit intended to foster family dialogues surrounding acculturation is designed to be adaptable not only for the studied diaspora but also for smaller communities facing considerable adversities. The cultivation of both individual and collective resilience hinges on equipping community members with the skills necessary to navigate identity-affirming resources while promoting overall well-being. Encouraging families to collaboratively construct meaningful narratives around personal choices plays a crucial role in validating community values and cultural identities in ways that resonate deeply. This study underscores the significance of identity resilience during crises, alongside the capacity to access personal resources, which are essential assets in an increasingly polarized society.

2. Autobiographical narratives

Using qualitative semi-structured autobiographic interviews designed as intergenerational dialogues between migrants and their descendants, the proposed study seeks to authentically highlight the distinct and complex mechanisms of current era transatlantic migration experience with regards to the discursive nature of collective identity construction. The interviews invite us into the intimacy of migrants' family lives, into their attempts to redefine their personal narratives, their contextual ways of being and simultaneously belonging within native and adoptive societies.

These autobiographic narratives do more than delineate “us/them” constructs, they give context to the ways migrants perceive themselves as bridging and enriching geographically remote communities. It showcases how they negotiate disruptive pressures of acculturation and increasingly transnational, interdependent lifestyles. These are stories of affirming one’s heritage as reinforcing mechanism for coping with rapid social changes but

also of endorsing multiculturalism and inclusivity. Most importantly the autobiographic narratives refocus us on the vital stories migrants craft, to model resilience for their descendants. What drives migrants' cultural resilience and positive continued anchoring in both native and host communities is an appreciation of the diversity of perspectives and traditions that their transnational lifestyle affords them. The unstated impact of the family shared stories is one of changing attitudes towards acculturation.

3.1 Autobiographic interviews relevance to public policy

Rational immigration policies on both sides of the Atlantic have for the past decade been increasingly sidelined by considerations of immigrants' cultural knowledge and compatibility with national norms and customs, instead of simply addressing labor needs based on demographic aging and competition for skilled labor. The perceived threat of immigration to a sense of value homogeneity within nation-states has emerged as a significant political concern.[8] Awareness of personal values, their relevance in life especially during the liminal time of immigrant relocation in an adoptive community, their negotiated transformation, restructuring and stability over their life course, as well as overall consistency, normative power, and validity for the self and others, require in depth research with interdisciplinary crosspollination of theoretical frameworks. Personal values, articulated during formative years within family settings play a crucial role in shaping identity and belonging at an emotional level, influencing attitudes toward social issues and choices of personal anchoring. A shared cultural background, such as the one we study in the Romanian American diaspora, encompasses but is not limited to ethnicity or religion, it involves shared values, social practices in local contexts.[9]

[8] Lena Seewann, "My Values, Their Values: How Value Conceptualisations Influence Attitudes Towards Immigration" in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 9, 2022, pp. 2091-2114.
[9] C. Panter-Brick, "Culture and Resilience: Next Steps for Theory and Practice" in *Youth Resilience and Culture*, ed. L. Theron, L. Liebenberg, and M. Ungar (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), pp. 233–244.

Isolationist nativist currents and public discourse on migration, present both within the United States and in many European Union countries, go against findings that suggest cultural diversity is intrinsic to innovation, enhanced creativity, and decision-making, providing the competitive advantage multicultural liberal societies offer in the soft-power competition with hermit authoritarian regimes. Without the supply of immigrants, the US would be rapidly aging due to slower population growth, lower fertility rates, and longer life expectancy just like most other developed nations.[10] The ability to fill labor gaps with specifically skilled migrants, the ability to incorporate diverse perspectives in driving innovative solutions due to cultural exchanges and the ability to attract and retain talent due to premiere research and academic institutions, all combine to give the US an impressive soft power global influence.

US isolationist tendencies are not novel, they have been experimented with in the first half of the last century especially during the period between the World Wars and it led to supply chain bottlenecks and inflation leading to abrupt economic crises and a generalized stagnation that threatened the ability of the US to project desired outcomes abroad with negative internal reverberations.[11]

In fact, McLeod and Lobel's work[12] proposed that culturally diverse groups tend to generate a wider range of ideas and solutions compared to homogeneous groups, leading to more innovative outcomes. Building on these findings, Watson *et al*.[13] showed that diverse teams access a variety of

[10] American Immigration Council, Labor Market Forecast 2022, <https://data.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/en/labor-market-forecast-2022>, accessed October 4, 2024.

[11] Charles A. Kupchan, *Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself from the World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), see especially chapter 11, pp. 269-299.

[12] T. H. Cox, S. A. Lobel and P. L. McLeod, "Effects of Ethnic Group Cultural Differences on Cooperative and Competitive Behavior on a Group Task" in *Academy of Management Journal* 34, no. 4, 1991, pp. 827–847.

[13] Warren E. Watson, Kamalesh Kumar and Larry K. Michaelsen, "Cultural Diversity's Impact on Interaction Process and Performance: Comparing Homogeneous and Diverse Task Groups" in *Academy of Management Journal* 45, no. 5, 2002, pp. 1036-1049.

perspectives and experiences leading to more thorough analysis and a consideration of different viewpoints, resulting in higher-quality decisions. The benefits of biculturalism in the workplace and the moderating effects of acculturation strategies, such as integration and assimilation, are further explored in the field of organizational psychiatry, findings that should inform host society migration policies as well as local administration integration plans.[14] In addition to the benefits of affirming cultural heritage perspectives within the professional field, immigrants who are able to retain and enact contextually both native heritage and host cultures are associated with high psychological adjustment. Retained biculturalism in integration is the ideal acculturation strategy and outcome.

Chen *et. al.*[15] study suggests that maintaining both one's heritage culture and integrating that of the host society can lead to better mental health and overall well-being. In a 2010 study on "The Multicultural Workplace: Interactive Acculturation and Intergroup Relations," researchers Oerlemans and Peeters introduced the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM) to predict how differences in acculturation orientations between host community and immigrant workers affect intergroup work relations.[16] Their findings suggest that greater disconcordance in acculturation orientations can lead to poorer quality intergroup relations, yet intergroup contact can moderate this relationship differently for host community and immigrant workers. The quality and frequency of these interactions can influence the relationship between acculturation orientations and work outcomes, with positive

[14] Confidence Hommey *et al.*, "The Moderating Effect of Acculturation Strategies on the Relationship Between Newcomer Adjustment and Employee Behavior" in *Frontiers in Psychology* 11, 2020, 2117.

[15] Xinyin Chen, Doran C. French and Jin Li, "Culture and Adolescent Development" in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, ed. Richard M. Lerner and Laurence Steinberg (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008), pp. 3–45.

[16] W. G. M. Oerlemans and M. C. W. Peeters, "The Multicultural Workplace: Interactive Acculturation and Intergroup Relations" in *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 25, no. 5, 2010, pp. 460-478.

interactions based on acknowledgement of cultural diversity enhancing cooperation and reducing potential conflict.[17]

The findings of the earlier mentioned studies rely on understanding acculturation as a process of cultural and psychological change that results following the meeting between cultures, as initially described by John W. Berry in 2005.[18] This involves changes in social structures, institutions, and cultural practices, as well as individual psychological changes such as identity, attitudes, and behaviors. He outlines the acculturation strategies and outcomes that individuals and groups might adopt offering insights from social and cognitive psychology on social cognition, cultural competence, social identity and stigma.[19] Berry's insights have been employed by Amelie Constant *et al.* in structuring a new measure of the intensity of an immigrant's ethnic identity orientation which they labeled as the "ethnosizer".[20] It measures and describes Berry's four adaptation outcomes: assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization.

Assimilation describes the option to adopt the host culture while discarding the home culture. It is a rejection of one's formative values, inviting dissimulation in socializations and incomplete actualization. The second described strategy, separation, involves maintaining the original culture and rejecting the host culture. It is a limiting form of encapsulation[21] that leads to projecting one's social standing in nostalgic forms, reenacting lost social roles. In its extreme form it allows for toxic nostalgia, for a mythologized native land suspended in time, at the moment of migrant's departure, or

[17] Ashley Lytle, "Intergroup Contact Theory: Recent Developments and Future Directions" in *Social Justice Research* 31, 2018, pp. 374–385.
[18] John W. Berry, "Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures" in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29, no. 6, 2005, pp. 697-712.
[19] John W. Berry, "Acculturation as Varieties of Adaptation" in *Acculturation: Theory, Models and Some New Findings*, ed. A. M. Padilla (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1980), pp. 9-25.
[20] Amelie Constant, Liliya Gataullina and Klaus F. Zimmermann, "Ethnosizing Immigrants" in *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 69, no. 3, 2009, pp. 274-287.
[21] Koen Leurs and Sandra Ponzanesi, "Connected Migrants: Encapsulation and Cosmopolitanization" in *Popular Communication* 16, no. 1, 2018, pp. 4-20.

during some imagined golden age of the native land. Possibly no longer attuned to the actual evolution of that home country, it invites various forms of "*long-distance nationalism*."[22] Integration, the third strategy is the outcome that affords maintaining the original culture while adopting aspects of the host one. It describes the outcome of full self-actualization or the ideal of a contained and "connected migrant" that operates in a transnational space yet remains socially and civically anchored locally. The fourth is not as much a strategy as it is a loss of identity, described as marginalization, it involves rejecting both cultural affiliations and not feeling contained in either, leading to isolation, likely social vulnerability, a social rupture ripe for manipulation of frustrations and channeling into extremist ideologies and political agendas.

Berry positions integration as associated with positive psychosocial well-being outcomes and social adaptation while marginalization is the opposite with negative outcome for the individual and group. He also proposed that both newcomers and host society need to engage in mutual accommodation for immigrant groups to undergo a successful acculturation[23].

A study implemented by Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver (2006) identified three vital components in the process of acculturation, adding to described strategies, acculturation conditions and outcomes. The former refer to the contextual factors that influence the acculturation process, such as the socio-economic status of immigrants, the level of cultural distance between the host and heritage cultures, and the presence of supportive social networks. The outcomes they describe as observable in various domains include psychological well-being, socio-cultural adaptation, and identity

[22] Anderson, Benedict. *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, London: Verso, 1998. See Chapter 3, pp. 58-74.

[23] This is in line with the findings of Sergiu Gherghina, Monika Mokre and Sergiu Mișcoiu, Sergiu, "The Non-Participation of Ethnic Minorities and Migrants in Representative and Deliberative Democracy", in *Identities*, 2025, pp. 1-11 and with those of Sergiu Mișcoiu, "Is There a Model for the Political Representation of the Romanian Roma?" in *Sfera Politicii*, no. 123-124, 2006, pp. 78-90.

formation.[24] Their description of acculturation conditions both at the individual and group level, related to the evolving environment and public discourse of the host society and the presence of perceived or objective discrimination is only one dimension to be observed. They also describe the need to understand the attributes of the community of origin (such as political context or potentially the way emigrants are being viewed). Attributes of the immigrants' group such as ethnic vitality or heterogeneity also play a role indicating the salience of a diasporic identity. Finally, personal characteristics, expectations, norms, and personality play a role in the adoption of strategies. While changing meta-narratives about migration and migrants in either host or native societies may be worthy lofty goals, changing the personal attitudes towards those narratives and training migrants in culturally authentic resilience skills may empower them with agency in self-understanding. Giving them a voice seems a more sensible goal. Acculturation as a construct studied in ethnic psychology, sociology, and anthropology presents a strong link with psychosocial adjustment and health, findings that are cross-culturally confirmed in multiple studies. [25]

3.2 Family autobiographical interviews as viable research tools

The nexus should be the basis for seeking to implement diaspora community-based interventions that ensure positive social anchoring of migrants and their descendants. Despite the assumed greater adaptability of adolescents and youth who experienced the family's relocation, support mechanisms and early interventions are required to ensure the positive structuring of both heritage and native host country cultural identities. Studies on these second-generation migrants' mental and social wellbeing suggest that the newly arrived are at a higher risk of experiencing depression

[24] Bianca Arends-Tóth and Fons J. R. Van de Vijver, "Issues in the Conceptualization and Assessment of Acculturation" in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 30, no. 1, 2006, pp. 67-85.
[25] Confidence Hommey, *op. cit.*

and loneliness compared with non-migrant peers.[26] Various forms of loneliness often go unnoticed in the initial rush address rapid logistic adjustments to the new social contexts. Persistent challenges to adolescents' social and mental wellbeing may not be easily identified or may be misattributed to other developmental challenges in the absence of targeted social interventions or more importantly in the absence of frank family discussions about individual experiences.

In their 2022 study, Elias and Brown tap into the potential role of intergenerational family stories in promoting mental health and wellbeing. They propose that intergenerational knowledge of family history is associated with these protective effects and discuss how gender and cultural factors mediate the way stories are told and their impact on descendants.[27] The style of family storytelling and choice of themes emphasized, often centering on hardship, resilience and success, may vary widely across cultures but seem consistent within our Romanian American diaspora study findings.

Personal narratives imply categorizations, the ordering of emotional experiences into logical structures. Narrative identity is "the sort of identity to which a human being has access thanks to the mediation of the narrative function."[28] Personal narratives give individuals a sense of identity and continuity, forming a cohesive life story or personal myth. They are shaped by cultural contexts and play a crucial role in interpersonal relationships and communication. Additionally, the study of these narratives involves understanding how people connect their life events, maintain a clear self-concept, and experience dissociation.

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[26] Sarah Devos et al., "At Risk or Resilient? Examining the Effects of Having a Migration Background on Mental and Social Wellbeing Outcomes Amongst Adolescents" in *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 29, no. 1, 2024, art. no. 2395388.

[27] Alexa Elias and Adam D. Brown, "The Role of Intergenerational Family Stories in Mental Health and Wellbeing" in *Frontiers in Psychology* 13, 2022, art. no. 927795.

[28] Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991, p. 73.

Autobiographical narratives are associated with fostering meaningful social relationships, imagination, cognition and personality, self-continuity and with sustaining positive self-regard. Most important they function as mechanism for making sense of the past and serve a developmental role in autobiographical reasoning, in discerning significant themes and insights into self. Exploring this nexus, a study on "Autobiographical Memory and Authenticity" published in 2022 examined how autobiographical memories contribute to a sense of authenticity. The research highlighted three primary functions: self-identity, social connection, and directing future behavior. It found that recalling authentic moments helps integrate these memories into a coherent life story, which is crucial for maintaining a true sense of self.[29]

An earlier comprehensive study in 2014 proposed an integrative approach to understanding autobiographical memory functions.[30] This research identified four classes of memory functions: reflective, generative, ruminative, and social. It emphasized that these functions help individuals make sense of their selves, their environment, and their social world. These more recent studies build on the seminal work of Robert Atkinson, in particular his widely translated book "*The Life Story Interview*"[31] which stands at the center of our qualitative interview approach applied to migrant Romanian American families in Minnesota.

In defending this study's choice for a modified autobiographic narrative interview structure, I acknowledge the array of complementary alternative approaches in applying and measuring resilience scales. These may eventually act as baseline and post-intervention assessments should this approach be adopted beyond its pilot experiment and be standardized to be easily reproduced in comparable diaspora hubs. Of relevance would be the Resilience Scale (RS), developed by Gail Wagnild and Heather Young,

[29] A. Sutton, "Autobiographical Memory Functions in the Recall of Authentic Moments" in *Current Psychology* 42, 2023, pp. 29473-29480.
[30] Harris, C. B., A. S. Rasmussen and D. Berntsen, "The Functions of Autobiographical Memory: An Integrative Approach" in *Memory* 22, no. 5, 2014, pp. 559-581.
[31] Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998.

a widely used tool to measure an individual's ability to cope with stress and adversity. It focuses on measuring inner strengths and positive adaptation rather than limitations.

An alternative, especially relevant to second generation migrants is The Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents developed by Sandra Prince-Embury in 2006, designed on a three-factor model of personal resiliency to measures self-perceptions of competences, perceived quality of relationships and ability to control emotions.[32]

Two comparable scales that can standardize the multi-generational impact would be the "Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA)[33] for the 1st generation migrants and for their descendants the Resilience Scale for Adolescents (READ), [34] both covering within their five key dimensions family cohesion and social resources, relevant to the evaluation of our proposed interventions.

One of the most extensive studies on child and youth resilience and most widely accepted measure in a cross-cultural setting is the (CYRM) developed by the Resilience Research Center as part of their International Resilience Project. [35] It assesses individual, relational, communal and cultural resources that support resilience in youth ages 12 through 23. From the initial 58 items it was reduced to 28 questions focusing on contextual factors that facilitate belonging and personal competence in accessing material resources. On several identified categories, the CRYM mirrors our applied adjusted Atkinson questionnaire employed in this study. These categories are spirituality (CRYM 3 items), culture (5 items) and education (2 items). These are also the categories that received most traction in the actual interviews we conducted with protagonists often reverting to these themes even when

[32] Sjur S. Sætren *et al.*, "A Multilevel Investigation of Resiliency" in *Frontiers in Psychology* 10, 2019, art. no. 438.
[33] O. Friborg *et al.*, "Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) [Database record]", *APA PsycTests*, 2003.
[34] O. Hjemdal *et al.* "A New Scale for Adolescent Resilience: Grasping the Central Protective Resources Behind Healthy Development" in *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development* 39, no. 2, 2006, pp. 84-96.
[35] Resilience Research Center, Research the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), 2009.

prompted to touch upon others. While the CRYM evaluates self-perceptions, our approach allows immediate feedback from family members and becomes more performative and relational.

Furthermore, Juang and Syed's review of the developing hybridity in acculturation and developmental theories offers a conceptual foundation for understanding the development and adaptation of immigrant children and youth.[36] Lacking the possibility of a longitudinal study of the specifically chosen diaspora, I am basing my observations in evaluating the interviews in relation with the findings of the "Add Health" large-scale, multi-cultural study that examined acculturation processes involving intergenerational consonance and dissonance in parent-child relationship within U.S. immigrant families.[37]

Of particular interest to our study of diaspora communities is also the Aroian Migration Stress Scale (AMSS), developed by Karen J. Aroian to measure the stress experienced by migrants.

This scale is frequently employed in research to examine the psychological effects of migration, particularly the somatization of trauma, which pertains to the expression of psychological distress through physical symptoms.[38] It outlines specific themes that were naturally raised in our family interviews and it assesses these various stressors related to migration, such as language barriers, discrimination, and loss of informal social support structures. This approach facilitates the identification of specific challenges confronted by migrants and can inform the formulation of targeted

[36] L. P. Juang and M. Syed, "The Evolution of Acculturation and Development Models for Understanding Immigrant Children and Youth Adjustment" in *Child Development Perspectives* 13, 2019, pp. 241-246.

[37] Kathleen Mullan Harris and Ping Chen, "The Acculturation Gap of Parent–Child Relationships in Immigrant Families: A National Study" in *Family Relations* 72, no. 4, 2023, pp. 1748-1772.

[38] M. Ciaramella, N. Monacelli and L.C.E. Cocimano, "Promotion of Resilience in Migrants: A Systematic Review of Study and Psychosocial Intervention" in *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 24, 2022, pp. 1328-1344.

interventions aimed at enhancing resilience and mental health.[39] AMSS outlines how stressors such as the language barrier can lead to isolation and frustration or how cultural adjustment to different social norms and values can be challenging.

The qualitative, open-ended interviews following Atkinson's life cycle provides a more appropriate framework to be implemented within our migrant families' cohort. Their family dialogues are co-constructed artefacts shaped by the interaction between first- and second-generation migrants with the discussion facilitator providing prompts and the researcher overseeing that the autobiographic phases are reached. This allows the respondents to articulate with coherence versions of themselves in rapport with native and host society but also with an imagined hybrid collective identity, as Romanian Americans.

The perspective of resilience being learnt withing culturally attuned familial settings is bolstered by Michael Ungar's work on "Resilience across Cultures,"[40] a study which involved over 1,500 youth from 14 different communities worldwide and which highlights both universal as well as culturally specific and contextually interpreted elements to resilience. This study outlines the interconnectedness of resilience factors reflecting the individual's cultural environment and the way individuals resolve the tensions between themselves, and their cultural context is highly specific to their relationship and environments. This insight supports the premise of our study that a familial dialogue on shared heritage values within a supportive community setting such as that of a diaspora may help voice, acknowledge and promote constructive resolutions to cultural tensions or differences experienced.

[39] Justine M. Gatt *et al*., "Trauma, Resilience, and Mental Health in Migrant and Non-Migrant Youth: An International Cross-Sectional Study Across Six Countries" in *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10, 2019.

[40] Michael Ungar, "Resilience Across Cultures" in *The British Journal of Social Work* 38, no. 2, 2008, 218-235.

Resilience factors involve the availability of informal social support mechanisms such as strong family or mentor relationships, a positive self-perception and confidence in abilities which can be reaffirmed within diaspora socializations, problem-solving skills when facing adversity which may include reaching out to those with relevant experiences. Other factors such as emotional regulation is thought and modeled within the family setting, while the multi-generational narrative anchors the individual in a succession of lives offering a sense of purpose, a series of aspirations and meaning in life. Adaptability to new circumstances and the determination to overcome setbacks are also modeled within migrant family settings but not always articulated unless prompted within a semi-structured discussion. The family modeled cultural identity, which has the potential of providing a sense of belonging, of community, is a sensitive element of resilience within the migrant residing in a dissonant cultural context. The hesitant parental attitudes based on the need to "fit in" are balanced by a sense of potential estrangement between parents and children due to inherent cultural differences and expectations.

4. Study description

This study leverages the theoretical framework developed in the field of social psychology to outline the protective and promotive factors of resilience, highlight the relevance of these learnt skills within the context of migrant acculturation strategies and position assisted resilience interventions as achievable through an innovative intergenerational family dialogue autobiographic semi-structured interview toolkit.

The study highlights the relevance of the intervention in understanding mechanisms of emotional self-identification and structured belonging as Romanian American diaspora members within a representative lot in Minnesota, an understudied diaspora subculture. This has broader implications for other diaspora communities in their engagement with native and host country institutions. We seek to understand how members of a small to medium size

Romanian American diaspora community define their hybrid cultural identity and ties with native and host society. It explores reflections of belonging and emergence of transnational emotional ties in the migration context as family-centered rather than ideologically or politically motivated. Furthermore, it aims to discern how second-generation migrants, or descendants that arrived at a very early age, construct their composite identity. This has implications for the sustainability of diaspora organizations and networks in retaining membership in the context of rapid acculturation and redefining needs of a virtual, transnational third space of diaspora socialization and performance of solidarity. It has also implications for the state of origin in an environment of demographic decline and in seeking to retain this transnational human capital within its cultural orbit through people-to-people exercises.

Our interviews follow the life stages outlined by Atkinson with the novel twist of turning the interviews into family dialogues where the questions are posed between the protagonists and the perspectives of first- and second-generation members are shared on those same life-changing narrated anecdotes or topics chosen. This encourages the articulation of emotional responses into categorized narratives and provides confidence in self-defining the basis of belonging while forcing a critical view of othering. The process of family intergenerational interviews initiates the mapping of available local ecologies of resilience accessed by the family and the strategies that were developed to cope with adversity.

The study was implemented through the support of a working group that delignated the goals and responsibilities within the oral history documenting project and the potential transformation of the recordings into a documentary targeting the wider American public. In 2022 the Heritage Organization of Romanian Americans in Minnesota (HORA) secured a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society for a Cultural Heritage Program titled "Romanian Immigration to the Twin Cities after 1989: Oral History Perspectives of first- & second-generation Romanian immigrants." This was the fifth immigration project conducted by HORA. It builds on the successful

execution of HORA's 2013 Early Romanian Immigration project, and the 2014-2017 project that resulted in two documentaries disseminated on public television stations in the US and Romania. The first documentary film, *A Thousand Dollars and Back*, was devoted to the first wave of Romanian immigration to Minnesota in the early twentieth century. The second documentary, *Through the Iron Curtain - From Romania*, recounted the oral histories of immigrants from Romania during the years of communist rule. The envisioned documentary from the current time caps off the trilogy of what is now a century of migration from Romania to Minnesota. Current U.S. immigration levels are comparable to the ones from 100 years ago when an isolationist and anti-immigration current wracked American communities and reinforced segregation.[41] That history makes it essential to understand the current experiences and motivations of migrants, and their diverse reasons for migrating as well as host society anxieties about values driven cohesion. The need for self-defining brings people back in search of their roots and the ways they structure that cultural identity may help them cope with adversity and divisive public rhetoric. By documenting these discussions among different generations, we sought to encourage more second-generation immigrants to engage in these types of conversations over cultural identity and belonging. The semi-structured questionnaire represents a valuable instrument for engaging younger demographics, who typically exhibit minimal interest in familial history until later in life. By promoting meaningful dialogues with older relatives, this method may enhance community involvement, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating positive integration outcomes. Unlike previous waves of immigration, where individuals had limited agency in their return to their home countries, post-1989 Romanian immigrants to Minnesota arrived for various reasons within a more interconnected and mobile framework. Consequently, the children of these

[41] Pew Research Center, "U.S. Immigrant Population in 2023 Saw Largest Increase in More Than 20 Years", *Pew Research Center*, September 27, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/27/u-s-immigrant-population-in-2023-saw-largest-increase-in-more-than-20-years>.

immigrants navigate unique identity challenges, oscillating between two cultural realms, which presents both advantages and the continual pursuit of identity and belonging.

This study successfully delineates the distinctions between first- and second-generation immigrants, focusing on their motivations for life choices and their conceptualizations of belonging and community engagement. Utilizing semi-structured qualitative interviews, first-generation immigrants were interviewed by their descendants, offering insights into the experiences of second-generation Romanian Americans in Minnesota, particularly those grappling with identity formation. The findings reveal a dichotomy: first-generation immigrants exhibit a clear sense of origin and identity, while their children often experience a sense of alienation, feeling estranged from both their parents' heritage and the broader American culture. Additionally, the interviews illuminate the sacrifices made by first-generation immigrants, who frequently accepted positions below their qualifications to secure better opportunities for their children. This research contributes to the understanding of immigrant experiences and identity dynamics across generations.

The first phase of the project, completed in 2022 focused on conducting the interviews, securing the accuracy of the transcripts and video recordings. Between August and December 2022, we conducted a total of 15 family interviews involving 32 interviewees and recorded 22.5 hours of high-definition audio, video, and written transcripts.[42] All interviewees signed an oral agreement form that gives us the right to make the transcript and recordings available for public use including academic research and we obtained legal assistance in drafting legal language specific for the

[42] The recorded and archived materials will be made available to the public. Included in the project implementation are the East Side Freedom Library (ESFL) and the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) who assisted in the archival aspect of the final product, the upkeep and public access to the high-definition digital audio-video recordings. All recordings were transcribed by certified transcription services but required our team's substantial editing to ensure accuracy and provide cultural context. The raw footage and transcripts stored by RCHS were offered to the Minnesota Historical Society and the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center (IHRC).

interviewees that are underage and were in the presence of their legal guardians/parents.

With regards to process tracing for the implementation of the project, while highly involved as a member within the Romanian American diaspora embedded in the field of such multi-generational family dynamics, I was physically detached from the community in Minnesota. I was one of the two moderators of the interviews, the other being a member of the community, a historian, who offered participants the comfort of having a familiar face to complement my outsider, neutral observer status. Two trial interviews were conducted to provide us with "hands-on experience" and to test the questionnaire I developed. The interviews followed the Minnesota Historical Society's "Oral History Project Guidelines." The interviewee selection process involved identifying and inviting families willing to participate, selecting families with a wide range of ethnic, age, educational level, socio-economic background, immigration period, and integration levels, ensuring that the available cohort presents a sufficient diversity of perspectives and experiences.

Unlike other diaspora communities in the United States, which tend to coalesce around faith-based organizations, my partnership with the HORA organization in Minnesota afforded a more inclusive cohort of migrants. Participants had the option to choose if the interview was to be conducted at HORA's cultural center, in a public building or in the comfort of their home and they were informed that the expected duration of the actual interview was of 60-90 minutes but that the whole experience may be 2-3 hours. The supporting staff of the HORA organization coordinated the schedules of participating family members and those of the filming crew and ensured the signing of legal release forms. The conduct of pre and post interview communication, the processing and archiving of records and video materials was secured by the host organization. Participants were provided the print transcripts of the interviews to check for accuracy (not for addition of post-interview substantive aspects). The inventory of artifacts/props having

to do with the family lore, were included in the documentary footage and provide insights into how objects and attire become the focus of family bonding and intergenerational emotional reverence.

I developed and held as moderator two participant orientation sessions that described the project, the unique format of promoting a semi-structured dialogue between family members and the role of the moderator to ensure the life story themes outlined in our adapted Atkinson interview were discussed. We proposed the themes and offered several alterative example questions for the participants to choose from or as inspiration for their own. The ten themes solicited in defining the interviewees' composite cultural identity were: family life, cultural heritage/traditions, traumatic experiences and resilience, immigration saga, education, career choices, love and emotional anchoring, spiritual life, current self-perception and vision for loved ones and the community that asserts their legacy.

One of the orientation sessions was recorded to allow selected participants to prepare themselves for the recorded interviews. I encouraged participants to think ahead of the topics sought by the project, to bring pictures or meaningful artifacts and consider the emotionally charged aspect of recounting their life story publicly. The participant training sessions included "conversational tips" in dealing with the presence of cameras and microphones, logistic aspects about the presence of question cards associated with each theme, the use of open-ended questions, of pacing, of dealing with emotions and the reassurance that each participant has the option to not answer uncomfortable questions. I asked participants to prepare in advance one story/experience that they perceived as central to their immigrant journey and insertion in their host community because expressing it in English within a limited time may be a challenge. This did not seem to detract from the authenticity and spontaneity of the interviews, in fact we allowed for each family to have their own conversational dynamic. Participants were informed they will be asked to define their composite cultural identity

and cover several of the autobiographic topics in the semi-structured questionnaire.

The second phase of the project involved identifying and researching recurrent themes uncovered by the oral history footage with some of the main findings included in this article. Footage logs, the scripts and completed documentary are available for review as the themes raised require further textual examination depending on study interests.

5. Main findings

We found that the interviews we conducted are more than autobiographical stories, they are intergenerational interactions that become narrative production sites, performed as much for the protagonists' own bonding and protective resilience needs as for the possible wider public. The approach bypasses the difficulties inherent in eliciting such narratives as an outsider and avoids also obtaining simple accounts. Participants shared values and meaning, not historic facts. They understood that they do not need to explain historical contexts but that we are interested in the reality of the identity transformation undergone in negotiating a new anchoring within a culturally different society. This format creates a safe, comforting environment of performing family dynamics and becomes a common endeavor to produce knowledge about the acculturation and integration experience. While there was some structure control through the onsite and virtually present moderators, the power asymmetry between researcher and interviewee was largely avoided. Reflecting on the standard practice of interviewers seeking to gain the expertise of the interviewee, the knowledge rested with the members of the migrant family, their personal perceptions. These emotions and memories had in the meantime been reshaped by settled time and current circumstances and what we see in the footage is an interactive narrative production site with protagonists conforming or subverting the constructs of what identity and belonging means to each.

Analyzing the transcripts of the interviews revealed topics that solicited greater attention within our supporting questionnaire. This led to a selection of topics to be edited and highlighted in the video-documentary and guided the selection of recorded materials, resulting in segments that address culture shock, the tension between assimilation and integration, language acquisition as a means of cultural incorporation, and the evolution of identity as individuals adapting to new social norms.

5.1 Crafting family narratives within assimilation pressures

The first solicited micro-narrative in our semi-structured qualitative questionnaire involved a description of family life, more specifically the stories that were told about the interviewee growing up within the extended family. On most occasions this warming exercise blended into the other topics of culturally distinct parenting styles and educational achievement expectations.

One aspect I sought to observe is if the gender of the person who recounts these family stories plays a significant role in the way the stories were received and if the stories had been repeatedly recrafted to fit current needs. The disconnect was apparent in families that had not shared in a structured way the experiences related to acculturation. Within families that had engaged in openly discussing these challenges, parents appeared surprised to hear the level of empathy and depth of comprehension that descendants presented. Both first- and second-generation family members undergo identity transformations and negotiate their cultural hybridity, often assuming that their experiences are opaque to other generations. Power rests with the narrator and in this instance the sharing or reaching for that role offered glimpses into family dynamics, even parental child role-reversals.

One of the important insights gained from our pilot cohort, was linked to the observation that mothers were the dominant presence in recounting such family stories but also the presence of grandmothers within multi-generational family structures was vital in child raising. Family narratives

seemed to be shared primarily within a matriarchal linage. This may well have to do with the predominance of intermarriages within our studied diaspora community, reflective of the ascent of interethnic and interracial family formation trends within American society at large.

Gender in storytelling may introduce differences in the style of storytelling not necessarily themes and values. One migrant mother [O.Z.] spoke of her mother as the mentor who instilled the drive that "you must not quit, don't get beaten down by life." Present visually in the interview while baking in their American home, her mother was a silent presence who only intervened to share that "her heart is full to hear [her daughter] say she's learned a lot from her." The migrant mother also shares that "home is where your family is, where you build a life." While there is a physical house in Romania "it is not the same, it is where memories live." Having the grandparent anchoring figure in the household, and with everyone gathered around their American family table she states, "I don't feel like I left anything behind." In a self-reflective moment as interview facilitator, this remark and the associated image reminded me of an ancient depiction of migration and cultural hybridity, the founding myths of the Greco-Roman world. It reminded me of Virgil's depiction of family duty and loyalty in the Aeneid, the scene of Aeneas fleeing the burning city of Troy, carrying his elderly father Anchises and leading his son Ascanius into a perilous new world. It sparked my observation that the mechanism of identity transfer, of defining who you are and imparting a sense of belonging within a lineage of lives must consider three generations, to include the essential role of grandparents' stories of the lost world.

Interviews conducted naturally led to recurrent recollections by migrants and their descendants about the stories or beliefs shared by grandparents, often during visits in the country of origin or during their temporary assistance in raising grandchildren within the United States.

Remarks about these stories giving confidence in self-strength to overcome adversity also tend to come with a caveat, descendants seeking the need to moderate parents' high expectations with some self-leniency.

The power of family storytelling comes up associated with some generational clashes between the survival attitudes of parents and the realization that the children do not experience the same spartan existence or social expectations to succeed academically or professionally. Clashes over American versus Romanian expectations may be a normal aspect of teenage development even in the absence of cultural differences, but the two were merged in our protagonists' perceptions. Out of these exchanges, children expressed awe at their parents' determination while the later tended to acknowledge having set some unwarranted pressures in a drive to instill in their children the values they found important in motivating themselves to push through adversity. Where present, grandparents as storytellers eschew those parent-child expectation clashes and tend to play a vital identity anchoring role for both.

The observation that grandparents have such a vital role in these fluid transnational lives suggests that diaspora entities might need to consider the positive psychosocial impact of engaging in oral history projects involving second generation migrants and first-generation elderly figures within diaspora hubs where natural grandparents cannot supplement that role.

5.2 Acculturation and the mental health impact

The shared family stories go beyond the initial culture shock and perceived discrimination or the loss of the extended family's support, they confirm or infer the toll on the mental health and stress of the adult migrants. In his interview, the community priest shared that he did not always have a good attitude towards change. "I was a good tree... taken from the other land... The tree will never be the same." Being the priest, he was treated differently, yet he had a hard time, with no place to live initially, placed from family to family.

Second-generation descendants often mention family support in dealing with their loneliness and homesickness but not all of them understood the parents' experiences. In critically evaluating our family dialogue approach we found that there might be an aspect of self-censorship with first-generation migrants potentially seeking to downplay their challenging experiences of social status loss or difficulties in reintegrating at their prior academic or professional levels. This vulnerability warrants acknowledgment alongside a discussion of the positive impact that dialogue may have in strengthening family bonds, promoting self-reliance, and fostering social competence, thus reducing individual stress.

Our interviews revealed that discrimination and marginalization of migrant descendants within primary and secondary educational environments in the United State are recurring concerns, usually related with host society language barriers. Migrant parents recurrently expressed feelings of inadequacy in navigating school systems on behalf of their children while simultaneously conveying high academic expectations that can add pressure on second-generation youth. Adding to the stress, legal documentation issues emerged unexpectedly in discussions, despite the intended focus on established migrant families. Legal assistance for migrants grappling with restrictive immigration policies remains lacking among Romanian American diaspora entities.

Economic struggles are common themes experienced during the liminal stages of arrival and insertion, with frustrations over accepting jobs below skill levels and lost social status impacting self-worth. The interview transcripts challenged the perception that acculturation inherently involves a unidirectional loss of identity to the dominant cultural environment. For some descendant interviewees, the rediscovery of the native country was in a sense more than finding roots within the family continuum, it explained their parents' behavior as the standard way of being within the native country, in the process offering a deeper appreciation of their parents' journeys.

Migrant parents seemed all consumed by economic hardships largely unknown to children and expected their sacrifices warranted greater effort from them. The frequently surfaced frustrations were related to underemployment and a loss of social status, indicating long periods of self-doubt and damage to their self-worth at various stages in their adaptation process. It is only within the much more recent migrants that we find arrival occurs only after securing professional insertion and recognition, which explains the greater tendency of this later migrant to support career-oriented diaspora networks that offer resources on employment assistance, enhancing knowledge of personal financial management and career opportunities. Yet, this instrumentalization of national cultural identity on professional grounds remains at best sporadic within diaspora socializations. Empowerment initiatives aimed at enhancing self-esteem and agency are limited, often laden with stigma as they imply reliance on social services in an individualistic society.

In providing an illustration of one interview that echoes recurrent themes, the mother spoke about her child being the cultural teacher explaining host society expectations and nuances that escaped her parents. The mother [R.O.] seemed surprised by the remark of the father [B.F.] of having turned things around and made their American experience a positive one. She was more hesitant, acknowledged the depths of personal transformations within the past 30 years. She mentions the jarring experience of realizing that as a migrant you step from being the majority ethnic group into being a cultural minority. To her daughter she offered an apologetic remark, "I felt in my heart that we were not the same people for you anymore." Both parents had professional careers in Romania which they really struggled to recover in their new setting while feeling disempowered to act and reach out to others as they had little understanding of basic host society norms and practices. The loss of social standing and respect associated with professional marginalization can be overwhelming, yet "you have to do it, build it again". […] "I have to say that I'm happy we came. I benefitted intellectually and culturally… but

if I had known in advance how the beginning would be, I would have never. Because I was miserable for quite a long time."[R.O.]

The daughter in the family [I.W.] best articulates the second-generation pressures and role-reversals that other descendants recurrently hint to, "already as a teen you think you know more than your parents." […] "Well, my parents decided to come here for me, and that places a huge burden of responsibility on me...". The mother in the family [R.O.], having experienced the loss of social and professional roles, and not finding her needs for socialization and cultural affirmation met within the diaspora church setting, acted on it by getting involved in establishing a civic diaspora organization centered on cultural heritage preservation (HORA). She set to change the landscape of her social predicament for her own wellbeing, her family, and her diaspora peers, in the process modeling resilience for her daughter. Many descendants claimed to have been completely or mostly unaware of the actual extent of the hardships their parents endured in adjusting. Most immigrant parents voiced some level of guilt for taking their children out of the extended family support structure they would have experienced in the native country.

These family stories gathered from our pilot cohort repeatedly highlighted self-reliance and resourcefulness in developing coping mechanisms that allowed the participant to overcome odds and experience gratitude for the successes achieved.

5.3 Misunderstood nexus of spirituality and organized religion

Another surprising finding was related to the questionnaire's section soliciting stories about migrants' spiritual life. The responses indicate a complex rapport between migrants' needs for socialization and cultural identity affirmation and the default presence of diaspora structures of organized religion. The questions drafted searched for the relevance of peer support structures in times of personal vulnerability, the anchoring of shared common

rites and beliefs despite being uprooted, or the enactment of such rites in pivotal life decisions, end of life care, birth, or family formation.

Several migrant parents confessed to being atheist or having no religious affiliation but indicated that they did seek church events and services as the default focus of the community. Despite being atheist, several mothers said they raised their children in the Christian Orthodox tradition to observe and retain their cultural identity. The church seems to be the default physical venue to socially connect, do good for the community, and perform the lore of a shared cultural identity. Others described the iconography as artwork to be preserved.

The declarative religiosity of Romanian Americans and the focus on raising new diaspora churches might be misleading. Some parents described themselves as declared but not "practicing Orthodox," while interviewed Romanian Catholic members felt they needed to search for integration resources elsewhere. Descendants suggested even lower levels of adherence to organized religion despite the Christian Orthodox community church being the hub for Romanian gatherings. They indicate spirituality in other forms of connectedness with nature, including practicing meditation or yoga.

One participant summarizes the nexus of migrant psychosocial needs and organized religion: "I was still longing for those relationships, for listening to Romanian being spoken around me […] So, religion became an avenue to reconnect with my community […] I'm not overly religious by any means, but I'm spiritual. I believe in donating my time and things for the good of the community." [O.Z.]

The community priest seems to confirm this complex reality, saying that religion is a "top cultural thing" immediately followed by his joy in seeking his children join the Romanian dance group. He compared being a priest in the US versus Romania, where the priest was not only a leader but a respected mentor. His daughter volunteered to validate the importance of the church, of teaching her children about the Romanian liturgy, alongside mentioning how her children watch Romanian shows and soccer on social

media. She added a warning that the "cozonaci don't taste the same here" but she fondly recollected how she connected with her father over making "cabbage rolls." The various incarnations of spirituality shared by the interviewees, the primacy of actual performative aspects of social bonding as motivators for adhering to organized religion did bring me back to the imagery of the ancient fleeing Aeneas, his sense of duty to his family and his piety as he also carried the "household gods" with him.

5.4 Language acquisition, retention and performed cultural heritage

While featured later in our hand-out questionnaire, heritage language retention took centerstage and blended into all of the stories volunteered. Most of the stories involved marriage partners with other ethnic and racial backgrounds, a diversity of languages and cultural backgrounds modeled in these migrant households but also an appreciation of those differences. The interviewed daughter of the community priest, herself married to a Vietnamese man, described the challenge to keep up these diverse cultural identities in the household. She spoke of the pride she experienced when she visited Romania, where she left as a teenager, and someone complemented her on her "Ardeal accent," a form of recognition that she still belonged. For second generation Romanian Americans, especially those born or raised from an early age within their adoptive society, the insecurity or lack of heritage language vocabulary is a source of much frustration, self-doubt and hesitation to engage in this optional identity. One teenager volunteered to explain, "while I'm not fully, like I don't speak Romanian or whatever, I'm not the perfect Romanian, but I also don't [identify as] completely American, either. It's a weird mix […], we grew up in like a mixed culture household. I feel kind of out of place when I'm around full American people, whereas if I'm with people who have an immigrant background as well, I feel way more comfortable." [G.A.] The linguistic criterion of cultural membership is presumed as essential by immigrant parents and community leaders, and it is the path to relate with grandparents or sought cultural mentors. However,

it should not lead to isolation and exclusion, especially since descendants have a wide array of alternative cultural backgrounds to synthesize and affirm.

One recurrent cultural marker mentioned by both first- and second-generation women is the wearing of the Romanian blouse. Popularized in the United States as the "bohemian blouse," it is a visual cultural icon for all Romanian diaspora communities and the learning of the symbols and regional specificities of the embroidery involved in creating these artefacts is a source of pride. A second-generation male respondent offered an alternative marker, music. [V.B.] "a lot of the upkeep in the [heritage Romanian] language comes through my stereo." He then positioned folk dance as the social activity that drives his community involvement. "And it's kind of neat, because each region of Romania and Moldova has its own different flavor. So, there's a lot you can learn through the steps and how the people move." He asks his mother "I was wondering how much of an influence, mămică, did you think that American culture would have on us? Did you think about that before we moved?" She answers, [P.B] "Huge. No, I did not have a clue it was going to happen. You realize very soon that you are going to lose everything that you have. Usually children, one year after immigration, they speak none of their native language. It takes less than twelve months, and they speak no native language if you don't keep it at home." The daughter in the same family, a mother herself, adds: "I think it's even harder when you try to teach a child who was born here. […] It's a lot of hard work to be able to preserve your language and we're so lucky that you guys worked so hard to be able to preserve what we have. Maybe we don't speak perfectly but it's so much better than nothing." While few diaspora entities, including our host organization, do offer virtual heritage language classes, the teaching materials shared from Romania are created for children who live in that environment not necessarily for migrant descendants. The language that is imparted within the family is an emotional one related to home life, often not reflecting a vocabulary that allows socializations or full expression within professional

or other public contexts. The availability of alternative cultural signifiers of interest in cultural retention and social affirmation, such as the identified folk dances, the traditional costumes, food, film or other performing arts festivals might complement engagement with migrant descendants, in the process consolidate the prospects of sustained membership and participation interest within diaspora hubs wherever their life journeys may take them.

When addressing how second-generation migrants sustain their identity and connect with their country of origin, our findings indicate that emotional expressions of parental affection can serve as effective vehicles for socialization. In contrast to past generations of exiles who sought nostalgic reconnection through diaspora communities, recent migrants benefit from advancements in communication technologies that mitigate isolation. This interconnectedness allows newcomers to negotiate and affirm their identity within both their native and host societies, normalizing transnational lifestyles characterized by maintaining informal support networks across borders.

The findings affirm cultural adherence and validate a unique hybrid identity shared within this Romanian American diaspora hub but also point to a disconnect between actual needs of families and limited options for performing those family values and traditions within inclusive socializations. The sustainability of this hybrid cultural identity cannot rely solely on families imparting discreet narratives of resilience but needs a complementary space for performing such an identity within meaningful socializations.

As our inquiry into second-generation Romanian Americans reveals, individuals may simultaneously navigate both nostalgia-driven engagement and the evolving identity frameworks of transnationals. The emotional needs arising from familial narratives create a distinctly "social" rather than geographical definition of "home." However, the diversity within migrant identities—shaped by the varying reasons for migration and shifting perceptions of home—complicates the construction of collective identity. Second-generation migrants may not have ready access to the transnational networks available to newcomers, resulting in a waning interest in sustaining

diaspora organizations that may become symbolically relevant but not practically sustainable. The fragmentation of these communities raises concerns regarding their long-term relevance and viability, especially among highly mobile individuals.

As we examine how migrants are shaped by narratives of belonging and identity, it is crucial to approach them not merely as rational actors but as emotional agents responding to complex identity constructs.

6. Conclusions

The qualitative analysis of intergenerational interviews within the Romanian American diaspora reveals a complex interplay of narrative construction, identity transformation, and cultural retention processes. This innovative intergenerational dialogue technique used as semi-structured interview allows us to transcend the mere autobiographical recounting of experiences. It serves in highlighting the dynamic arenas for negotiating intergenerational relationships, in the process fostering the protective and promotive effects of assisted resilience and cultural continuity. Participants, aware of the emotional gravity of their stories, engage in dialogues that prioritize shared values and collective meanings over strictly historical accounts. This shift underscores the significance of emotional and social context in shaping the narratives of migrant families, illuminating how these narratives function as sites of bonding and identity validation amid the challenges of cultural adaptation. With selected migrant families spanning the last thirty years of migrant family adaptation, the impact of virtual connectivity technology and the resulting simultaneity of presences as "connected migrants" appears to reflect only a limited subset of the current diaspora respondents.

The intergenerational discussions among migrant families yielded a shared cultural repertoire that can inform policymakers about the actual needs driving cultural identity resilience in diaspora hubs and determining the venues for engagement with state institutions and in public diplomacy

efforts. However, these family narratives often lack communal affirmations of collective identity beyond participation in religious services and cultural festivals, which primarily serve as social support mechanisms. The absence of civic-focused cultural centers in many Romanian diaspora hubs exacerbates this issue, further limiting opportunities for the enactment of cultural identity.

Civic and faith-based leaders are strategically positioned to identify resilience-building strategies, yet their current focus tends to be on language education rather than addressing barriers to integration within host communities. Few Romanian American diaspora organizations have established any formal social support groups aimed at alleviating migrant isolation. Despite the critical need for mental health services and counseling, these topics remain largely absent from the agendas of diaspora organizations, which often perceive them as taboo, even among culturally aware spiritual mentors. While faith-based organizations serve as primary socialization venues, their narrowly defined focus can create fractures within the broader Romanian American subculture. There exists a pressing need for these organizations to address psychosocial needs in migrant families; however, a lack of training in identifying and mitigating such needs, combined with confessional limitations, hinders inclusivity. For descendants with limited linguistic skills and a superficial understanding of family-oriented faith traditions, these entities may lack long-term relevance.

Interventions designed to foster resilience and strengthen bonds among migrant families, children, and mentors within localized contexts may effectively mitigate barriers to resource accessibility. Replicating semi-structured family dialogues in supportive diaspora settings could yield scalable insights into these challenges. Although community leaders and spiritual mentors may lack formal training in trauma-informed care, they can still identify needs through compassionate engagement.

Creating culturally sensitive and emotionally safe environments is crucial for acknowledging and addressing the trauma and cultural adjustment stressors faced by migrants at various life stages. Diaspora community-led

assisted resilience interventions centered on families can be implemented with minimal resources and possess the potential to empower newcomers to seek needed resources within their host communities. Building trust among diaspora leaders engaged in complex situations, alongside coordination with consular officials and local support structures, necessitates a holistic approach that incorporates subregional and transnational perspectives. Training local actors to identify emerging needs within diaspora communities can enhance support for identity resilience. Ultimately, policies that prioritize cultural sensitivity and intergenerational connectivity within these networks may facilitate more meaningful engagement with both host and native communities.

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